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LYNN UNIVERSITY

Donald E. and Helen L. Ross COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE PROPOSAL

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Title of Dissertation in Practice:

Autism to Higher Education: Tools for Parents

The Dissertation in Practice proposal has been read and approved, as indicated by the signatures of the committee members below, on the following date:



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ABSTRACT**Autism to Higher Education: Tools for Parents**

Over the years, a marked increase in the number of students with High Functioning Autism (HFA) attending colleges and universities has occurred. This can be attributed to: (a) the passage of legislations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA); (b) revisions to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM); and (c) early intervention and treatment (Pillay, 2012). Although the increase in enrollment may be an indicator that a more welcoming climate for individuals with HFA has been created, many institutions are not adequately prepared to accommodate these students and parents have not been given the tools to help their children succeed. Students with disabilities and those specifically with HFA have entered in higher education but have a low percentage of graduating. Parents find themselves ill equipped and unprepared to advocate and ensure that higher education institutions are adequately addressing the cognitive, social, executive functioning and behavior deficits that impact their HFA student and their ability to succeed in a higher educational academic environment, especially in circumstance where their child has chosen to leave home for college. This dissertation discusses symptoms and key features associated with autism that affect performance in an academic environment, provides suggestions for possible accommodations and educational adjustments and offers strategies that support student success and retention for students with HFA transitioning into higher education.

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DEDICATIONS

We would like to dedicate this dissertation to our husbands, without whose support we would not be where we are today. Thank you for holding the fort down while we hid away endless nights and weekends.

I, Shannon Emery, would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my children: Jack, Dean and Elyse. You have made me stronger, better, and filled with more pride than I could have ever imagined. This dissertation is a testament that you are never too old to continue growing. I love you to the moon and back!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*“There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child
can do instead of what he cannot do.”*

-Dr. Temple Grandin

Autism was first identified in 1943 by Dr. Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist at John Hopkins University in Baltimore (Jager, 2005). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was found to occur in four out of 10,000 individuals in the 1980s (Autism Science Foundation, 2021). In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) reported that approximately 1 in 59 children in the United States has been identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); this being a 47% increase from the rate of 1 in 88 children in 2012 (Autism Science Foundation, 2021).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disability with a wide range of effects that can be observable in children at an early age. Those with ASD have deficits in social communication and interaction, trouble making eye contact, difficult times making friends, and repetitive behaviors or interests. ASD has a wide range from those that are non-verbal to those that are highly intellectual but struggle socially and emotionally (Stothers, 2016). High functioning autism (HFA) is a term used to describe individuals with ASD who average above-average cognitive ability (MacIntosh, 2004). HFA is not an official medical diagnosis and is often used to refer to people with autism spectrum disorder who read, write, speak, and manage life skills without much assistance. Individuals diagnosed with ASD and who have a full-scale intelligence quotient (FSIQ) of 70 or greater are classified as having HFA (Dykens, 2011). With the recent changes in the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA, 2013)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), Asperger's disorder has been absorbed into the ASD continuum and are now referred to as having High Functioning Autism (Dipeolu, 2015).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), out of the 1 in 59 children diagnosed with ASD in the United States, 44% have IQ scores in the average to above average range (i.e., IQ >85) and 25% are in the borderline range (IQ 71–85) (AutismSpeaks, 2021). Therefore, approximately 69% of children classified with ASD are considered to have high functioning autism (HFA).

Problem Statement

As the rate of ASD diagnosis in children increases, the number of students with autism entering institutions of higher education also increases (Grogan, 2015). Wei (2014) found that each year, roughly 49,000 individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) complete high school. Approximately 16,000 of those students will subsequently pursue higher education (Wei, 2014). As the number of students with ASD continues to climb, institutions of higher education will be faced with the challenge of expanding their support and services to accommodate the diverse needs of this population (Camarena, 2015). Understanding the social experiences of college students who have autism could spotlight K-12 transition planning and positively impact retention, providing persistence strategies for higher education's response to this emerging body of college students (Kelley, 2012). According to Colclough (2018) "with approximately 80% of college students who have autism pursuing post-secondary education at community colleges at some point, we must acknowledge and strategically support college students with diverse cognitive and social abilities, encouraging their involvement and subsequently their supporting persistence and retention." The Washington Post reported in 2017

that people with autism make up 1 to 2 percent of students at universities; however, the graduation rate of U.S. students with autism is 41 percent, compared with 59 percent in the general population (Cox, 2017).

College professionals are accustomed to providing assistance to students with physical, cognitive, and sensory needs; however, unlike other groups of students with disabilities, the challenges faced by students with HFA tend to be more in the social and self-regulatory areas. This often poses particular challenges for counselors and faculty who may not be accustomed or familiar with the resources and support needed for academic and life success (Fast, 2004). Although colleges and universities may have support services through their Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) for HFA students, there is no law that mandates what “reasonable” accommodations look like (Whitaker, 2018). Furthermore, students must take the initiative to disclose their disability and ask for accommodations. This is a difficult skill that is sometimes undeveloped in K-12 education, transition. If students are not involved in the development of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) process, they may not be well enough informed about their disabilities to express what accommodations they need (Alverson, 2019). Without understanding their needs, the IEP process, and the importance of requesting accommodations, students may experience feelings of being ashamed of their disabilities and fear that asking for help might cause embarrassment.

The researchers’ product from the current study, may provide helpful resources for students with HFA and their families planning to transition from K-12 to higher education. Students with HFA are often very intelligent and academically inclined (Camarena, 2015); yet they experience significant social and interpersonal deficits, organizational difficulties, and lack self-advocacy skills, the very skills that are necessary for success in a college setting (Wolf,

2004). Addressing the disability-related needs of a student with HFA requires a shift from the traditional methods of accommodating to ones that improve social, communication and pragmatic functioning. No student's disabilities are the same; therefore, the researchers have to provide specific accommodations to HFA students preparing for higher education. Therefore, professionals in higher education need to increase their understanding of the unique challenges faced by students with AS so they can be more skilled at recognizing and accommodating their symptoms and behaviors in the classroom and campus at large. However, if the researchers cannot change universities, researchers must provide a way for parents and students to work together to find a way for their students to succeed.

Significance of Study

Although more students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education institutions, almost half of these students are not completing school and obtaining a degree (Hamblet, 2017). Hamblet (2017) stated; "the research on enrollment rates does not offer extensive, constantly updated data. Colleges have limited tracking and reporting responsibilities, and the decentralized nature of the postsecondary world makes it difficult to collect data. Also, students don't have to reveal their disability to their college, which makes it hard to know exactly how many students with disabilities are in college in any given academic year. One often-cited figure comes from 2008, when roughly 11% of students enrolled at college claimed to have a disability." Thirty-four percent of students with disabilities complete a four-year degree in eight years (National Council of Disability, 2015). Students with disabilities are applying and attending community colleges at a higher rate of 44.2% than their peers, which do so at a lower rate 20.6%, whereas compared to 4-year institutions students with disabilities attend at 18.8% and their non-disabled peers at 40.2% (Hamblet, 2017). Higher education institutions have

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realized ways to accommodate students with physical, cognitive, and sensory needs; however, they are less accustomed to working with students with HFA where their disability encompasses significant social deficits (Fast, 2004).

Students with disabilities' educational rights are protected from birth through the end of high school through a federal mandate called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (IDEA: P.L. 114-95). Students with disabilities in the K-12 system receive specially designed instruction with support through IDEA to meet students' individual educational needs. Supports for students in K-12 are developed by a plethora of adult stakeholders – including but not limited to parents, special and general education teachers, speech therapists, and guidance counselors. Once students transition out of the K-12 setting, those stakeholders are no longer meeting every year to create new support to ensure each child with a disability is receiving every accommodation available to help them succeed.

There is a dearth of research describing the specific supports concerning students with High Functioning Autism (HFA) attending post-secondary education (Anderson, 2019; Barnhill, 2016; Elias, 2017; Van Hees 2018; White, 2017); however, the number of students with HFA entering higher education continues to rise. Support systems within higher education institutions face new challenges on how to support students with HFA successfully. Individuals diagnosed with HFA respond best to a structured, predictable environment and can experience high anxiety levels when they transition to the much freer environment of higher education (Howlin, 2004). Even in cases where colleges and universities offer services, one of the most critical components affecting the success of students with disabilities, including HFA, in completing college is their ability to locate educational supportive services (Getzel, 2008). Students need to be prepared to find help and utilize the accommodations in which they are entitled.

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) are currently laws in place to ensure accommodations are provided to students in higher education settings (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, 2008). However, the support needs associated with students with HFA often require individualized accommodations. The importance of support that responds to these specific social needs is recognized in primary and secondary education, but there appears to be less awareness within higher education (Camarena, 2015).

There are specific strategies and processes at the K-12 level that are designed to prepare students with disabilities in high school for the transition to higher education after graduation. Unfortunately, the lack of integrity in implementation has contributed to the poor outcomes of students with disabilities, including HFA (Whitaker, 2018).

The Rationale of the Study

As the number of students with HFA entering higher education continues to rise, support systems within higher education institutions face new challenges of how to support students with HFA successfully (Camarena, 2015). Professionals at higher education institutions have become aware of easy to accommodate students with physical, cognitive, and sensory needs; however, they are less accustomed to working with students with HFA where their disability encompasses significant social deficits (Fast, 2004). According to Benito (2012), many family members feel that their child's high school program did not prepare them for life after high school, nor did their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) contain clearly defined transition plans for what the student would do after high school.

Individuals diagnosed with HFA respond best to a structured, predictable environment

and can experience high anxiety levels when they transition to the much freer environment of higher education (Howlin, 2004). They often find change difficult. Prince-Hughes (2002) described a student who successfully completed her undergraduate degree while living at home. However, she found it to be an immensely traumatic experience once she moved away from the comfort of her own home to pursue a graduate degree:

Fortunately, I was assigned to live in university housing on campus, so I did not have to deal with the stress of trying to find a place to live. However, I experienced so a lot of anxiety and stress over the whole event where I had recurring nightmares for three or four months with the same theme: moving day. (p. 102)

Camarena (2015) found that HFA students' adjustment to the demands of university life was described as easier when students were well prepared prior to arriving on campus.

Conceptual Framework: Theory of Mind

The conceptual framework of this study revolves around teacher and support personnel perspectives on continuing education for students with HFA and the current procedures of the secondary transition plan process. Working with students with HFA involves addressing social, communication, executive functioning, and behavior difficulties that impact skill acquisition, learning and performance. For many students with HFA, the greatest challenges they face are in the social and self-regulatory areas, rather than in the academic and cognitive domains (Sicile-Kira, 2004).

This framework aligns with theory of mind. Theory of mind refers to the ability to infer others' mental states, and one's ability to perceive how others think, and to predict what they may do in a given situation based on those inferences (Baron-Cohen, 2001). Individuals with HFA often face challenges related to their ability to interpret certain social cues and in turn, have

difficulty processing information relating to others. Theory of mind remains one of the quintessential abilities that makes us human (Whiten, 1993). It refers to one's ability to perceive how others think, and to predict what they may do in a given situation based on those inferences (Baron-Cohen, 2001). Baron-Cohen (2001) described the inability to recognize and process the feelings of others can be referred to as "mind-blindness." People with HFA, as a result of mind-blindness, may not have the ability to understand whether other people's behaviors are intentional or unintentional leading to a lack of empathy creating great difficulties in social situations. Despite being of normal intelligence, theory of mind deficits can have severe impacts on individuals with HFA.

Weakness in these areas' present challenges in students with ASD transitioning out of secondary school and into higher education settings. Gratez (2008) states, "social rules seem so obvious that one may question why they need to be taught, yet adolescents with AS will not learn them by observing others and by mere placement in social situations. The development of socialization (understanding of social rules) and eventual autonomy can take a lifetime for an individual with AS to develop. They may leap at the opportunity to attend college because they assume that their presence on a college campus will result in immediate friendships (something that perhaps did not occur in high school)." Results from Elias's (2018) study suggest that, in the context of transition into postsecondary education, students with ASD primarily struggle with social tasks and skills of daily living relating to a weakness in theory of mind.

Purpose of Study

Throughout the study, the purpose continued to be focused on creating a tool for parents to help their child with the transition process after high school. In gathering research, it is apparent that there is a gap of support for students transitioning from high school to college

where they were once successful to now dropping out (White, 2017). The goal is to provide parents with knowledge of what their students should be able to perform and how to work on these skills with their children.

The researchers being a special education teacher and a school guidance counselor, this topic is one they argue is lacking and can benefit both the students and parents and even employers' transition into higher education. The goal for every student is to be a productive citizen of society, and with this topic, the researchers hope to give these students a way to reach that goal.

Research Questions

Conducting a quantitative study examining students' experiences with HFA attending higher education institutions through their voice is paramount to understanding this population's experiences. Simultaneously, the experiences and opinions of parents and professionals working with this population are equally valuable to understand how to prepare students with HFA for success in postsecondary education. This study aims to understand the needs and of the lived experiences of attending college or university for students with HFA and discover common skills that lead to their success attending postsecondary education.

The research questions are:

1. What knowledge do parents and students need to help their students successfully transition into a higher education institution?
2. What is needed in a high school transition plan website for children with high functioning autism transitioning to higher education?

The initial hypotheses by the researchers for the research question are:

1. Parents and students do not know how to transition into higher education successfully.

2. Parents and students need guidance tools to be successful in higher education.
3. In high school, students need to ask for accommodations from their high school teachers or special education teachers to transition into asking their professors in higher education.

Assumptions

Many individuals assume that students with special needs cannot attend some form of higher education (Briel, 2014). With the reauthorization of HEOA, this assumption has become a thought of the past (Roller, 2016). More and more students with disabilities are discovering and enrolling in college programs, which will provide them with increased life skills and even a college certificate (Briel, 2014).

This study focused on students who have been diagnosed with ASD and are considered high functioning or less supported. These individuals were either preparing to transition into or had already begun attending a higher education institution. The study did not look at individuals with any other disabilities, with ASD that are not classified as high functioning or any other area of the autistic spectrum. Researchers only looked at ways to help parents prepare their children through the process of successfully transitioning into higher education. Individuals with HFA that are transitioning into the workforce were not considered. Data was only gathered to help create a transition plan, and there was no evidence of if the transition plan had an impact on transitions. This would be an area where research should be continued through another study.

This study was built on the following: 1) Providing a resource for parents and students to transition into higher education. 2) Results were based solely on each individual's own experiences. 3) Parents, Special Education Teachers, and students must work with or have a child with HFA in their home or classroom. 4) Participants would not be followed after the completion of the survey.

While the goal was to help parents and students successfully transition their students into higher education smoothly, the researchers completed a needs assessment to determine what is missing in the perspective of parents, special education teachers, and those with high functioning autism. Once data was collected and analyzed, researchers determined what to implement into their transition plan for students with High Functioning Autism. Participants participated in the needs assessment honestly and based on their own experiences. The needs assessment was based on each parent and student's individual experiences and responses cataloged into categories such as support services, transition programs, IEP support during high school, and appropriate accommodations that work for students with HFA. Students who participated in this study had been diagnosed with HFA and planned to enroll or were currently enrolled in higher education. The parents had to of had a child that met the same requirements. The Special Education Teachers must have worked with students with HFA and worked with them on transitioning into higher education. At the end of the study, participants were not followed after the study ended. The study focused on specifics of what was needed for transitioning into higher education. This study did not follow students through their college education. It is suggested that further research be conducted in following students from high school to college to determine the effectiveness of the transition plan the researchers created based on the needs assessment.

Definition of Key Terms

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by the DSM-5 as an individual with deficits in communication skills and social interaction, causing a clinically significant impairment in social, vocational, and areas of daily living. ASD has a wide range of what is considered to be on the spectrum. A child can be non-verbal or highly intelligent.

Disability Services. Disability services are the services that a student with a disability receives while at a college or university. The study states that “disability services” is an office or center on campus that provides support for all students with disabilities. Students connected with disability services will be provided with services or educational accommodations while attending college or university. These services can be called multiple names on different campuses such as Disability Services, Student Success Center, Center for Students with Disabilities, and Access for Students with Disabilities.

Educational Accommodations. Alterations to assessments so a student can demonstrate their “true ability” with minimal interference of their disability (Elliot, 2001). Educational accommodations are not limited to testing but can be applied to assignments and extra resources the teacher provides to a student. Common accommodations include extended time, shortened assignments, assistive technology, preferential seating, testing in a separate room, tests read to students, study guides provided before the test, teachers providing extra explanations of assignments, or formatting paper outlines. With technology growing, there have been more accommodations that universities and high schools are seeing. It may allow students to videotape lectures or have a note-taker tool to follow along.

Higher Education. Also referred to as Post-Secondary Education or Continuing Education, any type of education or training beyond high school, especially at a college or university.

Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). A 2008 reauthorization of the original 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA), which includes several initiatives benefiting students with disabilities (Madaus, 2012).

High-Functioning Autism (HFA). High-functioning autism refers to individuals who

are distinguished from the cognitive and language deficits typical of autism. Predominant characteristics include significant impairment in social interactions; stereotypical patterns of behavior; narrow areas of interest to the point of self-absorption; inflexibility in routine; awkward motor skills; no delay in language, cognitive development, self-help skills, and adaptive behavior; usually testing average to above average intellectually (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). An individualized education program is a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in accordance with Sec. 300.320 through 300.324 (ed.gov sec. 300.320, para. 1).

Inclusion. Placement of a child with special needs in a mainstream educational setting with the proper resources and support needed to sustain a child's productive educational experience (Batten, 2005).

Neurodiversity. The range of differences in an individual's brain function along with their behavioral traits. This is a term used in place of being on the spectrum or autistic, however, also includes disorders such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, epilepsy, hyperlexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder and Tourette syndrome. Neurodiversity is not being used within this study as it is a newer term. Research has not been focused in neurodiversity related to those with high functioning autism (Disabled World, 2021).

Postsecondary Education. In this study, post-secondary education refers to attending a postsecondary educational institution, including a college or university.

Social competence. The outcome of an individual's interaction with others, capacity to share in the emotional experience of social interaction, ability to form friendships, and the ability to successfully connect to others (Attwood, 2015).

Social cueing. When one signals through body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, or words that are intended to send a verbal or nonverbal message from one person to the other. It is a form of indirect communication that helps one interact and build relationships with others (Wright, 2020).

Social skills. Core abilities such as interpretation of verbal and nonverbal communication, eye contact, and ability to model behaviors (Knott, 2006) which allow people to acceptably function in society and successfully interact.

Transition. The change from one area of learning to another. In this study, the term 'transition' is used to address students' move and adjustment phase from secondary schools to higher education (Palmon, 2017).

