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Students with disabilities: making IDEA transition services work

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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: MAKING IDEA
TRANSITION SERVICES WORK

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the wonderful and unique students

Past & Present from my Educational Career Journey

I have seen you smile and I have you seen you struggle.

I wish I could have helped each and every one of you.

Please know that every day that you live

Is yet another chance to make the world a better place for us all!

You have made education such an awe-inspiring journey for me.

For your sake,

my lifetime goal is to make the transition planning process better than I found it!

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Abstract

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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: MAKING IDEA
TRANSITION SERVICES WORK

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Students with disabilities are less prepared to meet the challenges of adulthood,

more likely to continue to live with their parents after high school, and engage in fewer

social activities (Burgstahler & Kim-Rupnow, 2001). For many of these students,

transition services are not being implemented and monitored as mandated by the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), therefore, the probability for a

successful transition from high school to adulthood for these students is severely

jeopardized. Transition planning is a formal process of long-range cooperative planning

that will assist students with disabilities to successfully move from school into the adult

world (NJDSPED, 2010). The goal of transition planning is to help students with

disabilities plan for the future and have control over their lives. Effective collaboration,

administrative support, professional development, programs, and materials will enable

high schools to prepare their students with special needs for the transition from high

school to adulthood.

The purpose of this action research study was to develop and implement a

"results-oriented" transition planning process that ensures IDEA transition services

mandates are implemented from the IEPs to the classroom for secondary education

students with disabilities. This study took place over a 19-month period and utilized a mixed methods approach with a transformative design to collect data. Data were retrieved through staff, faculty, administrators, and student questionnaires; focus groups; interviews; class observations; and analysis of students' work. The student pre-transition planning process questionnaire clearly revealed that students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School were not being prepared to transition from high school to adulthood.

The transition planning activities were divided into10 weekly sessions: 1) Introduction and Reviewing Transition Planning Process Questionnaire; 2) Assess Interests & Skills; 3) Transition Assistance Resources; 4) Develop Goals, Priorities, & Career Plan; 5) Resume Writing; 6) Job Search & Job Hunting Techniques; 7) Dress for Success; 8) College as an Option; 9) Military, Apprenticeship, & Other Options, and 10) Post-Transition Planning Process Questionnaire. The student transition-planning portfolio is a strategic planning tool intended to help youth identify and achieve postsecondary goals (NCWD, 2010).The student transition-planning portfolios (STPP) were maintained and monitored by the researcher and accompanied the students during their high school years. The STPP clearly identified the competencies and skills students gained as a result of participating in the "results-oriented" transition planning process.

Based on the success rate of the students participating in this study, this research will serve as a resource to district-wide case managers to implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process at their schools. In order to determine if the transition planning process sessions were effective for the students, I examined the Transition Planning Process Questionnaire Results from Week 1 and Week 10. Examining the

results of their post-questionnaires, it was clear that these students felt more prepared to transition from high school to adulthood during Week 10 than they did Week 1. As a result of this action research study, the transition planning process will be an effective tool to increase the probability of success for secondary students with disabilities transitioning from high school to adulthood.

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Chapter I

Introduction

"Disability is a natural part of the human existence and in no way diminishes the

right of persons with developmental disabilities to live independently, enjoy self-

determination, make choices, contribute to society, and experience full integration

and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational

mainstream of American society."The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and

Bill of Rights Act Amendment of 1993

Background of the Problem

Transitions from high school to postsecondary education and employment can be

particularly challenging for students with disabilities (Bangser, 2008). According to

Burgstahler and Kim-Rupnow (2001), students with disabilities are less prepared to meet

the challenges of adulthood, more likely to continue to live with their parents after high

school, and engage in fewer social activities. Nationally, less than eight percent of

students with disabilities graduate from high school with a job, are enrolled in post-

secondary education, are involved in community recreation and leisure activities (Condon

& Callahan, 2008). School completion is one of the most significant issues facing special

education programs nationally (Gaylord, Johnson, Lehr, Bremer, & Hasazi, 2004).

