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**WHAT ARE PARENTS' OPINIONS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN'S  
TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO ADULTHOOD?**

By

Michelle Moore

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Language, Literacy, and Special Education Department

College of Graduate and Continuing Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts Special Education

At

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Thesis Chair: Joy Xin, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving husband Matt for his support and encouragement. Also to my mother for always listening and making me smile.*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Joy Xin for her guidance and mentorship throughout my graduate career, and to Emily Hughes for sweating the small stuff with me through this tedious process.

## **Abstract**

Michelle Moore

WHAT ARE PARENTS' OPINIONS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN'S  
TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO ADULTHOOD?

2001/12

Dr. Joy Xin, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this research was to determine if training affected parent attitudes towards the transition planning process. Twenty-one parent volunteers participated in this study. Parents answered survey questions about their attitudes before attending two training sessions. A second survey was then completed to determine if there was a significant difference in responses after training. A pre-post survey design was used where means were compared using ANOVA. The results showed a statistical significant difference in question 6 "I know that my child has a behavior plan" in favor of the training, and no significances between pre-post responses to other questions.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

Parental involvement in education is important for a child's academic success (Epstein, 1991). Parents are primary caregivers as well as advocates for their child. Their role continues when their child enters school. For example, parents are involved in their child's school activities from back to school night to parent-teacher conferences, from volunteering within the school to helping their child complete homework. It is found that children perform better academically (Christienson & Sheridan, 2001) and socially (Webster-Stratton, Reid & Hammond, 2001), when their parents are involved in schooling. Students with involved parents have better attendance rates and higher expectations (Caplan, Hall, Lubin & Fleming, 1997).

Parents have a strong influence on their child's education, however, some parents are absent from their child's school activities with different excuses, and ignore the school invitations for meetings. It seems that they are not willing to be involved in their child's schooling. Boss, Harrell, Leskey and Vaughn (1998) found that parents feel alienated because education professionals dominated the decision making process. They are not familiar with the procedures and terminology associated with school services. They

are confused and intimidated, and feel that the process is traumatic and complicated (Stoner, 2005). In addition, after years of their relationship with school and their child's school experience, they are not confident with school's education planning. This is a serious concern for the parents of a child with disabilities. According to the law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), parents of children with disabilities are entitled to access their children's school records and participate in the planning process and decision making. Schools are required to provide "related services" that are educationally necessary. These include speech pathology, audiology, psychological therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, recreational therapy, social work and transportation. In order to provide appropriate services to meet the individual child's needs, parents should be involved in the decision making in their child's educational planning. This includes IEP meeting attendance, obtaining resources, and discussing with the child study team and school personnel.

In addition, when a child reaches the age of 16, a transition plan is required and parents must prepare for their child's transition from school to adulthood. The term 'transition services' means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—"(A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary

education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing an adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation" (IDEA, 2004). In the transition plan, parental support is required and specific actions must be listed. Parents are invited to the transition planning meeting to discuss issues related to their child's transition with school personnel. Each plan includes 5 components beginning with a transition assessment where student data, needs and interests are evaluated as they relate to future goals (Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Formal assessments such as career aptitude and interest assessments may be used. This assessment leads to the next component which is to determine the child's present level of both academic and functional performance. Then, post-secondary goals are determined. These include education training, independent living and employment. The next component is to determine which transition services the child will need. The child study team will discuss related services, instruction, community experiences, adult living, and employment objectives. Subsequently, IEP goals are developed to support the child's academics, employment and

independent living (Fowler, Kelley, Kohler, Korterling, Mazzotti & Rowe, 2009). Parents play an important role in this transition process including their guidance and support based on the child's needs in the plan following high school graduation. It is found that students with disabilities face challenges to be successful in their transition from school to adulthood, especially because the employment rate for young adults with disabilities is substantially below that of youth in the general population (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). It has also been found that parent involvement declines when their child grows up to become an adolescent and is even lower for students who are at risk of underperformance (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

If parent involvement has such an impact on the success of a child's transition from school into adulthood, why wouldn't parents become more actively involved? According to Stoner (2005), many parents felt that meetings with special education professionals regarding education planning were traumatic, confusing and complicated. This could largely be due to the special education process that professionals understand, but might confuse and intimidate parents. Some parents might feel that they are not qualified to make important education decisions about their child, and others feel that it is the school's responsibility and they are too busy with their family's daily life. This, in turn, would make parents less willing to participate in their child's transition planning (Lytle and Bordin, 2001).

One strategy that for improving parent involvement is called, “parent training” (Gross, 2003). This means that parents are invited into a classroom setting where the information is provided and strategies are taught based on their needs (Stephens & Wolf, 1990). Usually, parent training has four components (a) assessing parenting problems, (b) teaching parents new skills, (c) guiding parents to apply new skills with their child, and (d) providing feedback to parents about their application (Barth, 2005). Parent training has been found to be effective to increase parent involvement in their child’s education, especially effective to involve those who have children with disabilities. They attend their child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and ask questions, discussing the child’s needs with the teachers (Bruder, Fleming, Park & Whitbred, 2007). Parent training provides the information and resources that will help parents to advocate for their child (Stephens & Wolf, 1990). Thus, they have positive attitudes towards school, with high expectations of their child’s schooling (Colling, Fishbaugh & Hermanson, 2003). These high expectations encourage their child’s effort in academic performance that lead to future success and achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Parent training is an essential part of their child’s successful transition.