Research Issues

The researchers did extensive research focusing on autism, transition, services provided in higher education, services needed for students on the spectrum, and parents of students with autism. The researchers found that there was a lack of information on transition plans for students with High Functioning Autism. The researchers also found that there is a lack of research on parents helping transition their students into higher education. Much research was on the experiences of students with Autism in higher education, and services that were provided and how they were used. Research showed that there are many programs and services that Universities offer to students with special education services; however, it is at the cost of the student. Farrell (2004) described a program where students could receive assistance, which included daily guidance. This program requires an additional \$4,500 per semester for services. However, Grossman (2001) determined that if students needed accommodations such as modifications to classes, then students could not be charged (Grossman, 2001).

Through research it is determined that students with disabilities have transition plans through their IEP. U.S. special education law, IDEA, requires every student with an Individualized Education Program in high school to have a transition plan that supports achieving post-secondary education, employment, and/ or independent living upon graduating (IDEA, 2004). Through several studies it was found that though transition planning is a federal requirement it does not always take place and if it is taking place, it is not done so appropriately (Landmark, 2013, Roux, 2015). In the study completed by Roux, only 40-58% of youth on the autism spectrum received transition planning. Therein lies the issue that if transition planning is not taking place, that students with HFA attending college are not being set up for success.

The researchers also determined that some programs that would be free of cost while attending high school and supports such as a case manager in high school are no longer being provided in higher education. IDEA was designed to provide services to those students in the K-12 system with the underlying goal as high school completion (Madaus, 2006). Through IDEA students are in a mandated structured support through an annual IEP team meeting. Once students transition into higher education they are no longer covered by IDEA and now have their rights to education covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability and requires educational entities to provide access to education to individuals who self-disclose and provide documentation of disability. This poses an issue for students with HFA as they struggle not always academically but socially and emotionally. Unfortunately, sixty-three percent of students who received special education services in high school upon enrolling in a post-secondary education institution believe they do not have a disability and thus do not disclose their disability (Newman, 2016)

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“It is never too late to expand the mind of a person on the autism spectrum.”

– Dr. Temple Grandin

Introduction/Background

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is characterized by pervasive impairments in social interaction and communication skills, as well as by stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities (APA, 2013). Individuals with ASD have characteristic impairments in communication, behavior, and social interaction and may demonstrate unusual or repetitive patterns of behavior (Hendricks, 2009). These difficulties persist into adulthood and lead to issues that affect socialization, education, and employment (Graetz, 2008).

Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism (HFA) are terms applied to the high functioning end of what is known as the spectrum of pervasive developmental disorders, or the autism spectrum. Individuals with HFA, formerly referred to as Asperger's syndrome (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), are often identified as having emotional and behavioral issues. Children with HFA have poor social awareness and compromised abilities to navigate social scenarios daily in the home, school, and activity settings; these children are often viewed as having behavioral problems (Attwood, 2015).

Students with learning and developmental disabilities who are transitioning from high school to higher education face particular challenges, and numerous articles have discussed the needs of such students (Sitlington, 2007). However, though much has been learned about students' needs and experiences with learning disabilities, far less is known about the transition process for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) (Ying Cai, 2016).

In a typical university of about 10,000 students, experts indicate that at least 100

students have HFA (Brown, 2016). With continued visibility, along with refined knowledge and services, it is estimated that the number of students with HFA attending higher education settings will continue to rise (Brown, Meeks, L., & Rigler, M 2016); however, many of these students drop out soon after entry (Shattuck, 2012).

Transition

U.S. special education law, IDEA, requires every student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in high school to have a transition plan that supports achieving postsecondary education, employment, and/or independent living upon graduating (IDEA, 2004). Whenever appropriate, transition planning should actively involve students since the process determines student strengths and interests. The IEP also targets outcomes to support those strengths and interests, sets goals, and prescribes services needed from the postsecondary institution. Unfortunately, despite the federal requirements, transition planning does not always take place: only four-in-ten students who receive special education services have plans that meet federal timelines and contain measurable goals (Landmark, 2013). Roux (2015) found that only 40-58% of youth on the autism spectrum received transition planning.

Disability Education Policy Differences between K-12 and Postsecondary Laws

Students with disabilities' educational rights from birth to age 21, if still enrolled in high school, are safeguarded through federal legislation called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004. IDEA ensures students with disabilities attending public schools would have a right to be evaluated by a team of different specialties to determine their special education services eligibility. If the student is eligible, an individualized education plan (IEP) is developed to address their specific educational needs. IDEA was designed to facilitate students' success in the K-12 system with the ultimate goal of high school completion

(Madaus, 2006). Specific mandated structures and supports are developed by many adult stakeholders – including but not limited to parents, special and general education teachers, speech therapists, and guidance counselors – to help students succeed (Whitaker, 2018).

Students moving on to higher education institutions are entitled to continue receiving accommodations through legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination based on disability and requires educational entities to provide access to education to individuals who self-disclose and provide documentation of disability (ADAAA: PL 110-325).

The differences between the intent and core provisions of IDEA and postsecondary disability law governed by Section 504 and the ADA directly impact students with disabilities in K-12 and postsecondary educational institutions (Shaw, 2011). For example, IDEA entitles students with disabilities to a comprehensive individualized educational plan, while Section 504 and the ADA are more civil rights antidiscrimination laws (Simon, 2011). Therefore, while IDEA focuses on providing students with disabilities comprehensive services according to their individual needs, higher education disability laws focus on providing students with disabilities access to an existing academic curriculum (Eckes, 2005).

Students in the K-12 educational system, where a variety of adult stakeholders may initiate the special education process, the student must disclose their disability to initiate receiving any accommodations once a student enrolls in a higher education institution. Each accommodation must be linked to a student's individual needs and the most suitable and effective accommodation must be explored. School counselors working in Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) offices on college campuses are typically the ones who meet with the

student with HFA and review medical, psychological and psychoeducational documentation to verify disabilities, determine the functional limitations that are associated with a particular disability and authorize appropriate accommodations and services.

Unfortunately, sixty-three percent of students who received special education services in high school upon enrolling in a post-secondary education institution believe they do not have a disability and thus do not disclose their disability (Newman, 2011). Students with ASD who succeed in using their accommodations may still need much more than the basic accommodations outlined in Section 504. Because higher education institutions are not legally required by any of these laws to administer comprehensive direct or related services—such as the tutoring, behavioral support, and other academic interventions commonly administered to students in the K-12 setting (Madaus, 2006). Hewitt (2011) describes the additional support needed by students with complex needs, such as students with ASD, as "extra cheese on the pizza." Successful accommodations and assistance often require unconventional solutions tailored to the individual's needs, requirements, and preferences (Bedrossian, 2007).

As stated above, legislation for the higher education institutions is composed of suggestions and not the strict mandates of IDEA at the K-12 level. There are no strict guidelines that constitute what "reasonable" accommodations are or how they can be used in postsecondary education. Organizations such as the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) outline best practices for the accommodation process at higher education institutions (AHEAD, 2012). Unfortunately, the availability of and procedures to obtain these supports can best be viewed as arbitrary or institution-dependent (Whitaker, 2018).

Figure 1

Differences in High School and Higher Education Disability Education Culture

K-12	Higher Education
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus is on student success 2. It's the school's responsibility to provide evaluation and determination of special education eligibility. 3. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has specific goals, accommodations and/or modifications, and other services to meet student's need educational needs. 4. Services are provided until the student graduates high school or turns 21 years of age. 5. A team of school professionals and parents or caregivers to create support and structures at school. 6. Parent Involvement - Parents or caregivers have access to student records. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus is on ensuring student access 2. It's the students' responsibility to disclose disability and provide evaluation paperwork. 3. Student Advocacy - Students must be able to talk about how their disability affects their ability to perform tasks. 4. Focus on providing equal access to individuals. 5. Students are provided accommodations based on acquiring desired tasks (employment, education, independent living). 6. Written consent for parent participation or access to records is required.

Special Education Law as it Relates to Transition

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students can continue to receive academic or related services from their post-secondary institution. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education oversees postsecondary schools to ensure that they provide academic adjustments for students with disabilities, and thus, that these students are not discriminated against. The students themselves, once of legal adult age, must disclose their disability, self-advocate, and provide necessary documentation regarding their disability (White, 2017). Students must identify themselves as having a disability to receive the support that will assist them academically. Typical academic accommodations for students with a range of

disabilities, including autism, in higher education, are similar to those received in high school, such as extended test time, distraction-free testing, flexible due dates for assignments, breaks during class, using technology in the class, note-takers, clear directions, using visuals, and optional group activities (Zeedyk, 2016). For individuals with HFA, academic support such as those listed above may be useful, but other support and services, especially those within the social/relationship domain, may not be addressed.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that allows college students of age 18 to keep their educational records private. FERPA does not allow parents the automatic right to their child's education records. FERPA gives students the right to disclose that information to their parents at their own discretion (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). FERPA allows a 18-year-old with High Functioning Autism to keep their educational records to themselves and not allow their parents access.

Professional counselors working in Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) offices on college campuses are typically the ones who meet with the student with ASD and review medical, psychological, and psychoeducational documentation to verify disabilities, determine the functional limitations that are associated with a particular disability and authorize appropriate accommodations and services (Boratynec, n.d.). Students with a clinical diagnosis of ASD that a qualified diagnostic professional verifies are eligible to receive reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and The Americans with Disabilities Act. Each accommodation is linked to a student's individual needs, and the most suitable and effective accommodation must be explored.

When probing these results in greater depth, however, issues emerged. For example,

only 66% of students with autism had an IEP that specifically linked the student's course of study to transition goals (Shogren, 2012). Often students on the autism spectrum do not feel comfortable explaining their needs or may not know how to advocate for themselves, and so their input on needed and desired accommodations is not offered and must, instead, be solicited to ensure they are appropriate and useful (Cox, 2017).

While DSPPS offices are accustomed and proficient in working with students with disabilities, many remain challenged and unfamiliar with the unique characteristics, traits, and needs of the student with AS (Boratynec, n.d.). Students with AS exhibit more than just academic challenges; they have difficulties in all aspects of higher education, including social, cognitive, and executive functioning domains (Wolf, 2009). The challenges for most higher education institutions lie outside the academic support. Understanding and assisting the ASD student with social, communication, and executive functioning seem to be the larger challenge higher educational institutions face. Successful accommodation and assistance often require unconventional solutions tailored to the individual's needs, requirements, and preferences which most DSPPS struggle to provide (Bedrossian, 2007).

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act was signed into law on August 12, 2006 and reauthorized on July 31, 2018. Perkins law helps students with disabilities to secure employment after graduation along with increasing the opportunities for those with autism or other disabilities to be eligible to apply for those jobs. The Perkins-funded CTE programs provide skills training and experiences that are critical for helping students with disabilities to gain employment or continue their education (Autism Speaks & U.S. Department of Education).

Resources for parents of students with autism

While students continue to have protections under ADA while in higher education their parents are no longer able to advocate for their children. To continue to receive academic services through the Americans with Disabilities Act, students must disclose their disability, provide documentation regarding their disability and be able to self-advocate for themselves (White, 2017). Due to this dilemma parents and the student’s special education team need to start preparing early for the transition into higher education. The researchers were able to identify resources that parents would have access to and share with their schools to help with the transition process for their child. These resources were found by a web searcher using keywords, autism resources for parents, transition of students with high functioning autism, autism transition resources, and disabilities resources for college. Researchers also pulled resources from a variety of dissertations, studies, and books used through their research. These resources are outlined in the table below in Table 1.

Table 1

Parental Resources

Access to Resource	Program Name/Agency	Description
https://nationalautismassociation.org	Autism Atrium	Free online webinars covering a variety of topics for students with Autism
http://templegrandin.com/	Temple Conferences	Free resources on autism mailing list, learn how Temple defeated the odds.
https://www.autismspeaks.org/	Resource Guide	In the resource guide parents can filter by states, age of student, and level of support needed to find what services are available throughout the U.S.

http://autism-society.org/	Transitions and Post-Secondary Education- College Internship Program CIP California Berkeley	Provides information on transition and secondary education supports. Also gives real life testimony on programs such as CIP and how it helped students with Autism succeed in college.
http://autism.org/category/webinar	Webinars	ARI has provided parents with webinars on a variety of topics to provide parents with information to help their child.
https://experiencecle.com/	Transition Program	College Living Experience (CLE) provides transition supports to young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
http://www.facesay.com/	Social Skills Software	FaceSay™ is a Social Skills Software that improves the social interactions of students with Autism on the playground, where it counts.
https://collegeautismnetwork.org/		The College Autism Network is a nonprofit organization linking varied stakeholders engaged in evidence-guided efforts to improve access, experiences, and outcomes for postsecondary students with autism.
https://www.collegesteps.org/		College Steps is a nonprofit that provides customized, college support for students with learning and social challenges such as learning disabilities, autism, and executive functioning deficits.
http://www.2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/	US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights	Provides information for professionals with resources and easy to support students with disabilities and their transition after high school.
www.ncset.org	The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition	Resources on transition, technical assistance, and newsletter on recent news and events.

health.gwu.edu	HEALTH Resource Center at the National Youth Transitions Center	Resources for students, families, those assisting with the students' transition. There are also two types of downloadable “toolkits” for both high school guidance counselors, students, and their parents.
www.blackdisabledandproud.org	Black, Disabled, and Proud HBCU Disability Consortium	Provided “tip sheets” to help high school and college students along with parents' resources to be successful in higher education.
www.autisticadvocacy.org	Autism Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)	A nonprofit organization run by and for people with autism created to serve as a national grassroots disability rights organization for the autistic community, advocating for systems change and ensuring that the voices of people with autism are heard
www.transitionta.org	National Technical Assistance Center on Transition	Offers resources to help districts prepare students for post-secondary education and employment after graduation.

Postsecondary Educational Experience

Students with disabilities attending post-secondary have risen and there are more specific needs of these students where institutions have had to adapt to support these students' needs due to the implementation of ADA. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2017 11% of students attending college reported a disability. This would be about 200,000 students attending undergraduate programs who disclosed some type of learning disability (McFarland, 2017). Many institutions have provided student support service offices to work directly with these students. The transition process can become demanding and confusing especially for students with disabilities. The US Department of Education deemed several barriers that students with disabilities face when attending post-secondary institutions. These barriers are as follows; low expectations, lack of knowledge of available resources, poor

collaboration among students, families, and professionals, and sometimes a lack of post-secondary goals entirely (Martinez, 2012).

Students with disabilities when attending college, the main difference from their high school to college is that they now have to advocate for their accommodations. While in high school, students with a 504 or IEP hold a legal document that teachers have to follow. Whereas in higher education students have to disclose their disability and many accommodations are at the students request or attending student services to receive these services. The transition to an advocacy-based approach has proven challenging for many people with ASD, who are less likely than students with other types of disabilities to take leadership of their own transition planning (Shogren, 2012).

When attending post-secondary education students may have to pay extra for the services they need. In a 2020 study conducted by Viesel, it was reported that cost was a huge factor during their research. Through all the programs Viesel identified in their study, 80% of the programs were associated with a price. The average cost of these programs was \$3,500 per semester to have access to these programs (Viesel, 2020). Through several studies, students have reported what services were beneficial and those that they did not use or see a purpose. Students with ASD have reported a need for increased high school support, parental involvement, support for increasing self-determination, as well as support to overcome mental health issues and the impact of co-occurring conditions noted as anxiety and fear (Accardo, Kuder, & Wooddruff, 2018). Accardo et al. followed up this study in 2018 finding that students identified the following supports to be the most beneficial; transition programs, counseling, faculty mentorship, and housing accommodations. This study also suggested that students with ASD struggle with communication however were not taking advantage of the programs that would help with their

communication and therefore they are not seeing it as a need of theirs (Accardo et al., 2019). [OBJ]

Retention of students with disabilities

A study done by Bakker (2020) shows that high functioning autistic students (HFA) have similar academic success rates compared with students without disabilities. HFA students do not differ from their classmates in their ability to attain the academic level of higher education; however, Bakker's study concluded that the similarities in students with HFA and without disabilities are similar. Baker's study did show that students with HFA earned credits at a lower rate than those of their non-disabled peers. Concluding that it would take more time for a student with HFA to complete the same degree as a non-disabled peer. Although the Baker study did not find a significant difference in retention rates in students with HFA as the study only followed students for one year. The National Autism Indicators Report Transition into Young Adulthood reported that fewer than 20% of students with Autism either graduated or on track to graduate 5 years after graduating high school (Roux, 2015). This would mean 80% of students with Autism are not on track to graduate or have withdrawn from higher education. Retention of students with disabilities is dependent on an educational environment that encompasses not only academic achievement, but also encourages the creation of an inclusive, connective atmosphere that promotes a sense of belonging (Whitaker, 2018).

Vacarro, Daly-Cano, and Newman (2015) described a sense of belonging for students with disabilities as a complex process with intersectionality occurring between developments of social relationships, mastery of the student role, and advocacy for one's educational needs. Although most higher education institutions focus on inclusive practices within the classroom, out-of-classroom involvement can lead to greater satisfaction related to the college experience. Involvement in extracurricular activities contributes to students with disabilities, namely HFA,

being able to relate to non-disabled peers on campus, thus improving their sense of belonging and probability of remaining on campus (Bakker, 2020).

Without a sense of belonging, students may hesitate to disclose their disabilities to avoid any potential harm to their social status. Students with disabilities, namely students with HFA, are often at risk when they enter college due to their unique exceptionalities when compared to the dominant group of students. If the college environment is perceived to be unwelcoming to individuals who may learn differently, students may deem it unsafe.

Feeling safe to disclose and communicate one's disability to college personnel, and utilize accommodations are important components for ensuring the educational success of students with disabilities in higher education institutions (Bakker, 2020).

Role of Effective Transition Planning

Students with disabilities who enroll in higher education institutions and who provide documentation of their disability are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations through designated personnel in the disability services office (Newman, 2016). A reasonable accommodation can be defined as an adjustment to education that provides students with disabilities the same access to their environment and curriculum as students without disabilities (ADA: P.L. 101-336). Reasonable accommodations typically include, but are not limited to, extended test time, separate test location, auxiliary aids for technology, and service or emotional animals. College personnel must review accommodations throughout the student's educational experience to ensure these educational supports continue to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities as they matriculate (Stodden, 2011).

As stated above, IDEA mandates that public schools begin preparing students with disabilities for their postsecondary aspirations typically in their first year of high school or at the

age of 14 (Sabbatino, 2007). This plan of action (called a transition IEP) should align with the student's postsecondary interests, and it is completed by the multidisciplinary evaluation team (parents, student, teachers, outside resources, etc.) prior to the student turning 16 years old.

During this process, it is imperative for students to actively participate and become aware of the differences between high school special education services and the services they will become eligible for, based upon their disability, upon enrolling in postsecondary education (Gil, 2007).

Special education professional organizations and education researchers have also developed guides and strategies specifically for the transition of special education students to career, college, and independent living. The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition, using the research of Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar (2013), developed a set of transition standards and competencies for educators in transitioning students with disabilities. These standards include (a) using valid and reliable assessments; (b) making sure that knowledge from generalized and specialized curricula is used to develop and improve programs and services; (c) continually facilitating and improving general and special education programs; (d) conducting, evaluating, and using inquiry to guide practice; (e) providing leadership, advocacy, and creation of positive environments; (f) using foundational knowledge of ethics and practice; and (g) collaborating with stakeholders.