According to Wagner et al. (1991), as cited in NCSET (2004):

> The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) found that approximately
> 36% of students with disabilities exited school by dropping out. The NLTS data
> also revealed that risk factors such as ethnicity and family income are related to
> dropout rates, and that some groups of special education students are more apt to
> drop out than others. Of youth with disabilities who do not complete school, the

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highest proportions are students with learning disabilities (32%), and students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (50%). (p. 8)

Transition planning is a formal process of long-range cooperative planning that will assist students with disabilities to successfully move from school into the adult world (NJOE, 2010) while transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within a results-oriented process (NJDOE. 2006). "Students with disabilities often have trouble meeting graduation requirements, and concern is mounting about the relationship between students' academic experiences and the formulation of post-school transition plans that address how students will access postsecondary education, employment, and community living opportunities"(Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999; Johnson, Sharpe, & Stodden, 2000a; Johnson & Thurlow, 2003; Policy Information Clearinghouse, 1997; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000a, 2000b, as cited in NCSET, 2004, p. 3). Poor post-school outcomes have been linked to the lack of vocational preparation, transition planning, and linkage to existing adult services and supports prior to graduation (Condon & Callahan, 2008). Most young people are receiving little to no career guidance outside the home, and not enough from their parents (Hurley & Thorp, 2002). Lack of career guidance leads to high school graduates who are undecided about their career goals or who will make poor decisions that they will regret later in life (Hurley & Thorp, 2002). A lack of special educators prepared with specific abilities in secondary transition to facilitate students' successful movement from high school to adult life is a significant variable in poor adult outcomes for students with disabilities (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Blalock et al., 2003; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008).

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In general, past research has shown that students with disabilities achieve post-school outcomes at a much lower rate than do their non-disabled peers (Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Sittlington & Frank, 1990). Another study found fewer than half of students with disabilities were employed full time two years following their high school graduation (Wagner et al., 1991). However, more recent research shows improvements in that 31% of students with disabilities access post-secondary education within two years of leaving high school (Newman, 2005, as cited in Williams-Diehm, 2007, p. 14).

As the end of high school approaches, so does the termination of a structured environment and pre-college support systems (Burgstahler & Kim-Rupnow, 2001). Having a particular disability can affect transition planning, and students with disabilities experienced higher stress, lower peer social support, and poorer adjustment than do other students without disabilities (Hoppe, 2003). Students who drop out of school tend to have backgrounds that include poverty, parents who are less well educated, homes in which academic skills such as reading are neither valued nor modeled, and the presence of multiple family stressors (e.g., drugs and alcohol, divorce, abuse) (Leone et al., 2003). The capacity of educators to deliver special education services has been seriously challenged by the interrupted attendance and mobility of youths with disabilities (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005). When students' behaviors are inconsistent with professional expectations, this only confirms their need for a specific type of programming (Cooney, 2002).

Students with disabilities display higher rates of problem behavior and disciplinary referrals than their general education schoolmates (Leone et al., 2003).

Many students with disabilities often have difficulties getting along with their teachers and controlling their behavior (Hoppe, 2003). Social isolation not only impacts the relationships of students with disabilities but also their academic and career success (Burgstahler & Kim-Rupnow, 2001). Students with disabilities that live in poor urban cities are faced with even more challenges. School failure places children at-risk for a host of negative social outcomes and despite public interest in improving the performance of all students; many children continue to falter (Leone et al., 2003). In addition, teachers less prepared to offer transition support in urban schools, moreover, often work with high concentrations of minority students living in poverty and attending the lowest performing schools (Pesky & Haycock, 2006).The larger the number of risk factors to which a child is exposed, the greater is the likelihood that he or she will engage in antisocial or violent behavior (Hawkins as cited in Leone et al., 2003). However, the impact of risk factors changes depending on when they occur in a youth's development, in what context, and under what circumstances (Leone et al., 2003).

According to NASDSE (2005), behavioral characteristics associated with cognitive and other disabilities are often magnified when a child or youth comes into contact with the justice system. These students no longer have the nurturing support system that they once had as high school students. Additionally, these youth often have difficulty behaving appropriately toward law enforcement and other authority figures and are often unable to understand the consequences of their behavior (NASDSE, 2005). Studies of the characteristics of incarcerated youth reveal prevalence rates of educational disabilities and mental health needs that far exceed those found in the general population of children and youth (Leone et al., 2003). Student with disabilities, some of whom had

other risk factors such as prior arrest, valued school experiences when they perceived that teachers provided consistent and persistent support (Eisenman, 2003). Schools and communities have many opportunities to prevent students with disabilities who are at risk for incarceration from being incarcerated and to enhance the protective factors that will build their resiliency (Stenhjem, 2005). According to Levine (2005), "Work-life un-readiness can afflict an entire community or even a global society, furthermore, individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, or unhappily employed impose a heavy drain on our society and are also susceptible to long-term underachievement" (p. 10).