## Importance of the Study

All children will eventually have transition from school to adulthood and it is imperative that parents understand this transition and the importance of transition planning. In order for this to happen, they must be involved in their child's transition process, understand the process, and have a role in providing support to their child. It is believed that their active involvement will greatly affect their child's success in transition. Parents that are more involved in the special education planning process, have children with higher academic achievement (Henderson & Map, 2002), improved attendance and higher aspirations for post-secondary education (Capli, Hall, Lubin & Flemming, 1997). It is also found that parent training has increased parent involvement in education (Gross, 2003). Parent training is considered to be an essential part to support this successful transition (National Research Council, 2001). Many different parent training programs have been provided to involve parents in their child's special education services and planning. Bruder, Fleming, Park & Whitbred (2007) found that 89% of the parents that participated in parent training used the obtained information to advocate for their child. However, little research was conducted on the parent training for student's transition process, especially the transition planning from school to adulthood. This study attempts to add to the evidence that parent training can be an effective strategy to

enhance parent involvement, especially in transition process of students with disabilities who are moving out of the school system into adulthood.

### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine if parent training would change parent's attitude toward their child's transition planning. The specific questions include:

1. What are the parent attitudes towards the transition process?
2. After participating in transition training, will parents change their attitudes towards the transition process?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

As IDEA (2004) mandated, parents of children with disabilities have the right to have access to their child's school records and to involve in decision making of their child's placement, assessment, special education services, and evaluation of these services. They also have the right to be notified within a reasonable time before there is any change in the identification, placement, or evaluation of their child. This means that parents are aware of changes and allowed to review and advocate for their child. Parents also have the right to disagree with school decisions and take the advantage of the due process procedures that are in place, including mediation and the right to appeal determinations. Parents may also request an independent evaluation of their child. They have the right to deny or consent to actions taken with respect to their child, and to inspect or review the child's education records. Finally, parents have the right to participate in the planning meetings for their child's identification, evaluation, placement, and transition (IDEA, 2004). This chapter reviews the related research about parent involvement in the education of



students with disabilities and transition planning. It focuses on parent training and its effects on the student transition process.

### Importance of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has an effect on the child. It has been found that parent involvement improves “social capital” (Lareau, 1996). This means that by being involved in school activities, parents increase their own skills and obtain information to support their child either to help with homework or give feedback on school services. This also means that parents are able to build relationships with the school personnel and other parents to better understand school expectations for their child’s academic performance and social behaviors. Baker and Stevenson (1986) found that when parents are involved, they are better able to “develop complex strategies for working with school to promote achievement” (p.157). When parents are involved they are better able to work together with the school personnel and reinforce school expectations at home (McNeal, 1999).

Schools often provide back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences and volunteer options for parents to be involved in school activities. In addition using various mediums such as emails, notebooks, parents can discuss the child's progress with the teacher periodically. According to Epstein and Dauber (1991), 6 types of parent involvement are identified:

**Type 1-** Involvement in basic obligations at home, for example: providing supervision, clean clothes and school supplies.

**Type 2-** School to home communications: for example emails, phone calls, letters or progress reports

**Type 3-** Volunteering: chaperoning field trips or working as a classroom aide

**Type 4-** Assisting in learning activities at home: helping students with homework

**Type 5-** Decision Making: parents as leaders in decisions for the education of the child

**Type 6:** Collaborating with the community: identify and integrate resources from the community to strengthen school programs.

Research on the effects of parent involvement shows positive results in children's academic performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A study of 10,000 high school students who had involved parents, performed better in school. This result was regardless of the parents' gender, education or ethnicity. In Bogenschneider's study (1997), a questionnaire was provided to students who were in 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade of nine schools in California and Wisconsin during 1987

and 1988, covering 80% of the student population with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The students were asked to respond to questions regarding parental involvement such as parent's attendance in school activities, help with their homework and monitoring school progress. A rating scale of never (1), seldom (2) or usually (3) was used. Student responses were compared to their academic scores. The results showed that students with more involved parents had overall higher grade point averages (Bogenschneider, 1997).

Another study conducted by Gottfriedson and Hussong (2011) measured the effect of parent involvement in dangerous behaviors including alcohol and drug use in school. The study traced 365 students from seven middle schools. The students were asked to complete a school based survey in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade and again in their first year of high school. Another survey was also provided regarding their parents. Students answered questions on a scale of "not at all" to "very" that were related to their opinions including stress level and sadness. They were then asked questions about parental support, family background and the child's alcohol use. The results showed that students, who reported less parent involvement in their schooling, had a higher risk of self medicating behaviors including alcohol and drug use. It seems obvious that parent involvement shows positive support to their child's academic performance and social growth.