Kohler (2003) identified five areas of emphasis for effective postsecondary transition outcomes as part of the Taxonomy of Transition programming. They include student development, family involvement, program structures, interagency collaboration, and student-focused planning. Kohler's work has become known as the Taxonomy of Transition programming. Kohler, along with Gothberg and Coyle (2017), reviewed and revised the original taxonomy to further define the constructs using positive postsecondary outcome research. The

revised taxonomy (Taxonomy of Transition 2.0) includes student-focused planning, family involvement, interagency collaboration, program structures, and student development. The Office of Special Education Programs, in an effort to improve postsecondary transition and outcome of students with disabilities, launched the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). This 10-year longitudinal study examined the transition planning and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in all 12 special education disability categories.

Participation in the IEP transition process may provide students with the ability to develop self-determination skills that will assist them in advocating for themselves in postsecondary education institutions (Wehmeyer, 2001). Schools that implement student participation in the Transition IEP process are likely to create a college culture in which they take responsibility for their education (McClafferty, 2009). Parents believe high schools are responsible for their children acquiring self-determination skills; this can occur by allowing students to participate in IEP transition meetings (Grigal, 2003). Mastery and utilization of these skills can help strengthen the ability of students with disabilities to distinguish accessing services in high school from accessing services in college (Morningstar, 2018).

Accommodations

Students K-12 with disabilities receive services and accommodations based on their IEPs. However, as stated above, once students reach higher education, they are required to disclose their disability, provide documentation of their disabilities, and express their accommodation needs before receiving reasonable accommodations. Provision of reasonable accommodations depends on the individual student's needs. Barnhill (2016) "indicated that students with AS and ASD typically accessed the following 13 accommodations and supports, with the first four listed as most commonly accessed and also available to all students with

disabilities if they demonstrate a need for these supports and accommodations: advisor, extra time on exams, alternate testing site when appropriate, tutoring, note-taker, technology supports (i.e., Dragon NaturallySpeaking, Smart Pens, etc.), preparation for employment, reduced course load, copy of professor's notes, instruction in life skills (e.g., budgeting, laundry, sexuality, hygiene), social skills instruction, assigned peer mentor, and priority registration.”

Extension of research issues

Alverson, Lindstrom, and Hirano (2019) conducted a study documenting the success of five young men with HFA in higher educational settings. Alverson's research was focusing on high school transition services and what services students with ASD needed to be successful. Researchers were also looking at what barriers these individuals faced when enrolling and attending college. Researchers concluded the support and preparation provided in high school for higher education was insufficient and found that students with ASD lacked the following: social skills, communication, and executive functioning skills. The researcher's goal was to provide a system of support for high school students preparing for higher education. Prior to developing the transition plan, the researchers conducted a needs assessment to conclusively decide the areas of support that would be most useful to the students preparing to attend a higher education institution and their parents.

Anderson, Carter, and Stephenson (2017) completed a study involving several universities in Australia. The study was to gain the perspectives of students with ASD and what services were used while they were enrolled in higher education. The study involved eight universities that took part in the study. It was found that there were high rates of academic and non-academic difficulties, but students were not using the support being provided to them. During the study it was not determined why students were not using the services provided to

them but suggested that the services and accommodations be flexible to the student and not work on their deficits but play to the students' strengths.

As more and more students enter into higher education with more and more unique needs, institutions have to adapt to support these students. "Twenty years ago, many students with Asperger's Syndrome did not see college as a postsecondary option. Today, more high school students living with Asperger's Syndrome expect college to be in their future, looking forward to an environment where they may finally shine." (Graetz, 2008). Graetz looked at a variety of options for students on the spectrum. As Graetz looked specifically at Asperger's Syndrome this relates closely with those that are High Functioning Autism. Those with Asperger's tend to be visual, concrete learners who struggle socially (Graetz, 2008). When these students attend Higher Education there are skills, they need to possess to be successful like; promoting self-advocacy, self-determination, financial understanding, being able to identify healthy coping skills, and the way supports are provided at colleges and universities (Graetz, 2008).

As students on the Autism Spectrum move through their life there are times where they experience social situations that affect how they look or perceive the world. Youth with ASD are more likely to experience bullying than their typically developing peers (Van Schalkwyk, 2018). Van Schalkwyk's study found that 51% of their sample reported being victims of bullying. Based on this information Zeedyk's study supports those students with ASD need not only academic support but social support as well. Addressing important issues such as living supports, practical skills, social supports, and educational accommodations (Zeedyk, 2014).

Theoretical Framework: Theory of Mind

One of the most common and most researched theories of autism developed by Simon

Baron-Cohen is the Theory of Mind, (ToM). As stated in chapter 1, theory of mind remains one of the quintessential abilities that makes us human (Whiten, 1993) and is the basis for all social interaction. The idea was that an individual with a theory of mind should be able to infer the full range of mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, imagination, emotions, etc.) and use this information to make predictions regarding others' behavior (Premack, 1978). Having a theory of mind is important as it provides the ability to predict and interpret the behavior of others (Ruhl, 2020).

“As humans we assume that others want, think, believe and the like, and
Thereby infer states that are not directly observable, using these states
anticipatorily, to predict the behavior of others as well as our own.

These inferences, which amount to a theory of mind, are to our knowledge,
universal in human adults” (Premack, 1978).

Theory of mind is an important underlying mechanism that allows for human social interaction to occur. Without it, we would greatly struggle to communicate with each other, understand each other's behavior, and we wouldn't be known as the unique social beings that make us so special (Ruhl, 2020). Children who are diagnosed with autism, a spectrum disorder marked by challenges with social skills, recognizing emotions and intentions in others, recognizing one's own emotions, restricted repetitive behaviors, and nonverbal communication (Autismspeaks, 2021), exhibit a deficit in theory of mind capabilities.

A deficit in ToM means that individuals with ASD may struggle in the following areas:

1. Explaining their behaviors
2. Understanding their emotions
3. Predicting the behaviors or emotional state of others

4. Understanding the perspectives of others
5. Inferring the intentions of others
6. Understanding that behavior impacts how others think and/or feel
7. Differentiating fact and fiction (Merrill, 2015)

Due to these deficits, teaching methods or coping skills on how to understand the emotions of others and how to react appropriately in social situations is a necessity for students with ASD, especially for those transitioning to higher education. Without these skills, students with ASD might want to socialize with others, but find the task overwhelming and frustrating. Strategies such as visuals, role-play, or social narratives to remind individuals with ASD about emotional states or appropriate behaviors can be useful (Ruhl, 2020).

Summary

The number of students with HFA enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States continues to increase. This can be attributed to the passage of legislations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Although the increase may be an indicator that a climate of inclusion for individuals with HFA has been created, many institutions are not adequately prepared to accommodate these students. While a typical young adult may anticipate the freedom that college brings, young adults with HFA may experience anxiety and pretransition distress due to leaving a structured school environment and familiar family routines (Glennon, 2001). Students with learning and developmental disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college face particular challenges, and numerous articles have discussed the needs of such students (Sitlington, 2007). However, though much has been learned about the needs and experiences of students with

learning disabilities, far less is known about the transition process for individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

Participation in transition planning has been associated with improved outcomes in postsecondary education and work participation after high school (Wehman, 2014).

As discussed above, there are no specific guidelines for determining appropriate accommodations for students with HFA, leading to inconsistent policies and services—which in turn can mean that students are not always well served (Shaw, 2009). This is why a strong transition plan needs to be in place to prepare students

Effective transition planning should help high school students with disabilities transition successfully to higher education settings or other post-school options (Roberts, 2010) and should be tailored to the unique needs of each student (Kucharczyk, 2015). Successful student-centered transition planning must involve the student and address his or her strengths, weaknesses, interests, preferences, and goals in life (Myles, 2005)

CHAPTER III: METHOD

“What I’ve tried to do is combine both my personal experiences with scientific research. I like to cross the divide between the personal world and the scientific.”

-Dr. Temple Grandin

Introduction

While it is commonly accepted that transition from high school to college is an extremely stress producing period and this change can be particularly difficult for those with HFA (Glennon, 2001). HFA students need to know their rights and be prepared to ask for accommodations before they enroll in higher education. Students with High Functioning Autism attending higher education only 20% of these students were on track to graduate on time through the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) it was also reported that this percentage continued to rise to 39% after students were seven years out of high school (Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, & Anderson, 2015). To further develop effective strategies and solutions, accommodations and services must be individualized for the student. As so eloquently stated in Wolf (2009), "one does not accommodate AS, but rather accommodates a student with an autism spectrum diagnosis that affects him or her in a uniquely individual manner."

Design Method

Researchers focused on an action research (Mertler, 2019) mixed quantitative and qualitative study asking both open ended and concrete questions on the needs assessment survey. Mixed method designs are viewed as preferable in implementation research because they provide a better understanding of research issues than either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone (Palinkas, 2015). Surveys are data collection techniques used to obtain information directly from people about their ideas, feelings, plans, and beliefs (Fink, 1998). The rationale for using a

survey in this study was to as serve as a tool to explore what skills are needed for students with HFA to successfully transition to post-secondary institutions, how prepared they felt they were to transition to higher education after secondary school and where these students struggle once they get to the higher education institution and what causes them the most anxiety-thinking about transitioning while still in high school. The participants' responses guided the researchers in developing a transition plan specifically designed for students with HFA preparing to transition to a higher education institution. The participants' answers and suggestions guided the creation of transition plans for students and their families. (See Appendix C-G)

1- Develop Needs Assessment Survey

2- Administer Survey

3- Collect Data from Survey

4- Develop a transition Plan for HFA students transitioning to higher education

Research Questions

1. What knowledge do parents and students need to help their students successfully transition into a higher education institution?
2. What is needed in a high school transition plan for children with high functioning autism transitioning to higher education?

Population and Sample

The sampling approach for this study used an overall purposeful sampling strategy (Palinkas, 2015). Network sampling, a method of non-random sampling, is a technique based on the social networks of multiple individuals who connect the researchers with participants who have direct experience with students with HFA that have or plan to transition to higher

education. This sampling technique involves the judgment of the researchers since they outlined specific characteristics of participants to be sampled purposefully.

The researchers commenced recruitment by contacting professionals affiliated with autism advocacy organizations, autism parental groups, professional special educator organizations, and autism support groups to recruit potential participants. Researchers reached participants by creating a High Functioning Autism Transition Facebook Group and a collection of emails reaching out to ask for participation. (see Appendix A) Participants were asked to complete the Google Forms survey from either the Facebook group, flyers, and collections of emails. The emails, flyers and Facebook group had the google forms survey link provided to participate. The survey also had a question at the very end asking if participants have any recommendations on who should also complete the survey. This was a snowball sampling to reach more participants.

The goal was to recruit a total of at least 120 participants consisting of at least 30 parents of a student with HFA, at least 30 high school special education teachers who work with students with HFA, 30 professionals working in the office of disability services in higher education, and at least 30 students between the ages of 18 and 22 with HFA who are looking to or have already transitioned into higher education.

Data Collection

Participants accessed the survey through an embedded link to a webpage and did not have to provide an email address to participate in the survey. The email and Facebook group indicated that participation was voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential. The researchers developed the self-administered survey (see Appendix B) based on research related to skills and services identified as important in transitioning students with HFA into higher education settings.

The needs assessments requested information about age, age of diagnosis, colleges/universities attend(ed), academic program, and year of studies, as well as questions regarding current accommodations. It also requests information about the support they received in high school, their course load per semester, and life skills such as living on or off campus. Each of the surveys include open-ended questions that will provide insight into each individual's experiences. This information provides the basic context for processing the data collected during interviews with the study participants. Each group of participants; parents, student, and support staff complete a needs assessment based on their interactions with the transition process.

Instrumentation

The self-administered needs assessment was delivered electronically via google survey. Using self-reported data was appropriate for this study because parents, special education professionals, high school & college students with HFA are capable of answering questions regarding the skills and services that were useful and lacking in secondary school while preparing to transition into higher education. A web survey format was chosen to increase the ease with which participants could access the survey.

After reviewing existing literature (see Chapter II) and examining other survey studies on transition practices for students with HFA; based on the identified information and the research questions, researchers developed a survey instrument (See Appendices A-G). Participants were first asked for consent to participate in the survey, without consent the survey ended. Next, the participants were asked a series of questions to determine if they meet the criteria to participate in the survey. If criteria were met, each participant was automatically taken to a specific survey based on the criteria they had entered.

The researchers developed four self-administered surveys: Student Survey (Appendix D), Parent Survey (Appendix E), High School Employee Survey (Appendix F) and Higher Education Employee (Appendix G). Each survey was divided in four parts and included sections on demographic information, participants' perception of skills impacting success in higher education, services provided and several open-ended questions. The first section of each survey contained general demographic information and included questions about gender, age, disability, type of higher education institution, college level, number of college semesters, GPA, and years in said profession. The second section contained questions concerning important skills helpful in transitioning to higher education. These included rating the importance of skills such as, self-determination skills (e.g., self-awareness of their disability, self-advocacy, self-management, decision-making, goal-setting and attainment), study skills, independent living skills, technology skills, and social communication skills. The third section contained questions asking the participants to rate the importance of services that assist in successful transition to higher education, as well as, services received in secondary education. The final section contained questions open-ended questions specific to each group surveyed (i.e., students, parents, high school, or higher education employees).

There were a variety of question types in the survey including single selection questions (i.e., yes or no questions), multiple response questions, and a 5-point Likert scale questions (i.e., 1 - not important at all, 2 -somewhat unimportant, 3 - neither important nor unimportant, 4 - important, and 5 - very important) and open-ended questions.

Procedures

The research design used for this study was action research. The Survey was created through Google Forms and distributed through Facebook, email, and flyers which included the

link directly to the survey.

The first step in the distribution process was to join several Facebook groups that focus on Autism. Through these Facebook groups, researchers posted about their research and a link to the survey. Researchers also directly emailed any participant that was personally known to the researchers and/or recommended from associates. Participants accessed the survey through an embedded link to a webpage and did not have to provide an email address to participate in the survey. The email indicated that participation was voluntary, and responses will be kept anonymous. The consent form is on the first page of the survey; only participants who consented to participate were able to gain access to the survey.

For this study the following procedures were performed:

1. The researchers conducted research on the needs of students attending higher education with high functioning autism.
2. Researchers joined Facebook groups that had a direct correlation with ASD (i.e. parent support groups, student support groups, college ASD groups, etc.) to attract participants.
3. The survey (Appendices C-G) was be hosted by a secure Google Forms and distributed through Facebook post and by an email. A Facebook post and email w sent to gain participation (See Appendix A for full review)
4. Participants will first read the informed consent (Appendix C). They must understand and agree to the informed consent in order to continue with the study. A forced field will be in place, therefore if a participant does not agree to the informed consent the survey will close and the participant thanked.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the data in a sequential process that allowed the researchers to collect, manage, and organize data. Then, this process continued with the researchers engaging with the data by reading and reflecting which lead to describing, classifying, and interpreting. Finally, the data was presented to elucidate the relationship between the survey and development of the product.

Preparation of the data for analysis started with the review of each survey for completeness. Survey data was electronically transferred from Psych Data into the Statistical Package of Social Scientists (SPSS) program for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to address the research questions: (a) which skills college students with HFA describe as being important to their success in higher education settings, (b) which of the identified skills were taught in secondary school, and (c) which services college students with HFA describe as being important in transitioning to higher education environments. All variables in the above research questions were categorical; therefore, frequency, standard deviation, and percentage will be examined.

This data was entered into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. Each row of the spreadsheet represents the source of support while each column represented the type of support. The frequencies of selections of type and source of support by participants was entered as numbers. Lastly, a descriptive analysis was conducted on the data of both sections of the survey to describe the sample. The results of the survey included several open-ended questions and were organized into codes then categorized to generate themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once both the Likert scale questions and the open-ended questions were analyzed individually, they were then triangulated to make meaning of the two sets of data together.

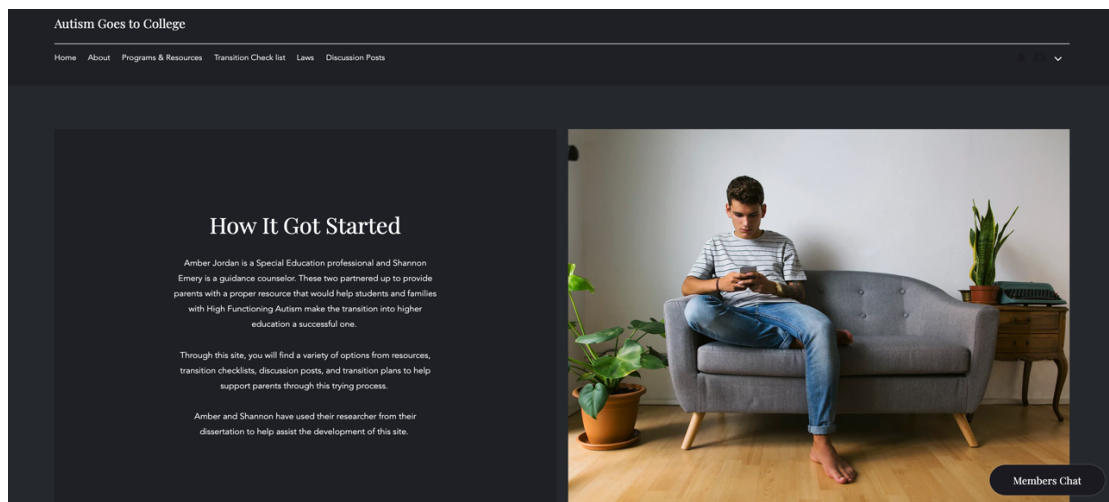
Ethical Considerations

While conducting this study, the researchers took careful ethical considerations to ensure the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participants were also informed that participation in the study would be voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without question or penalty. Participants were informed that completing the survey constituted informed consent. To protect confidentiality, the survey responses were anonymous. Participants' identities were further anonymized by assigning a number/letter combination to each participant, using only this number/letter combination. To maintain participants' confidentiality, surveys were completely anonymous. Survey data was securely stored on a password-protected google drive folder, and results were destroyed after the study was completed.

This study poses minimal risks to the participants due to their power to choose whether to participate. As stated above, participants were able to withdraw at any time for any reason. They could choose whether to answer questions about their previous experiences and offer opinions based on those experiences. Participants may benefit from participating in the survey by knowing they will be assisting in a product being created based on their experiences. The product was created to help students with HFA successfully transition into higher education (Figure 2). Participants were the first to have access to the product after the study was completed.