Some parents, however, do not play a meaningful role in their child's education (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). There are many reasons why this may happen. First, parents and professionals often have trouble coordinating schedules because most parents are working when the planning meeting for the child takes place during the day. Second, parents might also feel unequal when working in a team with school professionals that are trained in the field of education, because they are not familiar with the school policies, program or the current legislations (Mostert, 1996). This is always a concern in the field of special education. Parents of a child with disabilities are required to attend meetings, sign forms, and discuss issues in assessments, placement, and evaluation of the child's education. They feel that school professionals are making decisions about their child without really "knowing" the child in the manner that they do. As a matter of fact, they lack of knowledge of the special education system. These opinions are reflected in Billingsley and Lake's study (2000) when 22 parents participated in a phone interview. For example, one parent said:

"I think there probably should be far more parent education when the kids are initially brought into the system. You're sort of left out there hanging. It's all new to you, and unless you are able to hit on the right

people to help you out, you're just lost. Just lost. You have no clue where to go; you don't know what they need (p.245).

Similar results were found in Applequist's study (2009) when 32 parents of children with disabilities shared their opinions. It is found that most parents felt isolated and incompetent despite the desire to learn more information about their child's needs. The parents wanted information that was "accurate and thorough". Most of them stated that they would like to advocate for their child but did not know what choices they had. The serious concern of parents of children with disabilities is that they are not familiar with the language used in school. For example, a mother of an 8 year old child with a disability described her experience in attending her child's IEP meeting:

*Child study personnel: "Do you want OT services for your son?"*

*Mother: "What? Are you going to get him a job?" I had no clue.*

This was vocabulary that was uniquely different that I didn't have a clue what people were talking about. At the time I had a master's degree, I spoke three foreign languages, and I still didn't understand them" (p.10).

Thus, many parents were unhappy about lacking the education necessary to advocate for their child and the important decisions that needed to be made for their child's education. When the parents and school professionals are able to

understand each other, meetings can be productive in planning the most appropriate education for each child with disabilities. Transition planning is discussed at these meetings.

### Transition from School to Adulthood

Transitioning refers to a change from one environment to another. It can be a difficult process for a student with a disability because it requires time, planning, and adjustments in his/ her life. For high school students, this transition often means to students' readiness for their adult lives (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). According to IDEA (1997), the transition services are to be planned on the basis of the child's needs, preferences, and interests (20 U.S.C. § 1401 (30) (B)), and may include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment or post school adult living objectives, acquisition of daily living skills, or functional vocational evaluation (20 U.S.C. § 1401 (20) (C)). Transition services are to be specified in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), and his/her needs should be addressed by identifying courses of study by the time the child reaches the age of 14 years old and by developing interagency responsibilities or linkages by the time the child reaches 16 (20 U.S.C.

§ 1414 (d) (A)(vii) (Etscheidt, 2006). IDEA also mandates that a transition plan in the services that students with disabilities are entitled to receive. Since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the wording of the definition of transition process has changed from “outcome-oriented process” to “result-oriented” process (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (c) (5) (B) (ii)). This means that the focus on student’s transition results have been emphasized to improve the transition services for children with disabilities from school to adulthood (Johnson, Stodden, Emmanuel, Luecking & Mack, 2002). According to IDEA, transition plans are individual and are based on each child’s ability, interests, and needs. Students and parents are required to participate in the transition process to share information and opinions. They are allowed to ask questions and request services. Parents and the student also have the right to disagree with a decision and utilize due process if necessary (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Recent court cases have shown the importance of following the law to ensure the rights of a child with disabilities in transition services.

One such case was in Fractional Township High School district #128 (2002). In this case, a student with disabilities had two job experiences before being laid off; he then decided to apply to a technical school but he failed the entrance exam. The technical school was unaware of his disability and no accommodations were provided for the exam. The hearing officer decided that

the school district failed to evaluate the student to determine transition support or services necessary to enroll him in a technical school which had consistently been identified as the student's post-school option. The ruling was for the student to have a 36-week compensatory tutorial program (Etscheidt, 2006).

In addition to the school's responsibility, transition services should involve different agencies. In New Jersey, these include the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), Division of Disability Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), NJ Transit Access Link, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Division of Youth and Family Services, Community Mental Health Agency, Center for Independent Living, Office of Recreation, Social Security Administration, and the Office for Civil Rights. These agencies will provide services after graduation for job training, community living, transportation and therapy (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2010). The agencies play an important role to support the individual student job searching and community living. Their representatives are invited to attend the school's transition planning meeting to provide resources to parents.



## Parent Involvement in Transition

New responsibilities are placed onto parents during their child's transition process. These include attending meetings, obtaining resources and following through the transition plan to receive appropriate services of their child (Ankeny, Spain & Wilkins, 2009). This process can be a challenge to parents and a stressful time for their decision making.

Ankeny, Spain and Wilkins (2009) interviewed four mothers who experienced the transition planning process of their children with disabilities. All parents thought the process was difficult to balance all of their responsibilities, for example making telephone calls or writing emails to teachers, setting up and coordinating appointments with agencies, completing applications and evaluations, participating in team meetings and providing documentation to insurance companies to obtain services that schools do not provide. Even though this was an extremely stressful time, however, all of the participating parents said that it was worth to their child to reach the goal of being independent, successful and happy. They had very positive experiences in their child's transition process and indicated that this was due to the constant

communication with the teachers and other school personnel. It seems that communication between parents and school professionals on a consistent basis is a key to make a successful transition.

This above study is not the typical experience of a parent facing the transition planning of their child with disabilities. Blue, Banning, Summers, Franklin, Nelson and Beegle (2004), found that while professionals are aware of the importance of educating parents on the complexities of the transition process, there is a gap in the application of that knowledge. In 2001, a study on parents' opinions on the transition planning process found similar results. Defur, Getzel and Todd-Allen, sampled a population of parents from across Virginia, who had recently completed a transition planning meeting. They recruited 28 parents to participate in focus groups consisting of six to eight participants. The focus groups each met once and were asked to discuss three topics on the transition planning process for their child. First they were asked to discuss the hopes and dreams for their child as a young adult. Then they were asked their experience in working with the school to reach their child's transition goals including connecting with outside resources. Finally they discussed what critical areas professionals should be aware of during transition planning process. All of the discussions were recorded and transcribed to analyze for recurrent themes. The results showed that there were many persistent concerns. Overall, parents felt

that there were “barriers” against parent participation in transition planning. One parent stated that “schools make parents feel that they don’t know anything” (p.26). Parents also felt that the school was more concerned with their own agenda and ignored parent’s concerns. They suggested that schools need better communication and requested more guidance from schools to combat their feelings of isolation. Parents also asked for the school to collaborate with them to contact and include services that would benefit their child’s transition planning process. It seems from looking at the consistent responses to the discussion questions in this study that parents are eager to participate in their child’s transition but need more education, communication and respect from schools (Defur, Getzel & Todd, 2001).

### Parent Training

One strategy that can be used to increase parent involvement is called parent training. Wright’s Law (Wright & Wright, 2007) defines parent training as:

- “(i) assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child;
- (ii) Providing parents with information about child development; and
- (iii) Helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child’s IEP (p.100).”

This means that parents could receive training about their child disability, developmental growth and assistance needed in skill learning to reach educational, social or physical goals. Such training could help parents be aware of their child’s schooling and be involved in school activities. Goeffroy and Pinkser (1981) compared two types of parent training to involve parents to decrease their child’s behavior problems. A total of 40 parents participated in the study. They were divided into three groups. Group 1 received training on behavior modification, Group 2 was for effective parenting strategies, and Group 3 was serving as the control group without any training. The training was provided once a week for 2 to 3 hours for eight weeks for both group 1 and 2. The control group met only once at the end of the eighth week. There were six measures used to assess the training outcomes including three parent report measures, two cognitive scales and home observation data. The parent report measures included: Problem Checklist, where the parents underline the words that describe their child; The Family Environment scale, where the parents answer 90 true-false questions. In addition, the Tennessee Self-concept scale was

used for the parents to choose from five options from 'completely true to 'completely false'; a Behavior Modification Cognitive Scale to assess the knowledge and application of behavior modification techniques, and finally, Parent Effectiveness Training Cognitive Scale was also used to assess the knowledge and application of parents after training. A total of five observations were completed in home environments for a total of five observations. The results showed that the group that received behavior modification training had significantly reduced their child's deviant behaviors and increased the parent's perceptions of problem behaviors. The group learned parenting strategies, effectively increased positive parental consequences, family cohesion and decreased family conflict. Both groups showed a significant increase in the knowledge of the techniques that were involved in each of the respective trainings. The control group in comparison did not show any significant change in any of the above areas. It appears that this training was effective to provide parent skills and resources in order to support their child to reduce behavior problems.

The effect of parent training was also examined in Draper, Larson and Rowles' study (1997). In their study, 53 children, 31 boys and 22 girls, together with their parents participated. The families were randomly assigned to two groups: a treatment group or a control group. The control group received no

intervention. The treatment group participated in a training course once a week, for about 50 minutes each for three months. During the training parents were taught:

1. To frame their child's interests and abilities within the context of likely developmental possibilities
2. To select a task each week that they could share with their children
3. To work with the child in supporting, nurturing and affirming ways to complete the task.

The measures included selected items from the Georgia Family Q-Sort (Wampler, Moore, Watson & Halverson, 1989) which is based on observations of video-taped sessions of children and parents interaction. Each family was videotaped and tested separately. During the taped sessions, the parent was to instruct the child to complete a specified task (i.e. building blocks). The observer rated the interaction on subscales including: positive effect, conflict, communication, organization, appropriate expectations, and supportive leadership, based on operationalized definitions developed by the test's author. Each tape was observed by two observers who were previously trained to use the Georgia Family Q-Sort. The results showed that parents who participated in the parent training program were more likely to take a supportive leadership

role and have age-appropriate expectations during a puzzle solving task than the non-participating parents. The children of the parents that received training showed better social skills and better gross motor skills. Lower family conflict was also observed in families when parents received the training.