Figure 2

Autism Goes to College Website



Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations are the boundaries that the researchers set for the study. This study the delimitations where the study did not study students across the spectrum attending higher education. The study specifically focuses on 17- to 18-year-olds beginning the transition process and 18-24 year old's that had already gone through the transition process.

The research literature in this area is minimal, especially in transition planning for students with HFA enrolled in higher education institutions. And, given this study's small sample size, it cannot provide a significant contribution to the literature. The researchers' product was based on the answers given by the needs assessment. Future researcher, there should be more focus on factors that play into transition planning. Such as, gender, race, ethnicity, and teacher effectiveness. In this study 61 people completed the survey. Of those 61 participants only 27 survey responses met all requirements.

Some limitations for this study where the researchers may have known some participants and the participants may have answered in a way the researchers may want them to answer. Another limitation is that participants' diagnosis was not confirmed by the researchers, however

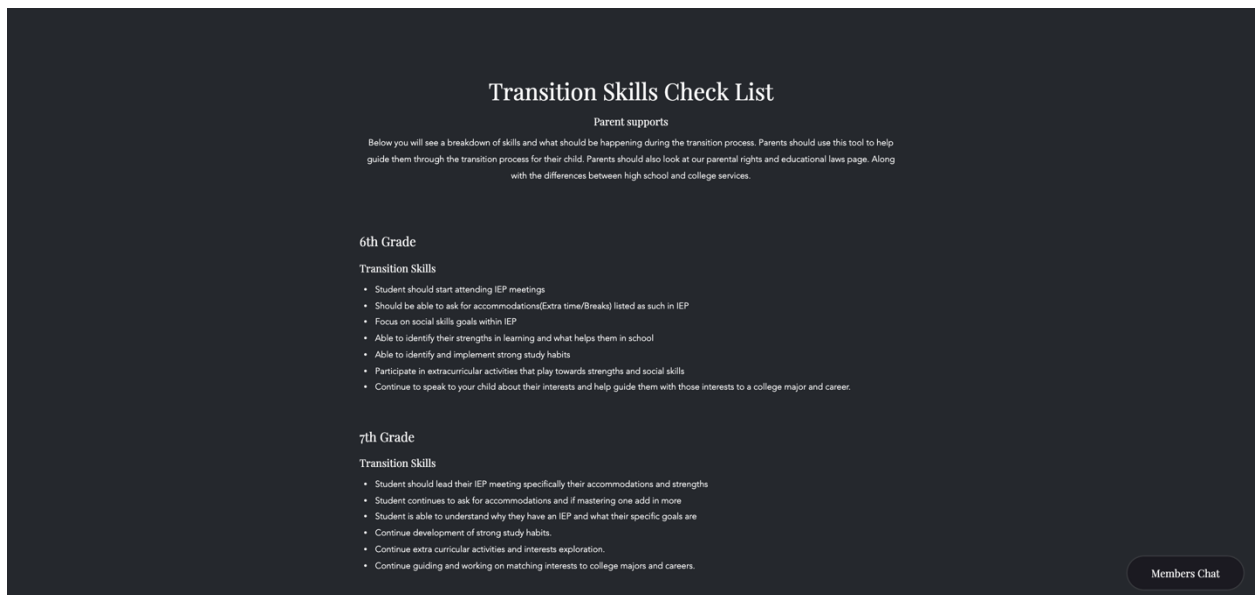
there was a question specifically asking participants about their diagnosis. Researchers did not follow the participants after the study had been completed the effectiveness of the transition plan will be unknown. This is where further research to be conducted following the conclusion of this study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide parents with a transition planning tool to help aid in the transition process for their students to be successful in Higher Education. This tool's goal is to provide a cost effective and reliable tool for students and families to access when starting to transition into higher education. See Figure 3 for the parental transition checklist which includes steps for parents and students starting in middle school.

Figure 3

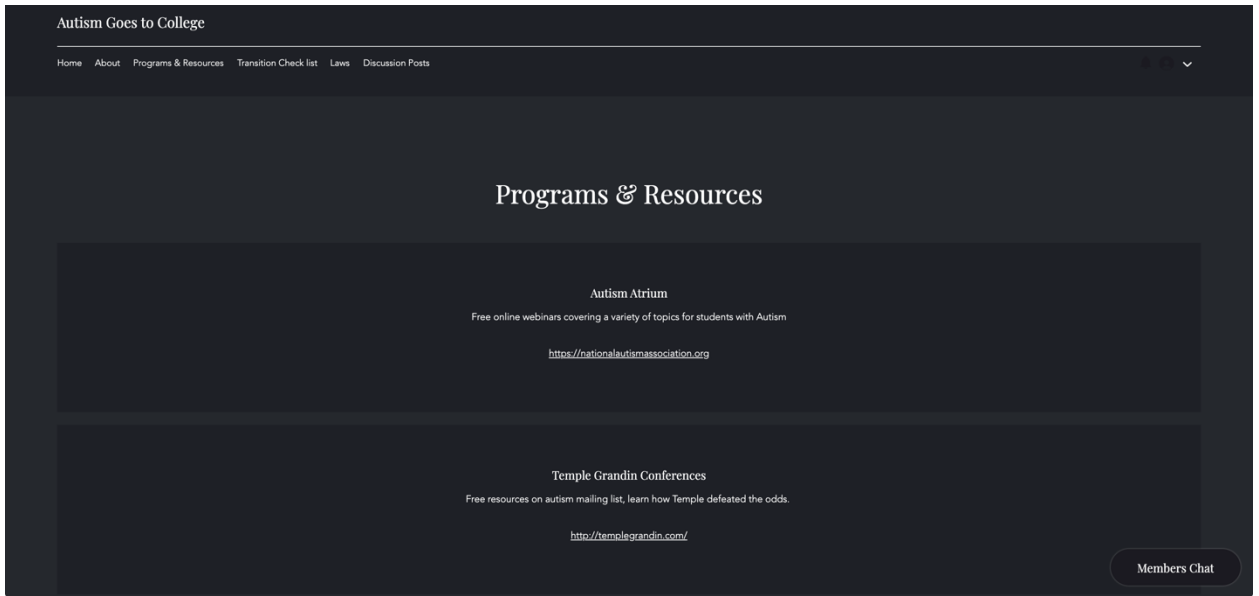
Transition Skills Check List



This website also provides parents with the opportunity to access programs and resources that could be helpful for their child with the transition process into higher education. See Figure 4.

Figure 4

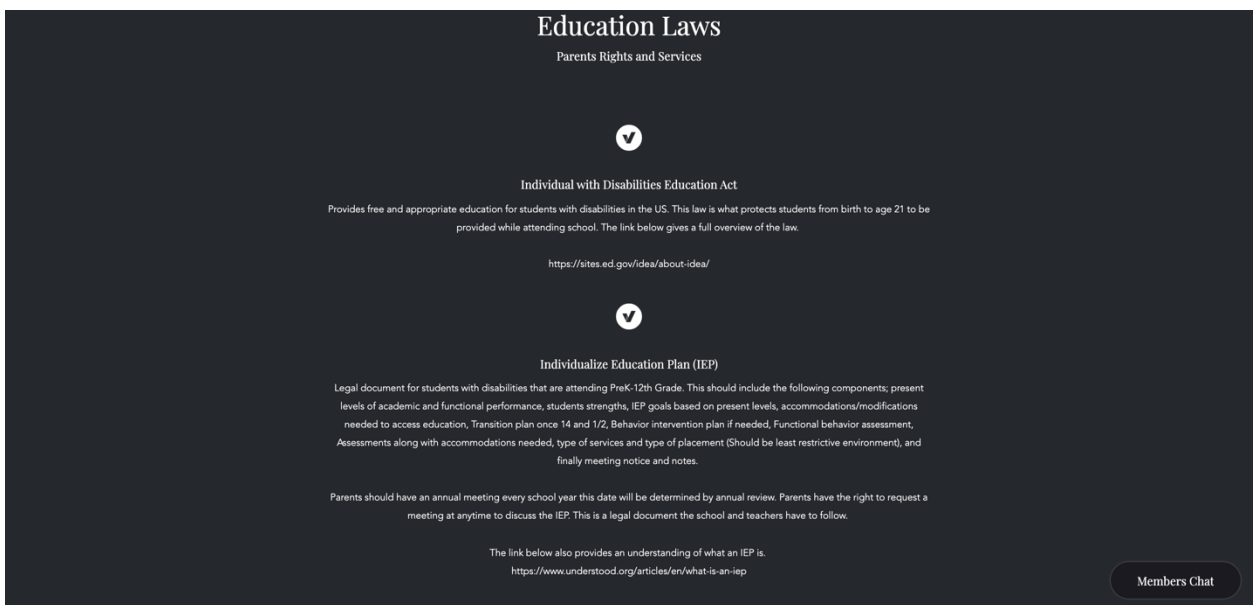
Programs & Resources



Parents then have access to a summary of educational laws that relate to K-12 education and higher education. This section of the tool provides a summary and includes a link to more information and law terminology. See Figure 5.

Figure 5

Education Laws



In summary, this is an action research study using the needs assessment to develop a transition planning tool for parents called to assist parents and students with the knowledge of effective transition plans. This tool provides parents the opportunity to eliminate uncertainty in their child's IEP meetings and give them a chance to help their students meet their fullest potential.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

“A treatment method or an educational method that will work for one child may not work for another. The one common denominator for all of the children is that early intervention does work, and it seems to improve the prognosis.”

-Dr. Temple Grandin

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain insight in the transition process of students with HFA attending higher education. The study looked at perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and higher education professionals. An absence of research specifically to students with High Functioning Autism transitioning into Higher Education and the support and skills needed for these students to be successful is what gave purpose to this study. The research used a survey approach to learn from a variety of participants. The goal of the survey was to gain information that is needed to help these students with HFA transition successfully.

The results shared in this chapter answer the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do parents and students need to help their students successfully transition into a higher education institution?
2. What is needed in a high school transition plan website for children with high functioning autism transitioning to higher education?

It was hypothesized that parents of children with HFA and students with HFA do not know how to successfully transition into higher education. That parents and students in this particular subgroup need guidance and taught tools to be successful in higher education. Finally, high school students with HFA need to ask for accommodations from their high school teachers or special education teachers to prepare them to have the ability to ask their professors in higher education.

Based on previous research it was determined that students with disabilities are required by educational law to have a transition plan that supports achieving post-secondary education, employment, and independent living upon graduation from high school (IDEA, 2004). Research showed that these transition plans although are a federal requirement, but it showed it was not always taking place (Landmark, 2013, Roux 2015). Finally, it was also learned that higher education support services programs are not always free of charge and at times for students to gain access to what they had in high school will cost families more to support their students (Madus, 2006).

Demographics of Participants

The Survey was open for four weeks and due to low participation researchers requested a modification to gain participants through the IRB. The request to gain access to participants through Council of Exceptional Children (CEC), School emails, and other Autism organizations. The survey was then open for another four weeks. While participants were taking the survey researchers used snowballing to expand their participation population. When an email was provided researchers emailed the survey to that participant. Once the eight weeks ended the survey was closed and no more survey answers were collected.

Links to the survey were posted in our Facebook group, Council of Exceptional Children discussion posts, school emails of special education administrators across the United States, and contacts and connections of researchers who would have qualified for the study. Researchers continued to network to gain more participants.

At the completion of the survey the researchers had a total of 61 participants who participated in the survey. Goggle forms did not gather data of how many people opened the survey. Based on our Facebook Group there were a total of 70 Facebook group members. Of those 61 participants who answered the survey 27 were qualified to participate in the study. These

participants met the three criteria questions. Students had to have a formal diagnosis of Autism, HFA, or Asperger's. Students had to be between 18 and 24 years old and plan to enroll or enrolled in higher education. Parents had to have a child with a formal diagnosis of Autism, HFA, or Asperger's. Their child had to be between 18 and 24 years old and plan to attend or attending higher education. High School and higher education employees had to work with students with Autism HFA, or Asperger's. Work with students between the ages of 18 and 24 and enrolled students with these diagnosis into higher education or currently helping enroll students into higher education.

The 34 participants that did not qualify for the following reasons; did not hold a formal diagnosis or were not between 18 and 24 years old. 14.3% (one student participant) of participants answered no to not holding a formal diagnosis of Autism, HFA, or Asperger's. 33.3% (two student participants) answered no to not being between the ages of 18 and 24. The remaining 4 participants all answered yes to being enrolled or planning to enroll in higher education. The only criteria parents did not meet is not having a child within the ages of 18 and 24. 55.6% (five Parent participants) answered no to this criteria question. High school employees that did not qualify were from two criteria; students were not between the ages of 18 and 24 or did not work with students with HFA enrolling into higher education. 21.6% (eight High school employee participants) answered no to working with students between the ages of 18 and 24. 58.8% (17 High school employee participants) answered no to helping students with HFA enroll into higher education. Finally with college employee's they answered 100% yes to having worked with students with Autism, HFA, or asperges and working with students in the 18 to 24 age range. When working with students' transition into higher education there were 12.5% (one college employee participant) who answered no.

Of those 27 participants who qualified for the study all agreed to the informed consent and completed the survey with 100% accuracy. These 27 participants were 4 students between the ages of 18-24 that have been diagnosed with HFA and either attend or aspire to attend a higher education institution, 4 parents of students with HFA and either attend or aspire to attend a higher education institution, 12 high school employees that work with students with HFA transitioning into a higher education setting, and 7 higher education professionals that work students with HFA transitioning into their higher education setting.

Summary of Analyses

Researchers created survey questions in two formats: Likert Scale, and open-ended. Likert questions were created to ask participants what skills were most beneficial to them during the transition process. Open-ended questions were created to gain more information of the structures of the transition process and participants' specific roles. Findings were organized by groups and types of questions. A Facebook Post and email (Appendix A) was created and sent out to open the survey. After approval from the IRB the researchers sent emails out to a variety of organizations. The survey (Appendix D) was through a secure Google Form which only allowed one answer per participant there was no data collected to identify participants. Researchers also collected emails from participants of others that may qualify. While the survey was open researchers would check in daily to send invitation emails to those emails collected. While participants accessed the survey the first question being asked was for consent to be able to move on into the next set of question. There were limitations based on participants responses during consent and participation criteria. If a participant did not give consent or answered no to one of the criteria questions it would thank them for their participation and end the survey.

After sending out the survey and responses gathered researchers analyzed the information. After the data was analyzed by the researchers, it was determined that there is a need for transition

planning along with supporting students within self-advocacy skills. Data also showed a disconnect in the transition from High school into Higher education. Therefore, it was concluded to be a need for an at home transition plan to help assist and prepare students for the transition process into Higher Education.

Student Results

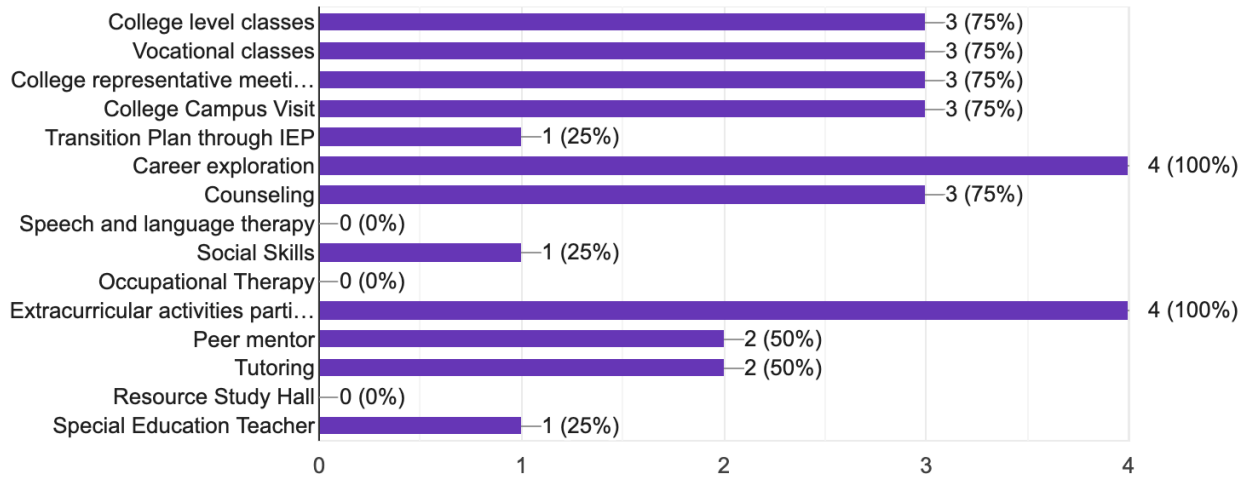
Student participants had three areas of criteria to qualify for completing the survey. Students had to have a formal diagnosis of Autism, 18 - 24 years of age, and attending or planning to attend higher education. Of the seven participants only four met criteria to qualify. Of the three that did not qualify, one did not have an autism diagnosis and two did not meet the age requirements. Results were drawn from the surveys of the four qualifying participants. Of these four students two had an IEP in High school and two did not, their age ranges were 18 to 21, all males, three attended a public university while one was still in high school. Each of the participants had a self-determined passing GPA: two students with B averages, one with a C average and one participant was unsure/chose not to answer. These students had a variety of services (see Figure 6) which they took part in during high school.

Figure 6

Student Services Received in High School

Which of the following services did you receive while in high school?

4 responses



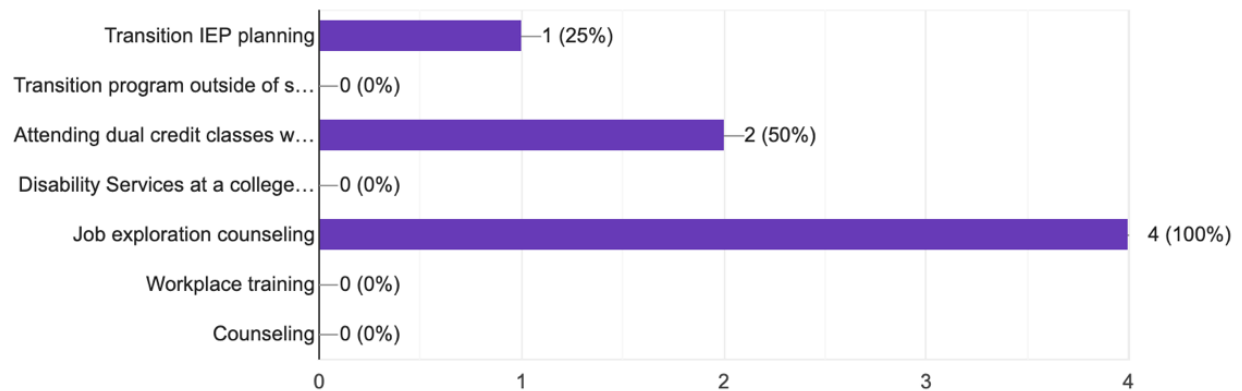
These students also identified specific transition services (see Figure 7) that they participated in during high school to assist them in their transition to higher education.