The effect of parent training was further evaluated by other studies including a longitudinal study from 2002 to 2005, where a university in Connecticut partnered with 10 parent advocacy agencies. This training did not only involve parents but also school professionals to enhance parent-professional collaboration in planning and implementing educational programs for students with disabilities. The training course included 3 modules: laws and regulations in special education, IEP planning, and family-school partnerships. The training presentation targeted the needs of the communities including Spanish sessions for Spanish-speaking parents. Over the four years, training was provided to 1,328 parents and evaluated with a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the training sessions. The questionnaire contained 17 statements where the participants marked their level of agreement on a 5 point scale with four open-ended questions. The results showed that 93% of the respondents were satisfied with the training sessions, and 89% believed that they gained applicable knowledge and skills. The open-ended responses showed that parents felt that the training sessions helped them to “advocate more effectively for their child”

and “help others through the IEP process (Bruder, Fleming, Park & Whitbread, 2007, p.11).”

### Summary

In the field of education there is a substantial amount of research related to the importance of parent involvement in the education of the child. Parent involvement increases the parent’s ability to understand school and social needs as well as reinforce positive behaviors in the home (McNeal, 1999). Parent involvement has also been found to increase positive outcomes in the forms of their child’s higher grade point averages (Bogenschnieder, 1997) and lowering the risks of engaging in dangerous behaviors (Gottfriedson & Hussong, 2011).

When focusing on special education, however, many studies show that there is a lack of parental involvement. It seems that parents feel frustrated, confused, and intimidated (Billingsley & Lake, 2000) during the many important planning meetings that help to develop individualized plans for their child. These planning meetings will occur throughout the education of the child. The transition plan, for example, is the plan that is developed to move a child from school into adulthood. Parents are required to participate in this planning and to advocate for their child in the transition process (IDEA, 2004).



Most research in the area of parent experiences with transition planning shows that parents feel overwhelmed and uninformed by the process and found that balancing all of their responsibilities proved difficult (Ankey, Spain & Wilkins, 2009). Parents also felt alone and uneducated by professionals (Blue, Banning, Summers, Franklin, Nelson and Beagle, 2004). There was only one study where the parents has a positive transition planning experience and it was as a result of the communication and education from the teachers of the child (Ankey, Spain and Wilkins, 2009).

Educating parents provides them with the tools to advocate for their child. One example of this is parent training. Research in parent training has shown that it can be an effective strategy to increase parent involvement (Geoffrey & Pinkser, 1981). It has also been shown to increase parent confidence and comfort level in the field of special education (Bruder, Fleming, Park & Whitbread, 2007). While there are many studies showing the positive results of parent training, there is lack of research targeting its effect on parent involvement in transition planning. There is a need for parents to receive the information necessary to make important decisions for their child. This study aims to provide parents with the training for the transition of their child into adulthood.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Method**

This chapter discusses the participants of the study, settings, procedure, research design, materials and measurement.

#### Participants

Twenty-one parents/guardians participated in this study. All of them have children that attend an alternative school for with disabilities, especially being classified with emotional or behavioral disabilities as well as learning disabilities. The participants reside in surrounding school districts in low income areas. Most have no more than a high school education. Table 1 presents greater detail.

**Table 1: Participant Information**

<b>Relationship to student</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Grade of child</b>
8 Mothers	6 High school diploma 1 Some high school 1 Some college	1 :Grade 7 1 :Grade 9 4 :Grade 10 2 :Grade 11
7 Grandmothers	1 Some High School 4 High school Diploma 2 Some College	2 :Grade 7 2: Grade 8 3: Grade 9
4 Fathers	2 High School Diploma 1 Some College 1 Bachelors Degree	3: Grade 8 2: Grade 10
1 Grandfather	1 High School Diploma	1: Grade 11
1 Foster parent	Some college	1: Grade 10

Setting

The setting for the training session was a classroom in the school that the parent/guardians' child attends. Chairs and desks were positioned in a "U" shape around a Smart Board. There was also a crescent shaped table in the back of the room with 8 chairs. A smart board was located in the front of the room where the trainer was

standing. All seats had full view of both the trainer and the Smart Board. Both training sessions lasted one hour in length and concluded with a question and answer session

### Research design

A pre-post research design was used design was used in this study. The participants were given a survey to complete before training took place. This was followed by two one-hour training sessions for the participants. They were then given the same survey as a follow up to measure if their opinions had changed.

### Materials

#### Survey Materials

The surveys included two sections, first, demographic information about the participants with 4 fill in the blank questions and 2 multiple choices. The second section included a 10 question rating scale where parents were instructed to circle answers ranging from; strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree in a four-point scale is used where 4 represents strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree . These questions were developed based on statements about attending

planning meetings, knowledge of special education, and attitudes toward special education (see Appendix A).

### Training Materials

A training packet was developed by the trainer to include the PowerPoint presentation printed as a handout with room for them to take notes (see Appendix B). It also included a glossary of commonly used terminology in transition planning meetings (see Appendix B) as well as a list of resources that the participants could contact for assistance with the transitioning of their child into adulthood. These resources included government and private agencies as well as contacts within the school district (See Appendix B). Pens and extra paper were provided to take notes if needed.

### Procedures

The participation in this study was voluntary which included completing an opinion survey, attending two training sessions, and completing a follow up opinion survey.

### Survey procedures

The first survey introduced the topic of the study, the importance of the research as well as assurance of anonymity. The recruitment procedure was to distribute surveys to all students in the secondary program before dismissal (see Appendix A). The secondary

students consist of grades 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. The students then returned the surveys to school as they were completed and handed them to the secretary upon signing into school. The surveys were then returned to the researcher with a list of parents/guardians who responded without knowledge of which parent/guardian coincided with each survey. Participation was based on willing responses of parents/guardians.

As the students brought the surveys back to school, the secretary marked the student's name on a checklist and placed the survey into a folder. After a week, the researcher collected the folder and counted 26 respondents. The researcher then called the 26 parents and invited them to a free training for transition planning that would be scheduled Wednesday from 6:00pm to 7:00 pm and another training the Wednesday of the following week from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Parents were asked if they had any questions before the conversation ended.

### Training Procedures

The first training began promptly at 6:00pm with 2 parents coming in late at 6:15pm. A total of 23 parents attended the first training. The parents were greeted and told the objectives of the training. The instructor handed out the packets which included Power Point notes pages, a glossary and a resources list. Parents then took seats and listened as the instructor, a special education teacher, went through a PowerPoint

presentation. After the presentation concluded (about 45 minutes), the instructor drew attention to the resources list. Then the instructor answered participants' questions.

The second training took place on the following Wednesday, where 21 parents attended and were all present by 5:58pm. The format followed the same as week 1 with different objectives and topics (see Table 2). After the presentation concluded, the instructor answered participants' questions. During week 2, the parents asked 8 questions and the session did not conclude until 7:20pm. The parents were handed the survey to take home to complete. Their child brought the completed survey back to school and handed it to the secretary. The secretary then handed over the 21 surveys to the researcher to ensure anonymity.

**Table 2: Training Procedures**

Week 1	Week 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction- brief history of the law related to transition planning</li> <li>• Definition of transition planning</li> <li>• Timeline of transition planning- from beginning of plan to when services will begin</li> <li>• Definition of “statement of needed transition services” -instruction, related services, community experience, employment, daily living skills, functional vocational evaluation</li> <li>• The role of the student and the parent in transition planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review main points from week 1</li> <li>• Areas involved in planning- postsecondary education, career exploration, functional academics, self determination, independent living skills, adult services connections, other issues</li> <li>• Role of outside agencies-DDD, DVRS</li> <li>• Guardianship-when to begin application and how.</li> <li>• Graduation-eligibility, commencement, and diploma</li> <li>• Considerations for college-rights, waivers, and disabilities</li> <li>• Strategies for transition planning- ideas for: students and parents/guardians</li> <li>• Resources: in-district contacts, state agencies, college accommodations</li> </ul>

Data Analysis

Responses on the pre and post training survey are statistically analyzed to present mean, percentile and standard deviation. A table will be presented to



demonstrate if the training has affected the opinion of the participants about transition planning.

## Chapter 4

### Results

**Table 3:** *Mean, Standard Deviation, & Percentages of Participants' Responses to Survey Questions Pre-test*

Questions/factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)
<b>Basic</b>				
I understand the special education process	1.56	.87	91%	9%
I feel that I am included in the decision process regarding my child's education	1.52	.87	52%	48%
I usually attend my child's IEP meetings	2.57	.59	48%	52%
I understand the information that is given to me when I attend meetings	1.95	.50	91%	9%
<b>Transition</b>				
I know what my child wants to do after graduation	1.76	.62	10%	90%
I know that my child has a transition plan	2.14	.65	81%	19%
I have attended transition planning meetings	1.95	.22	100%	0%
<b>Services</b>				
I am aware of the services that available to my child after graduation	1.95	.38	95%	5%

I know who to contact for information about services/ job training programs after graduation	1.85	.48	95%	5%
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**Table 4:** Mean, Standard Deviation, & Percentages of Participants' Responses to Survey Questions Post-test

Questions/factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)
<b>Basic</b>				
I understand the special education process	2.46	.93	52%	48%
I feel that I am included in the decision process regarding my child's education	2.48	.68	52%	48%
I usually attend my child's IEP meetings	2.42	.60	48%	52%
I understand the information that is given to me when I attend meetings	2.00	.48	86%	14%
<b>Transition</b>				
I know what my child wants to do after graduation	2.71	.56	33%	67%
I know that my child has a transition plan	3.04	.80	19%	81%
I have attended transition planning meetings	2.40	.92	62%	38%
<b>Services</b>				
I am aware of the services that available to my child after graduation	3.24	.62	5%	95%

I know who to contact for information about services/ job training programs after graduation	3.09	.62	33%	67%
<b>Training</b>				
I feel that training was effective	3.19	.52	24%	76%

The average mean for the pretest survey responses was 1.92. The mean for the post-test response was 2.65 resulting in an increase of .74. When parents were asked if they felt that the training was effective, 76% agreed while 24% disagreed.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the pre-test and post test responses (Table 5). Only question 6 showed a statistical significance. "I know that my child has a behavior plan" where  $F(1,20) = 3.3, P = 0.045 (p < .05)$ .