Figure 7

Transition Services Students were apart of in High School

What transition services have you been apart of? Check all that apply

4 responses



From these two figures researchers can see that these students are lacking transition planning skills, social skills instruction, tutoring, and special education services.

Students had four open-ended questions to answer. The first open-ended question being about challenges that they have faced while transitioning into Higher Education. It was reported that the social aspect of transitioning was the hardest part for two students. One student reported it harder to focus on classes at times. It was also reported that one student felt the assumptions of others was the biggest challenge. They reported that peers and teachers assumed what they were capable of doing compared to their general education peers and therefore was not always given access to a variety of opportunities. The second open-ended question asked who supported them the most while in high school one student reported it being their teacher, one their school guidance counselor, and two reported their college counselor. The third open-ended question asked what helped them the most with transitioning from high school to college; two students reported their roommate was the most helpful, one reported their college advisor, and finally a student reported that being able to participate in decision-making and giving their perspective on things was the most helpful. In the final open-ended question students were asked what advice they would give to someone going through this transition process. Two students reported attending classes, one reported using the resources at your disposal, and one advised for students to talk to someone who you trust and know what you're capable of doing and ask them for guidance.

Students had 19 Likert-Scale questions to complete these questions were asking participants to rate each category on a one to five rating scale where one is no importance, two somewhat important, three neither important/no importance, four important, and five very important. The skills they were rating were soft skills and activities/programs schools may have offered. Table 2 outlines the results from the student survey.

Table 2

Student Survey Results

Student	No Importance	Somewhat important	Neither important /no importance	Important	Very Important
Decision Making			25		75
Self-Awareness			25		75
Goal setting			25		75
Self-Advocacy				25	75
Self-Management				75	25
Study Skills					100
Living Skills				25	75
Communication Skills			50	25	25
College Classes			25		75
Vocational Classes			25	50	25
College Representatives			25	50	25
Campus Visits			25	50	25
School Counselor				25	75
Transition Planning			25	50	25
IEP Meetings			75		25
Therapy			25	75	
Speech/Language		50	50		
OT		50	50		
Extra Curricular			25	25	50

The results of this data are that students rated the following categories as a top priority; Decision Making, Self-Awareness, Goal setting, Self-Advocacy, Study Skills, Living Skills, College Classes, School Counselor, and Extra Curricular activities as very important.

Parent Results

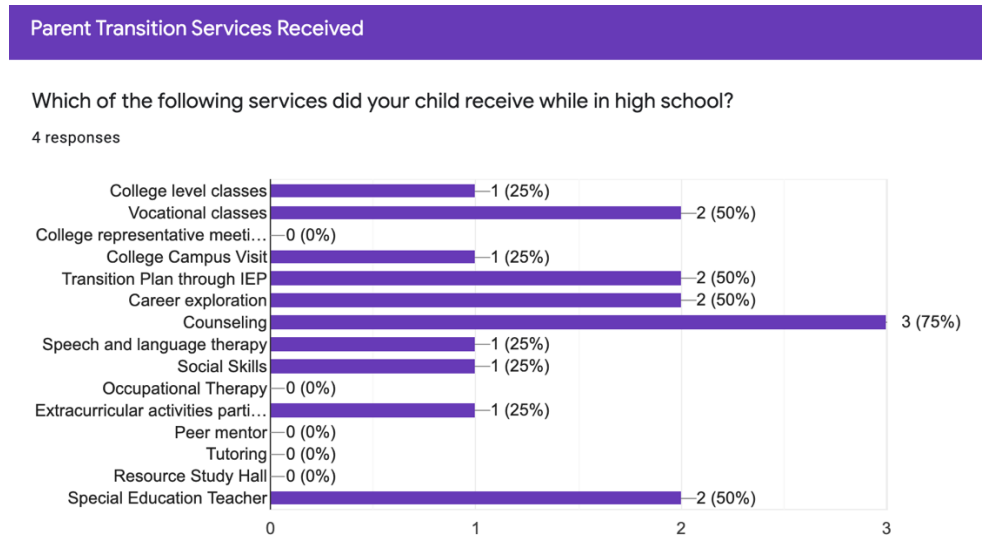
Parental participants had three areas of criteria to qualify for completing the survey. Parents had to have a child with a formal diagnosis of Autism, their child had to currently be within the age range of 18 and 24 years old, and their child had to be attending or planning to attend higher education. Of the nine participants only four qualified. The six that did not qualify all answered no to having a child within the ages of 18 and 24. The four remaining participants are what results

were analyzed. Of these four parents two children had an IEP while in high school where one did not and one child that had a 504 plan. Two children are currently enrolled in Higher education and two are planning to enroll. The two students enrolled in higher education attended community college and have completed two semesters.

Parents were asked about what services their children were apart of while attending high school and transitioning into higher education results are found in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Parent Transition Services Received



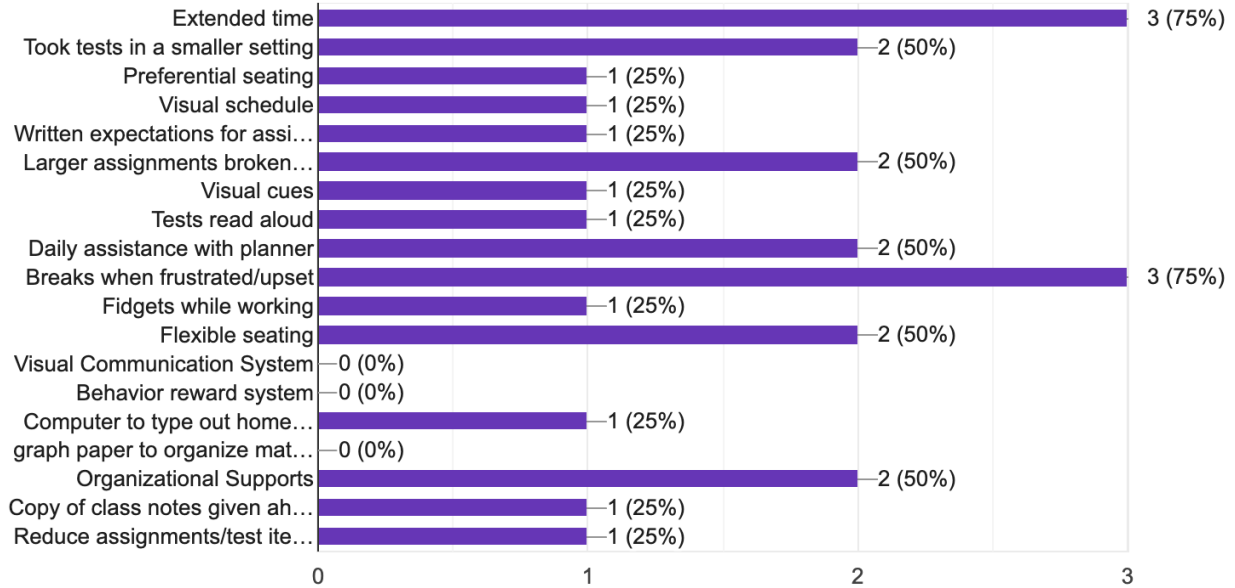
Parents then were asked about what accommodations their child received while attending high school. Results are found in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Accommodations Children Received in High School

What accommodations did your child receive in high school? (Check all that apply)

4 responses



The next question asked parents of what transition services their child had participated in.

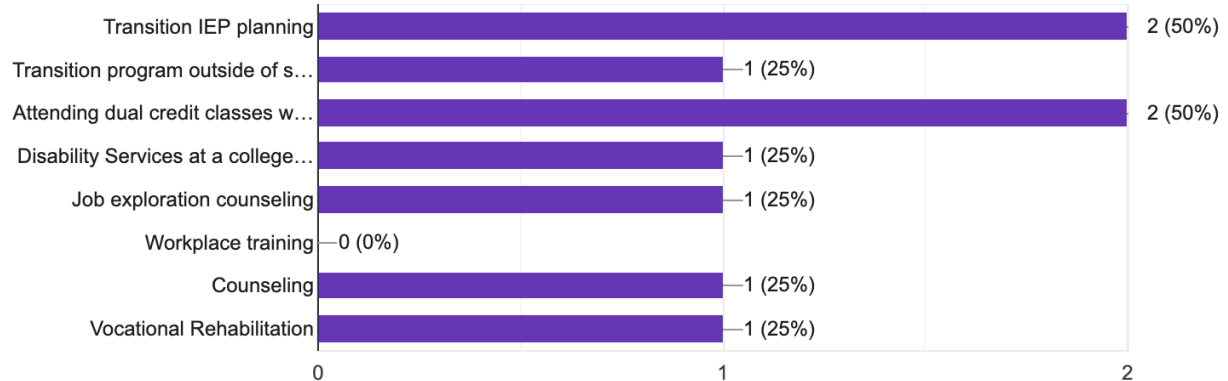
Results are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Transition Services Children were apart of in High School

What transition services have you or your child been a part of? Check all that apply

4 responses



Parents had five opened-ended questions the first question being about the challenges as a parent of a child with HFA and helping them reach their academic goals. These answers ranged from none to a lot of challenges. The first parent reported that traditional classes have too much verbal input and not enough hands on. Assignments and tasks also had a heavy load of group work and larger projects that can be easily overwhelming for students with ASD. Two parents reported no challenges and then the final parent-reported there to be a lack of support from teachers that followed a limited 504 plan.

The second question was who provided the most support within the transition and who parents felt supported by. Parents reported their special education teacher, therapist, and then no one. The next question related to who helped with the transition process the most parents reported, special education teacher, vocational rehab services, outside counseling, 1:1 therapy for a child, and then having a plan.

The fourth open-ended question was about the advice they would give future parents with children with HFA attending higher education. One parent suggested that having the school extend services if they can which is until they are 21 years old. This was due to knowing that services and supports significantly drop after graduation and the child/parent now becomes the special education teacher, advocate, and researcher. The next parent wants parents to understand and work with their child on their specific limitations. Then finally a parent suggested starting life skills training early in high school and not waiting until their junior or senior year.

The final question was specifically to the transition plan that the IEP team set and if it helped prepare their child for higher education. Parents reported that it was hard to know if the transition plan was going to help their child until the whole process was completed. Then the other parents reported that the transition plan did not help their child and a lot of the transition planning fell on the parents.

Parents were also asked to complete 19 Likert-scale questions which followed the same format as the student survey. They were asked to rate each category on a one to five rating scale where one is no importance, two somewhat important, three neither important/no importance, four important, and five very important. These skills were soft skills and activities or programs that their schools may have offered during the transition into Higher Education. Table 3 outlines the results from the parent survey.

Table 3

Results of Parent Survey

Parent	No Importance	Somewhat important	Neither important /no importance	Important	Very Important
Decision Making					100
Self-Awareness					100
Goal setting				25	75
Self-Advocacy				25	75
Self-Management				25	75
Study Skills			25	25	50
Living Skills				50	50
Communication Skills				25	75
College Classes			50	25	25
Vocational Classes			50		50
College Representatives			25	50	25
Campus Visits			50	25	25
School Counselor				50	50
Transition Planning				25	75
IEP Meetings				25	75
Therapy			25	25	50
Extra Curricular		25		50	25
Peer mentor		25	25	25	25
Tutoring		25	25		50

The significance of this data is that parents found the following categories a top priority; Decision Making, Self-Awareness, Goal Setting, Self-Advocacy, Self-Management, Study Skills, Living Skills, Communication Skills, Vocational Classes, School Counselor, Transition Planning, IEP meetings, Therapy, and Tutoring. All three parents agreed that Decision making skills and

having self-awareness were very important meaning these two categories would be the most significant.

High School Employee Results

High school employees working with high school students had three criteria to meet to qualify for the study; work with students with HFA, are these students between 18 and 24 years old, and have they helped enroll or currently enrolling a student with HFA into higher education. There was a total of 37 participants where 12 qualified to participate in the study. Those participants that did not qualify had not helped a child transition into higher education. Of these 12 participants, they were made up of the following professionals: two teachers, one transition coordinator, one guidance counselor, three special education teachers, and five special education professionals. These participants had an average of 15 years of experience. The highest being 30 and the lowest being seven. These professionals helped transition many students and of those students that transitioned how many graduated. Figure 11 shows the percentages of students that were transitioned into Higher Education and their success.

Figure 11

Percentage of Students that Transitioned in higher education & their percentage of success

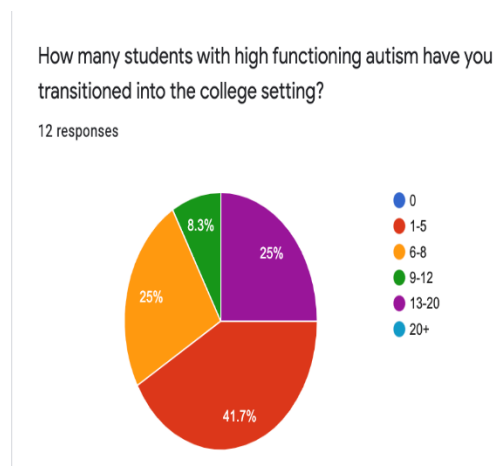
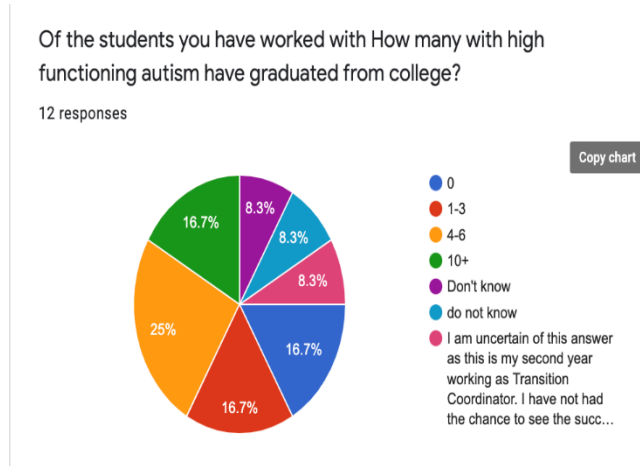


Figure 12 shows the number of students that graduated from higher education based on professionals that helped them do so. Figure 8 shows that students are transitioning into Higher

Education, and some are being successful. Those that are successful based on results 58% of students were able to graduate from Higher Education while the remaining 41% were unknown.

Figure 12

Number of students graduated from Higher Education



High School Employees were then asked eight Likert questions where they were rating soft skills on a range from one to five. The ratings were from one- no importance, two- somewhat important, three- neither important/no importance, four- Important, and five- Very Important. In Table 4 the results from teachers are reported. Table 4 shows results from these eight Likert scale questions.

Table 4

High School Employees Results

Teacher	No Importance	Somewhat important	Neither important /no importance	Important	Very Important
Decision Making				25	75
Self-Awareness				16.7	83.3
Goal setting				41.7	58.3
Self-Advocacy				16.7	83.3
Self-Management				33.3	66.7
Study Skills			25	41.7	33.3
Living Skills				25	75
Communication Skills			8.3	8.3	83.3

Based on responses it was determined that a focus on decision making, self-awareness, goal-setting, self-Advocacy, self-management, living skills, and communication skills were very important. However, the three that stood out among all responses were Self-awareness, Self-Advocacy, and Communication Skills. High School Employees were then asked about the flexibility to write transition plans for students with HFA. Figure 13 shows the results.

Figure 13

Transition Plans

The Transition plans that are set are they flexible to write for students with high functioning autism?

12 responses

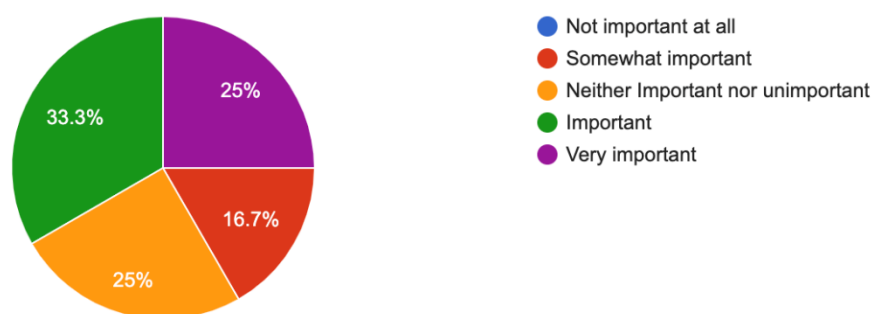
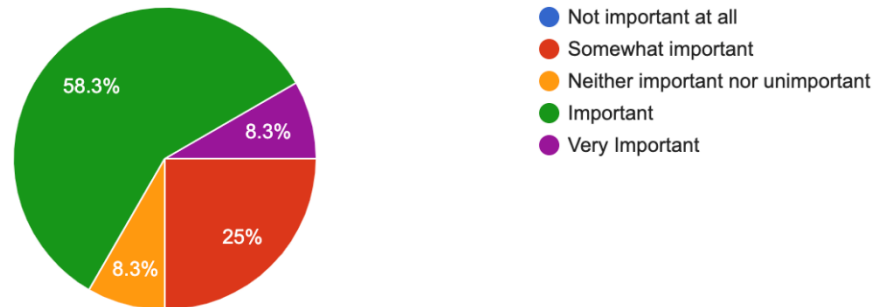


Figure 14 shows the importance of IEP transition plans at high school employee's schools. Overall, there were 33.3% of participants said that their schools transition planning were somewhat important to neither important nor unimportant.

Figure 14*Transition Plans Priority*

How important are the IEP transition plans a priority at your school?

12 responses



High School Employees then had three open ended questions to answer. These three questions focused on the lack of skills students have for attending higher education, current high school transition plans, and ideal way to help students with HFA transition into higher education. In question one educators were asked what skill deficits students with HFA lacked when it came to attending higher education. The common theme across all educators' answers were that students with HFA lacked social skills and independence to advocate for themselves along with understanding their rights under ADA compared to IDEA/IEP's.

In the second open-ended questions educators were asked about their school's transition plans for students with HFA. The common themes in answers were that transition planning was happening at schools however the implementation and results from these transition plans were not effective. One specific comment was, "Our transition plans are very cut and dry. There is not much that is adapted for students with HFA. I would love to see our school to start allowing students in their senior year do one class on a community college campus to help this transition process and have an IEP case manager to assist." Also reported was "My school district is all about meeting

compliance but not real outcomes.” From these answers along with others were ideas of what is needed for students with HFA.

In the third open-ended question educators were asked what would be the ideal way to transition students with HFA into higher education? Educators had a variety of ideas but the most common theme was having student stay with their high school IEP for longer or start community college classes while in high school so the High school case manager can help with the transition process. This would allow for students to learn and practice self-advocacy skills with more supports. The other theme across all answers is working together with colleges and universities on a collaborative effort to help support these specific types of students.