**Table 5:** ANOVA results

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.829	1	.610	3.317	.045
Within Groups	3.124	17	.184		
Total	4.952	20			

The parents were also encouraged to leave comments under the questions in the post survey following the last training. The general consensus to the basic special education questions were that parents felt that they needed more training on the topics that were presented. Parents also stated that they wished that training would have been made available to them when their child was initially classified into special education. Under question 4 "I understand the information given to me when I attend meetings", one parent stated: "I prefer not to attend my child's meetings because I don't know what the people are talking about, they don't ask my opinion and they don't really answer my questions."

Parents also responded with comments about the transition questions. The consensus was that this was the first time they have ever heard of a transition plan and that they would have liked to be included in the discussion from the beginning. One parent stated "I wish I was made aware of this process because I think I could have helped to make a good plan for my son after he graduates, now that he will graduate next year, it feels like I am too late. During the discussion session following the trainings, parents expressed feelings of anger and frustration about transition planning meetings because many felt that they were falling behind in the process of reaching out to agencies for assistance. Parents were also in attendance who stated that they went to all of their child's meetings and have no memory of a transition plan being discussed. , they were confused as to where the information was coming from to develop a plan if their opinion was not asked.

In regard to the services questions, parents stated that they were very grateful for the resources. The parents of the younger children expressed plans for gaining services for their child as soon as possible. Again, parents of the older children were angry that this was the first time that they were receiving this information and felt that they were too far behind to receive services for their child. One parent wrote “this information is not useful to me at this point since my child will graduate this year, why didn’t the school give this to me in the beginning, I thought the transition plan was supposed to start when he was 16.”

Over all, parents of younger children made comments of being grateful for the resources that were provided and stated that they planned to make use of them as well as take an active part in the transition plan. Parents of older children who are closer to graduation expressed frustration with the transition planning process as well as the special education process as a whole. The parents did ask many questions concerning the services that could be available after graduation especially focusing on job training and transportation.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### Overview of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate if parent training would impact their attitudes towards their child's transition from school to adulthood. The steps included: (a) determining the questions that would measure parent attitudes toward transition , (b) collecting data through surveys distributed to parents of children enrolled in a special education program, (c) conducting two training sessions about the transition planning process, (d) collecting data through a post-survey, and (e) analyzing the data for the results. Two questions were explored.

The first research question "What are parental attitudes towards the transition process", was examined by the parents responses to the survey prior to and after parent training. Results showed that most parents were not aware that their child had a transition plan and were confused by the process. Based on parent responses, they had a negative attitude toward the transition process. Parents expressed their frustration on the comments that they left on

the surveys about the lack of information that was given on their pre-survey prior to training. This frustration was not just directed to the transition plan process but also to the field of special education as a whole. Parents feel overwhelmed at meetings and powerless.

The second research question, “after participating in a transition training program, will parents change their attitudes towards the transition process” is more difficult to answer. While parents verbally expressed gratitude for the opportunity to receive training about transition planning, only one question showed a statistically significant change from pre-survey responses to the post-survey. This could be because of the limitations that are later discussed.

### Summary of Findings

The results showed that the overall mean from the pre-survey to the post survey increased by .74 even though only one question showed a statistical significance. Question 6: “I know that my child has a transition plan” resulted in a significance level of  $p = .045$  ( $p < .05$ ) meaning that parent training had affected



the parent responses regarding knowledge of the existing transition plans of their child.

In addition, parents provided their comments on the survey. All comments are summarized in three themes: basic special education, transition, and services. Under the basic special education section, parents stated that they were interested in receiving training in all aspects of the process and not only the transition. They expressed frustration and confusion with the field of special education and indicated that schools should provide training at the time of their child's diagnosis. Under the transition section, parents indicated that they were unaware prior to training that such a plan existed, even though some of their children were close to graduation. They also indicated that they would have valuable input for transition planning meetings if they were given more information ahead of time and were prepared for this process. In the services section, parents were very interested in acquiring services after graduation and asked questions regarding transportation and job training. They also expressed gratitude for the contact information that they received.

## Limitations

The goal of this study was to determine if parent training affected their opinions about their child's transition. A major limitation of this study was the size of the sample. The school was very small with only 54 students, and only 21 volunteer parents attended the training sessions. Thus, the results were based on limited number of participants which would be difficult to generalize to the entire parent population. Second, the parents also had scheduling conflicts and transportation issues, therefore scheduling training sessions proved difficult and only two sessions were offered which may have affected the amount of material the parents were able to learn. Third, many of the parents had children at or above 16 years old, this meant that they had already begun the transition planning process. Most of these parents were unaware that their child had already started their transition plan.

## Recommendations

For future research I would recommend using a larger sample size of parents so that the results would be strong to represent their opinions. I would also include more training sessions over a longer period of time. Much of the material that was presented to the parents was new information and breaking this up into smaller, more detailed segments might result in better understanding. Lastly, I would recommend providing parent trainings before their child is 14 years old when the transition planning process starts. This would better prepare the parents for the path ahead of them and ensure that they were better educated to advocate for their child from the start.