College Employee Results

College employees' participants had three areas of criteria to qualify for completing the survey; worked with students with HFA, worked with students between 18 and 24, and students that they worked with attended or planned to attend higher education. There was a total of eight participants where seven qualified for the study. These seven participants responses were used to analyze the data. 57.1% of participants worked at a public university and 42.9% worked at a private university. The eight participants were made up of one counselor, two directors of disability services, one Academic coach, three professors, one programming assistant and one project coordinator. College employees had eight Likert-Scale questions to complete these questions were asking participants to rate each category on a one to five rating scale where one is no importance, two somewhat important, three neither important/no importance, four important, and five very important. The skills they were rating were soft skills that employees felt were important to have while attending higher education. In Table 5 the results from the college employee Likert-scale questions.

Table 5

College employee results

College	No Importance	Somewhat important	Neither important /no importance	Important	Very Important
Decision Making				28.6	71.4
Self-Awareness					100
Goal setting				14.3	85.7
Self-Advocacy					100
Self-Management				28.6	71.4
Study Skills				28.6	71.4
Living Skills				42.9	57.1
Communication Skills				28.6	71.4

From Table 5 you will notice that out of the seven participants they agreed that all skills were very important for students with HFA. However out of them all employees rated Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy at 100%. Employees were then asked about what transition skills were worked on in their disability services office. Results are found in Figure 15.

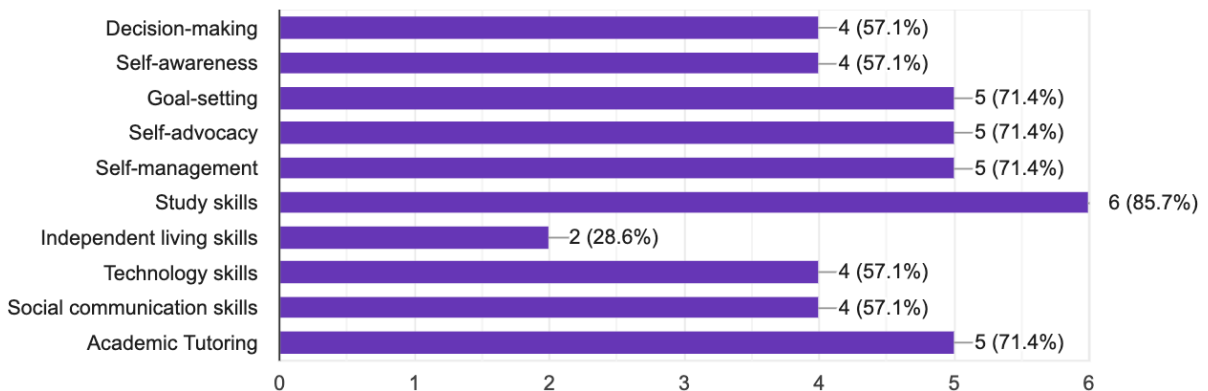
Figure 15

Higher Education transition services

Higher Education Employee Transition Services

What Transition skills are worked on through your disability services office?

7 responses



College employees then had three open-ended questions which asked about services, lacking skills, and collaboration with high schools. In the first open-ended question employees were asked about what services were offered without additional cost to the student while attending higher education. Results are found in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Transition services offered at no additional costs to HFA students

What Transition Services are offered to students with High Functioning Autism of no extra cost?

7 responses

Academic Counseling

Accommodations, executive functioning skills classes, housing, mentors

not sure; the IPSE program I work for costs money

service provided through the disability resource center

Advising, meeting independent of coursework, problem solving

Counseling, surveys

accommodations

The second open-ended question was asking employees what skills students with HFA were lacking once attending higher education. The participants reported social skills, self-advocacy, knowledge between high school and college, executive functioning skills specifically organizational skills, communication skills, planning, decision making, time management, and being able to see other perspectives.

The third open-ended question was asking how their college/university worked with high schools to help students with disabilities transition to higher education. The services that were free of charge to students were the following: outreach programs, information shared with schools,

schools can reach out for help, peer mentors, weekly activities with autism center, and meetings and conference for students with disabilities. Other responses showed that there was not much provided to high schools unless specifically asked for, none at all, and limited services provided to high school students with disabilities.

Results of Research Questions

RQ1: What knowledge do parents and students need to help their students successfully transition into a higher education institution?

Based on findings from the survey data and the research conducted, the researchers determined that students with HFA will benefit from flexible transition plans. The transition plan will be geared towards parents to help their child be successful in higher education. From the research conducted and data gathered from the survey, the researchers concluded that parents and students were lacking information on self-advocacy and how much independence would be needed when attending higher education. These skills would be a part of a transition plan which when looking at parent and student involvement in transition IEP planning there was only one student and two parents that participated in this process. Only 37.5% of participants reported they participated in transition planning. Parents reported not being supported with their child's transition and transition plans not being followed. Researchers concluded that the analyzed data showed a need for better transition planning and more involvement with the transition into higher education.

Parents indicated that soft skills such as decision making, and self-awareness were the most important for their child. Similarly, Garrison-Wade (2012) made the recommendation for parents to empower their students with disabilities to make their own decisions, which may help students develop a strong sense of self. Self-awareness and self-advocacy are directly linked to students' ability to request accommodations (Garrison-Wade, 2012).

Students' limited self-awareness may compromise their ability to self-advocate and is a significant restricting factor to academic success in higher education settings (Garrison-Wade, 2012). Creating a transition plan that incorporates and focuses specifically on these skills will benefit students in the long run.

RQ2: What is needed in a high school transition plan website for children with high functioning autism transitioning to higher education?

When researchers looked at the data from all four survey's researchers found a need for collaboration between high school and higher education to create and implement a flexible transition plan for students with HFA. Data provided a need for transition plans to specifically work on self-advocacy skills, Self-Awareness, Decision Making, communication skills, and goal setting. These areas were important skills identified where students with HFA were lacking when attending higher education. There were also reports of students needing more support of a longer timeframe. Under IDEA students with special education needs can be serviced through High School until they are 21 years old (IDEA 2004). The common suggestion was for students to start community college classes while still enrolled in High School to receive more support with the transition process. Students would then have goals on soft skills to continue to work on transitioning to ease into higher education and continue to work on lacking skills.

RQ2: What is needed in a high school transition plan website for children with high functioning autism transitioning to higher education?

Researchers determined that there is a need for a flexible transition plan specifically geared towards students with HFA. Based on the data gathered and analyzed from the survey it was determined that the transition plan will include the following: Self-Advocacy, Decision Making, Transition Planning, Communication Skills, and an understanding of changes from High School to Higher education.

These results align with the existing professional literature, which indicates that self-advocacy, as well as self-disclosure, are important skills for students with HFA transitioning to higher education (Ciccantelli, 2011). Longtin (2014) also recommends the ability to self-advocate to be a necessary skill for students with HFA to succeed in higher education and beyond. The results of Thoma and Getzel (2005), whose focus group participants identified many of the key components of self-determination as being essential for their success, including problem-solving skills, self-awareness, goal setting, and self-management continue to align with the results of this current study.

The transition plan will also have a focus on gaining the maximum number of services such as being enrolled in Community College while attending high school.

Summary of Analysis of the Data Survey

The researchers created survey questions in the form of open-ended and Likert scale questions. The Likert scale questions were geared towards soft skills and activities that students were lacking or had a need when transitioning into higher education. It was also to gain insight on each perspective of participants to understand if there was a need across all settings. Open-ended questions were created to gain an understanding of what is needed to improve the transition process from a variety of perspectives. Likert scale and open-ended questions were triangulated to gain an overall understanding of answers to guide researchers in finding and creating a product to support parents with the transition process.

From the research and data compiled from the survey, the researchers concluded that there is a need for a flexible transition program to be created to help support parents, teachers, and higher education employees to work together to help students with HFA be successful. When researchers looked at the data from open ended questions it was understood that there is a disconnect with high school and higher education institutions with support for students with HFA.

As researchers gained an understanding and made conclusions based on the data from the survey questions, it was determined that the creation of a flexible transition plan would be beneficial for parents, teachers, and higher education employees. The results from the survey determined what skills to focus on within the transition plans along with collaboration needed from all four groups. The research supported a need for this transition plan to help students be more successful within higher education.

Summary of Results

Researchers investigated the problem of students with HFA successfully transitioning into higher education. The research conducted was both qualitative and quantitative. Based on limited research in the transition of students with HFA, the purpose specifically looked at how to create a transition process for students with HFA preparing to transition from secondary school into higher education. Specifically, this study used survey methods to determine which skills college students with HFA describe as being important to their success in higher education settings, which of the identified skills were taught in secondary school, and which services college students with HFA describe as important when transitioning to higher education environments. The study participants focused on four groups: students, parents, high school employees, and higher education professionals. The four-part survey included sections on demographic information, participants' perception of skills that are helpful transitioning to post-secondary education, important services that assist in the successful transition to postsecondary education open-ended questions specifically geared toward each group of participants.

The survey was based on prior research conducted and aimed to gain insight into the gaps with the transition process for students with HFA. To find out what was needed to help these students transition, researchers had to analyze the data collected. Based on the data analysis researchers concluded the need for a flexible transition plan for students entering higher education.

After a two-month period, twenty-seven participants completed the survey that included both Likert scale and open-ended questions which allowed researchers to narrow down the needs of students with HFA and, it was determined a flexible transition plan for these students would be useful. This was a topic that was mentioned across all four groups of the survey.

Discussion of Results

Through previous literature, the researchers found that students with learning differences who were transitioning from high school to higher education face challenges (Sitlington, 2007). Researchers also discovered that even though there are federal requirements with transition planning this does not always take place within secondary education. Results from the survey also indicated a lack of transition supports that were specifically for students with HFA. Teachers reported that transition plans were written but also generic.

Data gathered from the survey gave insight into what was needed to help support parents of students with HFA transition into higher education. The overwhelming response from participants in all four groups recognized self-advocacy skills were lacking among students with HFA. There was also a common theme of the transition process now is lessening in supports and there are other ways to make this transition process easier. These students deserve to be prepared with the skills they will need to be successful within the walls of higher education and then transfer those skills into job applicable skills. The data that was collected from the researchers suggests that a flexible transition plan specifically for students with HFA would benefit those students. The literature also suggests transition planning does not always take place: only four in ten special education students have plans that meet federal timelines and contain measurable goals (Landmark, 2013). The 2015 study by Roux also found that only 40-58% of students with ASD receive transition planning services (Roux 2015).

Survey results showed an idea of allowing students with HFA to stay enrolled in high school longer but attending college-level classes would allow for these students to transition into higher education with more supports. Students with special education needs and Individual Education Plans can be serviced until they are 21 years old (IDEA 2004). If students with HFA continued being serviced until they were 21 years old this could give them up to three years of high school servicing while attending higher education. The survey results suggested that these supports be put in place to help teach and support students with HFA being able to navigate the changes in higher education. Through research, it was found that Gateway Community College has a program, Step Forward II & High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder Program, which supports students specifically with HFA transition into their community college (HFA Gateway 2012). This type of program is more prevalent in Community Colleges than other higher education institutions.

Suggestions from survey participants were analyzed to create a flexible transition plan for students with HFA. For the transition plan researchers focused on the following: student-driven, self-advocacy, direct/high expectations, decision-making, identified support, independent living skills, participants had suggestions of having more support from their teachers. These skills will also help assist with the disconnect of students not having the ability to disclose their disability. Sixty-three percent of students with special education services in high school did not believe they have a disability and did not disclose their disability to higher education institutions which play a part in the lack of skills shown on the researchers' survey (Newman, 2011).

Limitations

The results of this study are limited by several factors. This study potentially could have been skewed by the participants completing the survey not qualifying for the study due to the age limit. When analyzing data, it was understood that the majority of participants answered no to the age limit question 24% of survey participants. Then 29% answered no to working with students

that have transitioned to higher education. This was mostly high school teachers that answered no to this criterion. It could be a limitation as we were not able to gain as many participants based on criteria. Another limitation could be the way participants were gained. Even with one of the largest educational groups for exceptional children, there was still a lack of participants. This could be the time the survey was posted and it being summer and the start of the school year and not having enough time to complete the survey. The next limitation would be that participants joined our Facebook group but may not have followed through with taking the survey.

In addition, survey data are subject to the bias, memory, and interpretation of the participants. As result, this study is limited only to the perceptions of those who completed the survey at the given time. This may have caused data from the study to be affected. The small sample size is another factor limiting the generalizability of this study's findings, the sample size of the study was a total of 27 participants. Additionally, surveys were distributed during the summer, possibly the start of vacation for participants; this could have affected the participation rate. Therefore, the data is skewed and limited based on the number of participants in each group. Where students and parents were the smallest group of responses with four total. Most of the results came from high school professionals and could skew the results.

The final limitations to be considered are the answers given from the participants to the researchers. Participants may have answered how they think the researchers wanted them to answer. The amount of time the survey was open is also a limitation in the number of responses from participants. The study is also limited as there was not enough time to follow participants through their transition process and be able to report on if the created transition plan was helpful or successful for students and parents.

Implications for Future Transition Plans for HFA students

Secondary schools must ensure that college-bound students with HFA have the skills to be successful in higher education settings. Secondary school educators may find the present study's results valuable in addressing the needs of students with HFA as they transition to higher education.

Based on the results, researchers concluded that a flexible transition plan for students with HFA would be beneficial for students, parents, high school employees, and higher education employees. The results are consistent with previous research that has been completed. All students with HFA could benefit from these flexible transition plans as teachers could use them in the early years of junior high to prepare these students for future educational goals.

Researchers plan to incorporate a transition plan that is focused specifically on soft skills that require a team effort to implement. Students with HFA require a specific skill set to be successful within the higher education setting. If these students have the support in place their transition into higher education and the workforce will be more seamless.

Researchers understand that not all students are going to need these supports to be able to access higher education successfully. The hypothesis of the flexible transition plan will provide parents, teachers, and higher education professionals with a tool to help the transition process.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study adds to the current literature on addressing skills and services important to the success of students with HFA transitioning to higher education; however, there is a need for further investigation and perhaps, replication. An important area of research may include an in-depth examination of each of the identified skills and services and their relationships to the success of students with HFA transitioning into higher education. This, of course, would require a study that follows students from post-secondary education through their successful completion of a college degree.

Based on the limited findings, the researchers concluded that a flexible transition plan created specifically for students with HFA is a need along with additional research. Future research can be implemented to help determine if the created tool is effective for students, parents, teachers, and higher education professionals. The researchers agree that there may be a future need to update this transition plan to follow federal laws that may be passed in the future.

Researchers could also adapt this study to allow participants of a wider age range to gain more participant responses. Researchers could also adapt the study to follow participants and include a focus group to gain more information to expand on the open-ended questions. Researchers will continually stay updated on the Facebook page by asking those who participated in the study to try the created transition tool.

As this study is limited based on the number of participants it is recommended that the research is expanded to gain more participants. This study had a lack of insight from students and parents so gaining those participants should be accessed differently. Instead of building social media accounts, researchers would partner with a specific transition support organization to gain participants. It would also be recommended to change the age requirement as this was shown to be where most participants did not qualify.

Following the completion of this study research will be continued by conducting a focus group study specifically with HFA students enrolled in higher education. Due to the lack of participants within a survey, the continuation will be conducted at a specific college/university with a transition support program which will allow for researchers to gain further insight into what is working with their transition process. The researchers would then take that information and produce a program that would allow high schools and higher education colleges/universities to adapt a free of charge program for their students to work together with one another.

Discussion

This study investigated what skills and services students with HFA would and have found important to their successful transition in higher education settings and which of the identified skills were taught to them in secondary school. While the results of the study are limited, they suggest that self-determination, study skills, independent living skills, technology skills, and social communication skills are important to a successful transition into higher education environments for students with HFA.

The ability for students with disabilities to live a happy and successful life after the completion of secondary school is one of the primary goals of special education services (Test, 2014). The present study has identified areas that may help educators, students, and their families in developing effective transition plans for students with HFA transitioning into higher education. This study also identified several implications for future research related to transition for students with HFA. Given the growing number of students with HFA entering higher education, transition planning will continue to be an important topic to be addressed for these students and their families (Camarena, 2009).

Students with HFA, Parents, and educators have faced many challenges within the last two school years. These challenges have impacted the response to education and how students will continue to push through and be successful. Most often students with HFA do not struggle academically but in those soft skills. IEP teams should continue to focus on academics; however, a bigger focus should be on self-advocacy, self-management, communication skills, and other soft skills to help students with HFA transition into higher education if they so desire. Literature supports a person-centered approach to transition planning (Camarena, 2009).

Participant's data was collected, and the researchers were able to identify the need for a transition plan that incorporates soft skills. This transition plan was created to be in the best

interests of the students, their families, and the educators using them. More research should be continued to determine the effectiveness and implementation of the transition plan.

While transition requires the supportive involvement of a skilled team of professionals, it is ultimately the adolescent who must be at the core of this process. With support from their families, schools, and agencies, students with HFA can plan and prepare for higher education and independent living (Webb, 2014).

CHAPTER V: JOURNAL ARTICLES

“Sometimes you have to go outside your field of study to find the right people.”

-Dr. Temple Grandin

Journal Article 1: Literature Review

Autism to Higher Education: Tools for Parents

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a disorder that develops with pervasive disabilities, communication difficulties, and difficulty in social interaction. It is also characterized by stereotyped and eccentric behavior and habits that are not viewed as normal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). People affected by this disability encounter numerous difficulties when having public interactions. These individuals may also react in a deemed abnormal way and exhibit repetitive behavior patterns (Hendricks, 2009). These communication problems chase their victims into adulthood, and symptoms usually persist for the rest of their lives, negatively influencing their social life. The detrimental effects of ASD damage careers and education and deprive people of their social roles (Graetz et al., 2008). In high functioning autism and its subscales, a person generally does not show any sign of intellectual disability but has difficulty with social interactions and communication, difficulty in emotion recognition, complications in expressing thoughts, and bizarre social interactions.

Children with HFA lack social awareness and fail to manage challenging situations they face every day in schools and homes. These children are considered to have questionable behavioral tendencies making things problematic for them due to this misfortune (Attwood, 2005). This obstacle is worsened in the case of pupils experiencing cognitive impairments, making their way into higher education institutions from the school level. Various studies have discussed the hurdles in the way of these students and the issues in their transition (Mull, 2001). Although we appreciate the efforts put in by scholars and researchers to address the problem, still a lot to be

discovered to make the transition process for these students smooth, and things required to be done fulfil the academic needs of the students who have autism spectrum disorders (CAI, 2016). We can get to know about the widespread nature of the problem with the help of data that tells, in a normal education institution with 10,000 students under one roof, and experts believe that as many as 100 among them can be HFA suspects (Brown et al., 2016). We foresee an uptick in the number of students attending higher education because of high-class knowledge and services but for these students to continue their education from then onwards has only a thin possibility.

Special Education Law - Relating Transition

In the US, the Individuals of Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) protects disabled students from continuing their education and acquiring all necessary academic services from their institutions, offering education to the level of a post-secondary institution. Department of Education monitors the performance of post-secondary schools to make sure that they accommodate students with disabilities without any blatant discrimination against them. The students, in that case, once they reach the age of puberty, are supposed to reveal the nature of their disability themselves, along with the necessary documents to ascertain their disability (White, 2017).

Students must inform institutions about their disability to acquire legal assistance and the much-needed support to continue their academic journey. Thus, Students with Autism or any other disability, both in higher education and schools, receive special treatment and essential accommodations, such as flexible dates for the submission of assignments, extended test time, breaks during class, use of technology, clarity of commands, and the permission to work in a group (Zeedyk, 2016). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the law which was passed by the federal government, makes it optional for college students to maintain the privacy of their educational records. It doesn't directly allow parents to get access to their children's academic

records. FEPPRA sees it as students' mandate to decide what information he wants to disclose to their parents (US Department of Education). FEPPRA allows students affected by HFA, and are not over the age of 18, to keep their academic records secret with the assurance of no privacy breach from anywhere. Students who are diagnosed with ASD, which is also counter-checked by a professional to validate its credibility, are eligible to get recommendations, aids, disability services, and facilities, mentioned in two acts named as rehabilitation act, introduced in 1973 and act of Americans with disabilities.

Higher Education Disability Culture Difference & High School

Each student with any kind of disability was protected legally by the law that was formulated to defend the liberties of students with special needs. Their academic rights should not be violated if their family decides to enroll them in high school. IDEA works to ascertain the level of disability and their eligibility to acquire special education services. If health professionals declare any students eligible, IEP is developed to meet these compromised students' educational needs. IDEA was initially designed to assist students in completing high school education (Madaus, 2017).

Higher Education focuses on students' access compared to High School, which focuses on students' success. Higher Education leaves it to the students to disclose their disability, but High School, on the other hand, considers it as school's responsibility to determine students' disability and provide evaluation paperwork (Eckes, 2005). Higher Education advocates encourage students to talk about the detrimental effects of their disability affecting their academic progress. High School has an Individualized Education Plan that takes care of students' needs and the availability of disability services (Simon, 2011). High School entitles parents and guardians to get access to their student's academic records, but Higher Education only authorizes students to see their records, and for parents' participation to view the performance card, they need written consent.

Resources for Parents of Students with Autism

While students enjoy protecting their legal rights, their parents in Higher Education can no longer speak for them. Students are bound to disclose their disability to receive academic services through the Act on Disabilities. Students must also provide medical documentation supporting their claims of having any kind of disability (White, 2017). This challenge compels parents and the student's special education team to prepare early, so the process of transition into higher education should be smooth.

Parental Involvement - The Law

Serving students who fall into the category of disabled students is ensured by the Disabilities Act (Gartin et al., 2004). One nonnegotiable of the law is the mandate to work in tandem for transition planning. Transition services are those well-planned and a set of organized activities to help children with disabilities. It aims to support such children and meet their demands after knowing about their interests and preferences.

Theoretical Framework

The theory was introduced by Simon Baron-Cohen and is said to be one of the most researched theories of Autism. It is one of the superior abilities that makes us, and all social interactions are based on that. It believes that every individual with a theory of mind should be able to understand various mental conditions such as beliefs, emotions, and desires. He can then use this information in his attempt to know (Premack., 1978). This theory is vital to evaluate others' behavior and the ability to interpret others' thoughts. We as humans have the idea about our instincts and tendencies, such as think, belief but these constructs are not apparent. With the help of these states to predict others' behaviors as well as our inclinations. This theory is a key underlying mechanism that makes social interactions for humans possible. Without the existence of this

theory, it would be impossible to communicate, and we would have never known the specialty of us as humans

Discussion for Parents

Parents must be knowledgeable of the differences between special education services provided in K-12 and the postsecondary level. For students with ASD, transition planning is critical, and this planning must be more intensive than for other students with disabilities (Freedman, 2010). One important step in designing a transition plan for a student with a disability is for parents to review the high school accommodations that have been provided and to insist that the school create an environment that will help prepare the student for college (Madaus, 2005).

Parents involved in the transition to higher education experience aid students in successfully achieving those goals by guiding them through deciding, planning, and preparing them to be carrying out their college plans once they are enrolled in higher education. Parents also must realize that the path to transition and to a career may not always be as smooth as they would like for it to be (Broatch, nd). Most importantly students that are actively involved in their transition process are more successful transitioning to the college setting (Haxhiu, 2019).

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Journal Article 2: Higher Education Special Education Services Disconnect

Introduction

College students with HFA see a shift in their education from high school to higher education. Students with HFA are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). Students who are protected under IDEA receive special education services, supports, accommodations, and modifications as outlined in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Once these students reach transition age and are attending a higher education institution they are no longer protected under IDEA. These students are now protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990). ADA provides students with disabilities to have access to the same resources, facilities, and materials as other students without disabilities. With being provided with these services ADA does not provide the same supports that a student would have within their IEP to be successful. With the transition to higher education students are now required to ask for their accommodations. Students with ASD have reported challenges with being able to self-advocate for themselves and managing their emotions (Elias & White, 2018). Overall college students are expected to be responsible for themselves and have more independency along with having to advocate for themselves and balancing their educational studies.

It was found that transition plans for students with HFA were not effective (Emery & Jordan 2021). This study had a small sample size and should be duplicated to determine themes and reliability. This was due to several reasons including, not flexible for students with HFA, generic plan, no focus on skill deficits, and students not being given supports until they are 21 years old. Under IDEA students with disabilities may have services until the age of 21. What was found is that students with HFA were graduating high school their senior year without the school possibly looking at extending services and being creative in their supports. Teachers reported that allowing

students with HFA to be enrolled in college classes while also completing high school would be beneficial. Special education professionals suggested that these students extend their high school graduation date for one to two years to receive supports under IDEA until their 21st birthday. Students with disabilities that are of higher need such as down syndrome, ASD, and others continue to be provided services until the age of 21 however these services are not within the college setting.

Higher Education and High School Partnership

Leading up to higher education parents have an interictal part in the child's transition process and their education. For students with HFA parent involvement is necessary to help be successful. When a student enters higher education the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) takes affect where parents are no longer able to be as actively involved and are only allowed access to limited information. It is important for students with HFA to be able to advocate and be self-sufficient to be successful in this transition.

Witcher, 2020 found to have a gap between K-12 graduation and postsecondary enrollment where students enrolling were unaware that to be able to have access to accommodations, they must be requested beforehand. There was also a gap found in understanding that they must self-disclose their disability. Students thought that K-12 professionals would reach out to their higher education institution to discuss accommodations (Witcher 2020). A bridge or pathway to help bridge these two entities would be helpful for both the institution, retention, and the students as their success would result in graduation.

In a study technically not graduate from high school on time, but this would allow for dual enrollment and crossover of services. This type of program could be up until they are 21 or just during part of their four years of high school.

Higher education and high schools should work together with the transition process of all students with disabilities. Faculty in higher education are not knowledgeable when working with students with HFA. Faculty struggle to manage behaviors within the classroom and fail when assisting students with communication (Witcher 2020). There is a need to help bridge the disconnect with high schools and higher education. Making it a partnership to share insight into what works for students with HFA to make professors jobs easier. It has been reported that high schools do not prepare students with HFA for the change in implementation of accommodations once in higher education. The concerns are accommodations that were given in high school will not always be manageable once in higher education. Accommodations are cookie cutter once in higher education where they should be individualized for each individual student (Witcher 2020). If higher education institutions and high schools would partner up and work together to help this transition process, there would be more success in the end for the individual student and the school.

Transition Plans Lack of Implementation

The federal government provided \$342 million in private and federal funding towards autism research in 2015. Of those funds only 2% were used to research the transition process overtime (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). With limited funding towards this specific area there is still much uncertainty of what supports and services available for individuals with ASD. With this limit in funding there is not much known about what is helping these students be successful in high school and how to transition those same supports into the college environment without additional cost in programs.

As mentioned, students must disclose their diagnosis once in higher education, the disclosure of their diagnosis is critical for gaining access to services once enrolled in higher education (Gelbar 2014; Shattuck 2014). Of those students' who did disclose their diagnosis only 40% report receiving support services from their higher education institution (Roux 2015).

Transition planning is supposed to be a process that is based on student's individual needs, preferences, and interest which the team is made up of the student, school staff, parents, and outside agency representatives (IDEA 2004; Trach, 2012). Students however have gotten the short end of the stick when it comes to transition planning. Even though students are to be a part of this process it has been found to be a box that schools check off that it has been completed. Research has shown that transition plans have been inadequate and not individualized for each student's needs. Miller 2013's study found transition plans to be a template that included sections of student's needs, strengths interests, preferences, transition assessments, course of study, post-secondary education, employment, and independent living, postsecondary goals and transition services, related services, employment, living skills, and vocational programs. These templates were being used to help with the planning process but during this study it was found that many of the sections were left unfilled (Miller 2013). Miller recommends that high school teachers and administrators establish a better system for monitoring and accountability of regulations as it relates to the transition process. The areas of improvement are followed up to establish a curriculum alignment to the transition plan and improve collaboration during the transition progress between all parties including teachers, administrators, parents, and postsecondary mentors which includes input from the student (Miller 2013).

Transition plans have shown to be inadequate and not serving the student in the way they were intended. This is not just for students with HFA but students of all disabilities. The plans must look different for a student that is capable of attending higher education to a student that needs assistances with learning a specific job skill. In Miller's study of the 39 transition plans evaluated they all failed to meet the lowest standard of being considered moderately successful (Miller 2013).

Teachers have mandates to follow from federal, state, and district requirements. These requirements can weigh on teachers with balancing what is best practice and what is required of

them even more so when it comes to special education. With all these factors teachers continue to identify a lack of collaboration that then effects the effectiveness of a transition plan. Overall transition planning needs to be a priority as it has long term effects of students with disabilities.

Transition Planning

Transition plans are a requirement under IDEA for student in K-12 education. Once a student reaching the age of 16, they are required to have a transition plan as a part of their IEP.

Research suggests the sooner this process starts the more effective the planning has been.

Collaboration is key in creating a transition plan along with it should begin as early as possibly in a child's education and is best achieved by collaborating as a team (Trach, 2012). A part of a study by Emery and Jordan the results from their study showed a need for a flexible transition plan for specifically for students with High Functioning Autism (Emery & Jordan 2021). This study showed that students transition plans were not individualized and could be reworked to involve parents more throughout the process and have a focus on self-advocacy skills (Emery & Jordan 2021).

In IEP transition planning it involves adequate time for the IEP team to collaborate and come up with the best plan for that individual student. Research has shown that schools will start this planning process in high school and did not allow for the adequate time for parents or students to prepare for post-secondary education or the work force (Hirano, Shanley et al., 2018). Special education teachers are responsible for creating goals and determining supports that the student needs. This usually happens before the IEP meeting and there is little to no input from parents, students, or other IEP members (Trach, 2012). Involvement of the parents and students in this process is highly important and at times parents have reported the process being frustrating. At the time of the meeting, they may feel that the school is doing everything to support their child however the implementation of the plan can be limited. Through research it has been shown that for transition plans to work they need the following components: consistent collaboration from all

team members, transition knowledge by both the teacher and parent, parent input documented and implemented within the IEP document, transition plans individualized, and each member of the IEP team understanding their role (Osborn 2020).

Parents in Transition Process

Parents play an important role in the transition process and parents ultimately know the child the best and have seen what works and what does not. Osborn (2020) outlines how parents have been a part of advocating for their children and getting equal opportunities since before IDEA, ADA, and NCLB. Parent voices however are not found to be present in research (Osborn 2020). Parents and students are the ones that are ultimately paying the price at the end of their child's education.

In 2018 Rossetti conducted a study which was focusing on parents' active participation in the transition planning process. This study found three areas that impacted their students transition process. Self-determination can exist through parents' interpretation, parents need to be involved throughout the educational process, and direct service providers and functional collaboration are imperative in a positive transition planning experience (Rossetti 2018). Not only were these three areas important in the transition process but understanding that parents have reported feelings of frustration of the IEP meeting, but these frustrations came from being given paperwork that appeared to be completed without the input of the parents which created more feelings of being alienated (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Research has shown a need to continue collaboration with parents and listen to their input about their child.

Parents are important in this transition process and understanding the roadblocks are also important to find a solution to helping improve their child's successful outcomes later in life. These barriers to parent involvement in the transition process have been family barriers, school barriers and adult service barriers (Hirano, Rowe et al. 2018). The role of the parent with these barriers can

become complicated and hard to break down especially due to each family having a different dynamic. Schools can encourage active participation of parents and students with the transition process. Schools can also focus on teaching students to self-advocate in an environment with supports (high school) to transfer this skill to an environment with minimal supports (higher education) where this skill will be highly valued (Gibbons 2015). In Osborn 2020 it was found through focus groups parents confirmed that the following were important in their child's transition planning, Collaboration, Self-efficacy, and parent roles. If parents and schools all agree the same skills are needed to help support the student, then parents need to be a valued member of the process.

It is recommended that the following steps are being taken by the parents in their child's transition process especially when it relates to students with HFA. **Step 1** Parents are informed about what transition services are and gain a full understanding of their child's rights. **Step 2** Parents are involved in advocating for their child when IEP is implemented and are a valued member of the team. **Step 3** Parents identify the needs and wants of the student's future. **Step 4** Parents are integrated in helping provide support for their child. **Step 5** Parents are continuing to add input of the transition process not just during IEP meetings.

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Appendix A: Facebook Post and Email sent to participants to gain survey access

HIGH FUNCTIONING AUTISM TRANSITION SURVEY

Please find the attached survey and complete it if you meet one of the following requirements; parent of a child with HFA going into higher education, special education teacher/guidance counselor working with students with HFA, work in higher education disability services, or a student with HFA planning to attend or attending higher education



High Functioning Autism Survey -
<https://forms.gle/tem8W29VkWxcv9GU8>

Email to participants

Dear Invitee,

Our names are Amber Jordan and Shannon Emery. We are doctoral students at Lynn University in their Educational Leadership program. We are kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that we are conducting, High Functioning Autism Transitions to Higher Education. The intention is to gain information from students, parents, high school professionals, and higher education professionals to help produce a product that is of need to help students with High Functioning Autism transition into higher education successfully.

The study involves completing one survey based on your relation to the study. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The survey is completely anonymous and does not require you to provide your name or any other identifying information.

If you would like to participate in the study, please continue the survey related to your relation to the study and review the consent on the first section of the survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated and of great importance to assist students with High Functioning Autism transition at a higher successful rate than that of their peers.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Amber Jordan, Master of Education, Doctoral Student, Lynn University ajordan2@email.lynn.edu

Shannon Emery Master of Education, Doctoral Student, Lynn University
Skniseley@email.lynn.edu

Jennifer Lesh, Doctorate in Education Leadership, Lynn University Chair
jlesh@lynn.edu

[CLICK HERE FOR SURVEY](#)

Appendix B: Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study about students with High Functioning Autism transitioning into higher education. The researchers are inviting parents, school support personnel, college disability services and 17 and older students with High Functioning Autism who are currently or planning to transition into higher education. This form is part of the process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by researchers Amber Jordan and Shannon Emery, who are doctoral students at Lynn University.

The purpose of this study is to determine what tools are needed to help students with High Functioning Autism transition into higher education. If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to complete the needs assessment survey that relates to your relation to the student transitioning into Higher Education. This survey will include questions related to the following: demographics, experience with transition services, accommodations, and experience while attending or working with higher education institutions.

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The Benefits of this study include voice your opinions, concerns, and experiences related to the transition process of students with High Functioning Autism. The study aims to produce a product to help successfully transition students with High Functioning Autism. This study is completely voluntary and there will be no reimbursement or payment for time.

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. The research will not use your personal information for any purposes. The survey does not ask for any identifying information and with that the answers to the survey will be kept anonymous. Data will be kept secure by password

protection and data will only be kept for at least 5 years.

If you have questions now or at a later time, you may contact the researchers via email

ajordan2@email.lynn.edu or skniseley@email.lynn.edu. You may also contact Lynn Institutional Review Board Chair at jlesh@lynn.edu.

Questions may be answered before completion of the survey.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I understand the study well enough to decide about my involvement. By saying yes to the below question, I understand and agree to the terms described above. Please indicate your consent by answering yes to the question below.

Appendix C: Participant Criteria

Survey was created to automatically take each participant to the correct sections from Participant Criteria

LINK TO VIEW SURVEY- [Click Here to Link to Survey](#) To take survey - [Click Here](#)

I. Informed Consent

1. Based on the information about the study do you give consent to participate in this study?

Please review the requirements above.

- Yes
- No

If consent is not given the survey will end after this question and not continue to the remaining questions of the survey

II. Participant Study Groups

1. Which of the following describes you when it comes to High Functioning Autism. I am....
 - A student with High Functioning Autism
 - A Parent of a Student with High Functioning Autism
 - A Teacher/guidance counselor working with students with High Functioning Autism while in high school
 - An employee working in disability services at a college or university that has experience with students with High Functioning Autism.

III. Participant Student Criteria

1. Do you have a formal diagnosis of Autism, High Functioning Autism, or Asperger's?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you within the ages of 18 to 24?
 - Yes
 - No
3. Are you either enrolled or planning to enroll in higher education?
 - Yes
 - No

III. Parent Study Criteria

1. Do you have a child with a formal diagnosis of Autism, High Functioning Autism, or Asperger's?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Is your child within the ages of 17 to 24?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Is your child enrolled in or planning to enroll in higher education?
 - Yes
 - No

III. High School Employee Criteria

1. Do you work with students with a formal diagnosis of Autism, High Functioning Autism, or Asperger's?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Do you work with students within the ages of 17 to 24?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Have you helped either enroll a student with High Functioning Autism into higher education?
 - Yes
 - No

III. Higher Education Disability Services Employees

1. Have you worked with students with a formal diagnosis of Autism, High Functioning Autism, or Asperger's?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Do you work with students within the ages of 17 to 24?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Have the students you work with currently attending higher education or planning to attend higher education?
 - Yes
 - No

Appendix D: Student Survey

Survey was created to automatically take each participant to the correct survey from Participant Criteria (Appendix C)

I. Demographics Students

1. Did you have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) while attending High School?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Have you been diagnosed or received services in high school for any of the following (Check all that apply)
 - Autism (autistic disorder, autism spectrum disorders (ASD))
 - Asperger's Syndrome (AS)
 - High Functioning Autism (HFA)
 - Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
 - Other Health Impairment (OHI)
 - Speech or language Impairment (SI)
 - Emotional Disturbance (ED)
 - Deaf blindness
 - Deafness
 - Hearing Impairment (HI)
 - Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
 - Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
 - Intellectual Disability (ID)
 - Visual Impairment including blindness (VI)

3. Are you currently enrolled in higher education? Or in the process of enrolling into higher education?
 - Yes, currently enrolled in higher education
 - No, I am not enrolled and do not plan to enroll in higher education
 - Yes, I am planning to enroll in higher education after graduation from High School

4. Age _____

5. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Choose not to answer.