I would also recommend that parents receive training in understanding the basic concepts that are involved in special education when the child is initially diagnosed with a disability. Many of the parents expressed confusion about IEP meetings as well as related services. Some parents did not even fully understand the diagnosis of their child. This would be a challenge during parent training when a specific facet of special education is discussed. It is important to provide basic information about special education for parents so that they could better understand the transition planning process.

## Conclusion

Through a literature review, it was found that parent involvement in education lead to students' higher grade point averages and lower risky behaviors (Gottfriedson & Hussong, 2011). In the field of special education, there is a lack of parent involvement because of negative attitudes that parents have towards planning meetings, especially transition planning. Research shows that parent training is an effective strategy to increase parent involvement in their child's transition from school to adulthood (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This has been evidenced in parents' comments in the survey after training was provided.

This research addresses only one piece of an overarching theme in the field of special education. Parent communication and involvement should be a vital part of educating all children. Parents should be equipped with the information needed to advocate for their child and to become an equal participant in all planning meetings including transition planning meetings.

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## Appendix A

### Pre- post survey

Dear parent,

In attempt to make our program more effective for both students and parents, we are asking that you complete the following questions. This information will help us make the necessary changes in our program for improvement. Your support is very much appreciated. I am conducting a study on the effects of parent training on the attitudes of parents toward the transition planning process of students as they move from school into adulthood. If you wish to participate in this study, please complete the survey below. Please do not include your name since all responses are kept anonymous. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to respond to any question or not to participate in this study as a whole with no penalty to you. If you have any questions please contact me via the information below:

Please circle one response to the following questions:

1. Are you  
Mother                  Father          Grandparent                  Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How many times have you attended your child's meetings?  
1                  2                  3                  4                  5                  6 or more
  
3. What is your highest level of education?  
Some High School                  High School Diploma  
Some College          Bachelor's Degree                  Bachelor's +
  
4. What is your child's age? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long has your child been enrolled at Daretown? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. At what age did your child start to receive special education resources? \_\_\_\_\_

For the following items, please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements by circling the appropriate category.

1. I feel that I understand the special education process (evaluations, planning meetings, etc)  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
2. I feel that I am included in the decision process regarding my child's education.  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
3. I usually attend my child's IEP meetings  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
4. I understand the information that is given to me when I attend meetings.  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
5. I know what my child wants to do after he/she graduates from high school  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
6. I know that my child has a transition plan.  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
7. I have attended a transition planning meeting for my child to discuss his/her transition into adulthood.  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree
  
8. I am aware of the services that are available to my child after graduation.  
Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

9. I know who to contact for information on adult services/job training programs.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

10. I would attend training at my child's school about transition planning if offered.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

**Contact Information:**

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# Appendix B

## Parent Training Presentation

Slide 1

Planning the Transition from School to Adulthood



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Slide 2

What is transition?

- A transition means change
  - Your children make transitions from class to class and from school to home
- In this case we are talking about the transition from school into adult life
  - When school ends, your children will move into adult-life and will need a plan

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Slide 3

**It's the law!**

- Under the law (IDEA, 2004) transition services mean:
  - a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within a results-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities
  - This includes post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation

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Slide 4

**When does transition planning begin?**

- Every student with an IEP is eligible
- By the time the student reaches the age of 14, the IEP states the student's post-secondary goals
  - This allows the team to consider educational experiences in the school or community that might help reach his/her goals
- This statement is based on the student's needs, preferences and goals and is reviewed with the annual review

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Slide 5

**Examples of post-secondary goals**

- College
- Employment
- Technical training
- Military
- Independent living

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Slide 6

**When do transition services begin?**

- When the student turns 16, the IEP includes "statement of needed transition services"
  - This means the activities and strategies that will lead to the desired school outcomes and who will be responsible for them
  - The goal is to help ensure that the student is able to achieve long-term goals and links them to supports, services and programs needed for adult life

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Slide 7

**What services are included?**

- Instruction- this can take place in classroom or small group setting and can be provided in the school, at home or in the community
- Related Services- transportation, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and other supportive services

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Slide 8

**What services are included?**

- Community Experiences- provided by the community, school consultants or other agencies
  - Learning to shop, use public transportation, library etc.
- Employment/Adult living objectives- may lead to paid employment or career opportunities

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Slide 12

**What is the role of the student?**

- From the age of 14, students must be invited to participate in transition meetings
- Parents should prepare the student at home by asking them to make a list of goals they might have after they graduate

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Slide 13

**Homework**

- Read this power point again and jot down questions that you have for our next training



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Slide 14

**Questions**

- Would you like me to go over any information that was covered tonight?

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Slide 27

Transition Resources Continued		
Agency	Phone	Web Site
Social Security Administration	1-800-772-1213	<a href="http://www.ssa.gov/disability">www.ssa.gov/disability</a>
NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities	1-800-832-9173	<a href="http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd">www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd</a>

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