6. I am currently attending a
 - High School
 - Public university

- Private university
- Community college
- Other _____

7. Number of college semesters completed

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

8. Grade point average:

- A (3.6 +)
- B (2.51 - 3.5)
- C (1.51 - 2.5)
- D (0.6 - 1.5)
- F (0.0 - 0.6)
- Not sure or choose not to respond.

II. Important skills helpful in transitioning to postsecondary education

9. Your success in college may be improved if you have certain skills. Look at the list of skills below and indicate if you think these skills are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your success in college. A definition of each skill is provided for you.

SKILLS	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimportant	3 - neither important nor unimportant	4 - important	5 - very important
<p>Decision-making (participating in IEP/transition meetings, goals for future, high school courses related to future career, major courses of study)</p>					

<p>Self-awareness (understanding strengths and needs related to disability, knowing accommodations/services needed)</p>					
<p>Goal setting and goal-attainment (setting specific goals for the future, considering personal strengths and weaknesses when setting goals for future, developing an action plan to reach goals, following the action plan)</p>					
<p>Self-advocacy (communicating wants and needs to others, asking for accommodations related to disability, seeking help of others when needed)</p>					
<p>Self-management (keeping track of grades, credit hours, and GPA; monitoring my progress, organizing my time, using a planner)</p>					
<p>Study skills (note-taking, test-taking, reading and writing skills)</p>					
<p>Independent living skills (banking skills, paying bills, meal planning, budgeting, housekeeping, using private and public transportation)</p>					

<p>Social communication skills (ability to initiate and maintain conversations, build relationships, understanding and interpreting nonverbal cues, respecting other people’s views and space)</p>					
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III. Important services that assist in successful transition to postsecondary education

10. Your success in college may be improved if you have received some services while in school. Look at the list of services below and indicate if you think these services are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your success in college.

SERVICES	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimportant	3 - neither important nor unimportant	4 - important	5 - very important
Access to college level classes (dual credit classes, PreAP and AP level classes)					
Access to vocational classes					
Meeting with College representatives at high school					
College Campus Visits					
Meetings with a school counselor (regarding classes, college applications, filling out financial aid forms, college visits, etc.).					

Transition planning while in high school					
Attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings					
Counseling therapy session (for coping skills, stress management, problem solving)					
Speech and language therapy					
Occupational therapy					
Extra -curricular activities participation					
Peer Mentor					
Tutoring					

11. Which of the following services did you receive while in high school? (Check all that apply)

- college level classes
- vocational classes
- college representative meeting
- college campus visit
- transition plan through IEP
- career exploration
- counseling
- speech and language therapy
- social Skills
- occupational therapy
- extracurricular activities participation
- peer mentor
- tutoring

- resource study hall
- special education teacher
- Other

12. What transition services have you been a part of? Check all that apply

- Transition IEP planning
- Transition Program outside of school
- Attending dual credit classes while in high school
- Disability services at a college or university
- Job exploration counseling
- workplace training
- counseling
- other _____

IV. Open Ended Student Questions

13. What challenges have you faced as a student with Autism while attending school?

14. While in high school, what school personnel do you or did you feel most comfortable going to for support?

15. What helped you the most with transitioning from high school to college?

16. What advice would you have for younger students with ASD wanting to attend college?

Appendix E: Parent Survey

Survey was created to automatically take each participant to the correct survey from Participant Criteria (Appendix C)

I. Demographics Parents

1. Did your child have an IEP while attending High School?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Which of the following services or diagnosis pertains to your child while in high school (Check all that apply)
 - Autism (autistic disorder, autism spectrum disorders (ASD))
 - Asperger's Syndrome (AS)
 - High Functioning Autism (HFA)
 - Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
 - Other Health Impairment (OHI)
 - Speech or language Impairment (SI)
 - Emotional Disturbance (ED)
 - Deaf blindness
 - Deafness
 - Hearing Impairment (HI)
 - Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
 - Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
 - Intellectual Disability (ID)
 - Visual Impairment including blindness (VI)

3. Which statement describes your child the best.
 - Yes, currently enrolled in higher education
 - No, I am not enrolled and do not plan to enroll in higher education
 - Yes, I am planning to enroll in higher education after graduation from High School

4. Child's current Age _____

5. Your Child's Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Choose not to answer.

6. My child is currently attending
 - High School
 - Public university
 - Private university

- o Community college
- o other

7. How many college semesters have been completed successfully by your child?

- o 0
- o 1
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o 5
- o 6+

8. Child’s Current Grade Point Average

- o A (3.6 +)
- o B (2.51 - 3.5)
- o C (1.51 - 2.5)
- o D (0.6 - 1.5)
- o F (0.0 - 0.6)
- o Not sure or choose not to respond.

II. Important skills helpful in your child’s transition to postsecondary education

9. Your child’s success in college may be improved if they have certain skills. Look at the list of skills below and indicate if you think these skills are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your child’s success in college. A definition of each skill is provided for you.

SKILLS	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimportant	3 - neither important nor unimportant	4 - important	5 - very important
Decision-making (participating in IEP/transition meetings, goals for future, high school courses related to future career, major courses of study)					

<p>Self-awareness (understanding strengths and needs related to disability, knowing accommodations/services needed)</p>					
<p>Goal-setting and goal-attainment (setting specific goals for the future, considering personal strengths and weaknesses when setting goals for future, developing an action plan to reach goals, following the action plan)</p>					
<p>Self-advocacy (communicating wants and needs to others, asking for accommodations related to disability, seeking help of others when needed)</p>					
<p>Self-management (keeping track of grades, credit hours, and GPA; monitoring my progress, organizing my time, using a planner)</p>					
<p>Study skills (note-taking, test-taking, reading and writing skills)</p>					
<p>Independent living skills (banking skills, paying bills, meal planning, budgeting, housekeeping, using private and public transportation)</p>					

<p>Social communication skills (ability to initiate and maintain conversations, build relationships, understanding and interpreting nonverbal cues, respecting other people’s views and space)</p>					
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III. Important services that assist in successful transition to postsecondary education

10. Your child’s success in college may be improved if they have received some services while in school. Look at the list of services below and indicate if you think these services are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your child’s success in college.

SERVICES	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimportant	3 - neither important nor unimportant	4 - important	5 - very important
Access to college level classes (dual credit classes, PreAP and AP level classes)					
Access to vocational classes					
Meeting with College representatives at high school					
College Campus Visits					
Meetings with a school counselor (regarding classes, college applications, filling out financial aid forms, college visits, etc.).					

Transition planning while in high school					
Attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings					
Counseling therapy session (for coping skills, stress management, problem solving)					
Extra -curricular activities participation					
Peer Mentor					
Tutoring					

11. Which of the following services did your child receive while in high school?

- college level classes
- vocational classes
- college representative meeting
- college campus visit
- transition plan through IEP
- career exploration
- counseling
- speech and language therapy
- social Skills
- occupational therapy
- extracurricular activities participation
- peer mentor
- tutoring
- resource study hall
- special education teacher
- other

12. What accommodations did your child receive in high school?

- Extended time

- took tests in a smaller setting
- preferential seating
- visual schedule
- written expectations for assignments
- larger assignments broken up and scheduled time to complete each smaller task
- visual cues
- tests read aloud
- daily assistance with planner
- breaks when frustrated/upset
- fidgets while working
- flexible seating
- visual communication system
- behavior reward system
- computer to type out homework instead of handwritten
- graph paper to organize math work
- organizational supports
- copy of class notes given ahead of lecture
- other

13. What transition services have you or your child been a part of? Check all that apply

- Transition IEP planning
- Transitioning program outside of school
- attending dual credit classes while in high school
- Disability services at a college or University
- Job exploration counseling
- Workplace training
- counseling

VI. Parent Open ended questions

14. What challenges have you faced as a parent with a child with autism while helping them reach their academic goals and full potential?

15. While your child was attending high school, what school personnel do you or did you feel most comfortable going to for support for you and your child?

16. What helped you most with transitioning your child from high school to college?

17. What advice would you give parents that have a younger child with High Functioning Autism and the transition process?

18. Did the transition plan set by the IEP team help you work with your child to prepare them for higher education?

Appendix F: High School Employee Survey

Survey was created to automatically take each participant to the correct survey from Participant Criteria (Appendix C)

I. High School Employee Demographics

1. I am currently working as a high school...

- Teacher
- Special Education Professional
- Guidance Counselor
- Public University
- Principal
- Special education administrator
- Paraprofessional
- other

2. How many years have you worked in the education field?

II. High School Transition

3. How many students with high functioning autism have you transitioned into the college setting?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-8
- 9-12
- 13-20
- 20+

4. Of the students you have worked with how many with high functioning autism have graduated from college?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 10+
- I do not know
- other

III. Important skills helpful in transitioning to postsecondary education

5. Your success in college may be improved if you have certain skills. Look at the list of skills below and indicate if you think these skills are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your success in college. A definition of each skill is provided for you.

SKILLS	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimporta nt	3 - neither important nor unimporta nt	4 - important	5 - very important
Decision-making (participating in IEP/transition meetings, goals for future, high school courses related to future career, major courses of study)					
Self-awareness (understanding strengths and needs related to disability, knowing accommodations/services needed)					
Goal-setting and goal-attainment (setting specific goals for the future, considering personal strengths and weaknesses when setting goals for future, developing an action plan to reach goals, following the action plan)					
Self-advocacy (communicating wants and needs to others, asking for accommodations related to disability, seeking help of others when needed)					
Self-management (keeping track of grades, credit hours, and GPA; monitoring my progress, organizing my time, using a planner)					

<p>Study skills (note-taking, test-taking, reading and writing skills)</p>					
<p>Independent living skills (banking skills, paying bills, meal planning, budgeting, housekeeping, using private and public transportation)</p>					
<p>Social communication skills (ability to initiate and maintain conversations, build relationships, understanding and interpreting nonverbal cues, respecting other people’s views and space)</p>					

III. Transition IEP Services

6. How important are the IEP transition plans a priority at your school?

- Not important at all
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Important
- Very important

7. The transition plans that are set are they flexible to write for students with high functioning autism?

- Not important at all
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Important
- Very important

IV. High School Employee’s Open-Ended Questions

8. What skill deficits are students with High Functioning Autism at your school lacking when it comes to attending higher education?

9. Describe your school's transition plans for students with high functioning autism?

10. What would be an ideal way to transition students with high functioning autism into higher education?

Appendix G: Higher Education Employee Survey

Survey was created to automatically take each participant to the correct sections from Participant Criteria

I. Higher Education Employee's Demographics

1. I am currently employed at a
 - Public university
 - Private university
 - Community college
 - other _____

2. I am currently employed as a college
 - Guidance Counselor
 - Coordinator of Disability Services
 - Director of the Office of Disability Services
 - Academic Coach
 - Other

II. Important skills helpful in transitioning to postsecondary education

3. Your success in college may be improved if you have certain skills. Look at the list of skills below and indicate if you think these skills are not important at all, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, important, or very important to your success in college. A definition of each skill is provided for you.

SKILLS	1- not important at all	2 - somewhat unimportant	3 - neither important nor unimportant	4 - important	5 - very important
Decision-making (participating in IEP/transition meetings, goals for future, high school courses related to future career, major courses of study)					
Self-awareness (understanding strengths and needs related to disability, knowing accommodations/services needed)					

<p>Goal-setting and goal-attainment (setting specific goals for the future, considering personal strengths and weaknesses when setting goals for future, developing an action plan to reach goals, following the action plan)</p>					
<p>Self-advocacy (communicating wants and needs to others, asking for accommodations related to disability, seeking help of others when needed)</p>					
<p>Self-management (keeping track of grades, credit hours, and GPA; monitoring my progress, organizing my time, using a planner)</p>					
<p>Study skills (note-taking, test-taking, reading and writing skills)</p>					
<p>Independent living skills (banking skills, paying bills, meal planning, budgeting, housekeeping, using private and public transportation)</p>					
<p>Social communication skills (ability to initiate and maintain conversations, build relationships, understanding and interpreting nonverbal cues, respecting other people's views and space)</p>					

III. College Transition Services

4. What transition skills are worked on through your disability services office?

(Check all that apply)

- Decision-making
- self-awareness
- Goal setting
- Self-advocacy
- Self-management
- study skills
- independent living skills
- technology skills
- social communication skills
- academic tutoring
- other

IV. Higher Education Employee Open ended questions

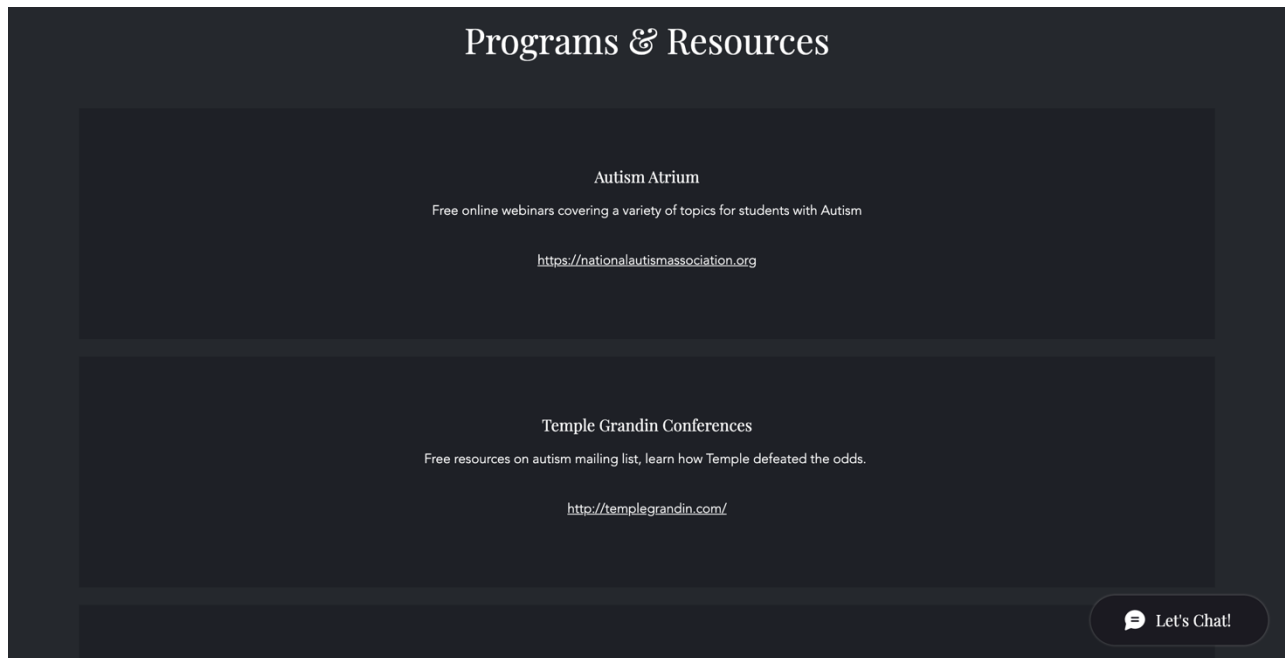
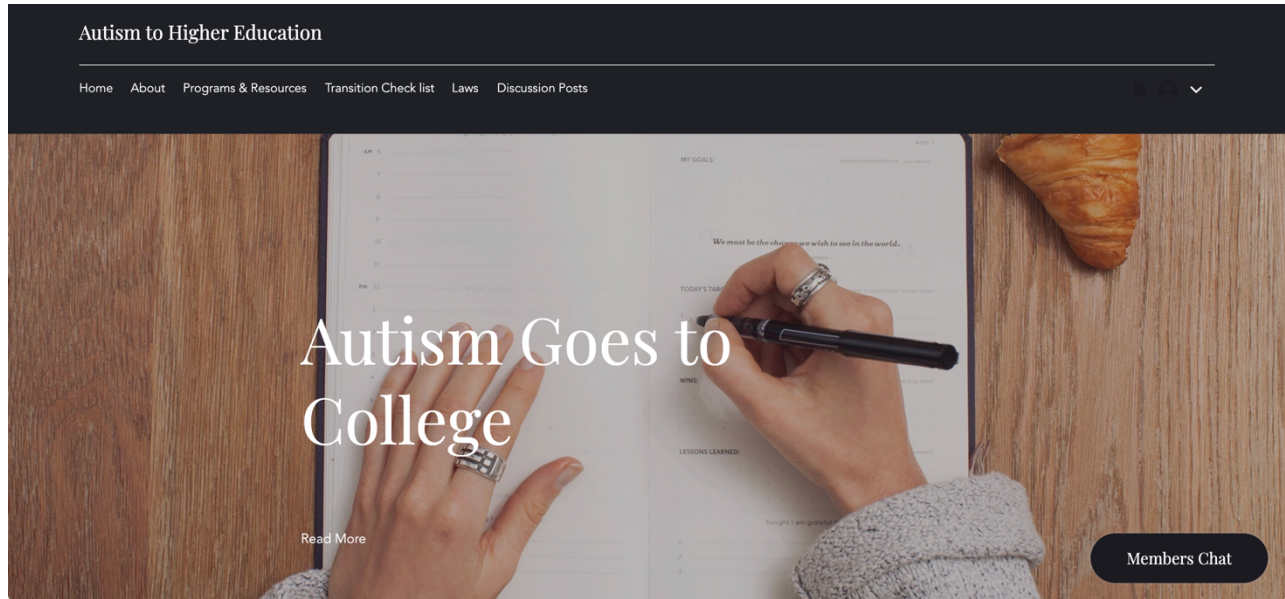
5. What transition services are offered to students with High Functioning Autism of no extra cost?

6. What are students with High Functioning Autism lacking when attending higher education?

7. Does your college or university work with high school to help transition students with disabilities? Explain

Appendix H: Parent Transition Resource

<https://amberljordan1990.wixsite.com/website>



Education Laws

Parents Rights and Services



Individual with Disabilities Education Act

Provides free and appropriate education for students with disabilities in the US. This law is what protects students from birth to age 21 to be provided while attending school. The link below gives a full overview of the law.

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>



Individualize Education Plan (IEP)

Legal document for students with disabilities that are attending PreK-12th Grade. This should include the following components; present levels of academic and functional performance, students strengths, IEP goals based on present levels, accommodations/modifications needed to access education, Transition plan once 14 and 1/2, Behavior intervention plan if needed, Functional behavior assessment, Assessments along with accommodations needed, type of services and type of placement (Should be least restrictive environment), and finally meeting notice and notes.

Let's Chat!

How It Got Started

Amber Jordan is a Special Education professional and Shannon Emery is a guidance counselor. These two partnered up to provide parents with a proper resource that would help students and families with High Functioning Autism make the transition into higher education a successful one.

Through this site, you will find a variety of options from resources, transition checklists, discussion posts, and transition plans to help support parents through this trying process.

Amber and Shannon have used their researcher from their dissertation to help assist the development of this site.



Let's Chat!