Impetus for the Study

The transition planning process is critical to assuring the success of students served through special education services (Dowdy, Carter, & Smith, 1990; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills standards identify key skills that students must meet upon graduation to include career awareness and planning, employability skill, critical thinking, self-management, interpersonal communication, character development and ethics, consumer and personal finance, and safety (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). Research involving Individual Education Plan (IEP) document reviews has characterized transition goals as vague, overly broad, or template, suggesting that limited attention may be given to aligning transition plans with youths' unique characteristics and individual goals for life after high school (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009; deFur, 2003). Transition plans are often in name only, many are ineffective, and some may thwart the goals of young adults (Cooney, 2002).

Consequently, transition planning too often becomes an afterthought rather than the primary focus that guides secondary special education service decisions (deFur, 2003). According to the Federation of Families SC (n.d.),"Because students with disabilities often experience limited success after leaving high school, many new IDEA 2004 provisions seek to improve transition planning so that students with disabilities can be more successful in their adult lives" (p. 1). Many secondary education school students with disabilities are in dire need of results-oriented transition services. Additionally, the federal government holds state education agencies responsible for the implementation of transition services to students with disabilities (Katsiyannis, deFur, & Conderman, 1998). Even though transition services are firmly mandated by the federal government, it is evident that many schools still have difficulties implementing this critical component. Additionally, the standards-based reform movement has shifted the attention of educators from preparation for work and career toward academic performance outcomes for all students (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006). Despite all that has been learned and accomplished regarding research-based secondary transition practices, they are rarely implemented and sustained at local schools (Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004).

Prior to becoming a special education teacher, I was a correctional officer at a New Jersey county detention center. It was very devastating to me to witness how many young people with special needs were incarcerated in an adult facility. According to Quinn, Rutherford, Jr., and Leone (2001), criminal behavior has been strongly linked to a number of factors including dropping out of school, substance abuse, weak family structure, poverty, and learning and behavioral disabilities among others. When these

students leave school early, are unable to obtain meaningful employment, and engage in delinquent activity, their failure places them at great risk for involvement in juvenile courts and corrections (Leone et al., 2003).

Youth with disabilities are particularly over-represented in the juvenile delinquency system (NASDSE, 2005). "It is estimated that between 60-75% of the youth in the juvenile justice system have one or more diagnosable disabilities" (Juvenile Justice Coalition of Minnesota, 2011, p. 3). Increased attention is needed on the growing number of youth with disabilities involved in the juvenile and adult correctional systems (Stenhjem, 2005). When it comes to education reform, instead of being concerned about matters of substance, policymakers focus on getting teachers and schools to change, hence, as Sergiovanni phrased it, putting "process over substance" (Hunt, 2005). "Young adults unprepared for their career startups are also not equipped to cope with their disappointment over who they are turning out to be and what they find themselves doing" (Levine, 2005, p. 17). They may even have to endure long-term maladjustment, emotional instability, spasms of depression, alcoholism, and abysmal self-esteem (Levine, 2005). Levine (2005) insists that:

> As a nation, it is important to examine the educational and socio-economical struggles of our youth especially those with disabilities therefore, every government would be well advised to address an epidemic of such un-readiness, gauging how it might affect its economy, its productivity, and it capacity to resolve perplexing national problems. (p. 12)

I believed that if I could help young people while they were still in high school, I might be able to motivate at least one person to do something positive with his or her life. I have watched at least three generations of several families spend repeated time in jail. I often wondered who was taking care of their children. Now as an educator, I find myself

advocating for these children because it does take a village to raise a child. If we do not help these children now, they are doomed to create another generation of lifelong incarcerated adults. The purpose of transition planning is to help students with disabilities plan for the future and have control over their lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to develop and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensures IDEA transition services mandates are implemented from the IEPs to the classroom for secondary education students with disabilities. NJAC 6A:14 (NJDOE, 2006) mandates that all students classified as having a disability are required to have an IEP, which is a written plan that describes the student's present levels of educational performance, progress in the general curriculum, services to be provided to include transition services, annual goals, and complies with many other statutory requirements. Some schools' staff members have noted that a lack of resources inhibited their ability to fully implement career development activities or programs (Neumark, 2004). Teachers play a major role in helping students prepare for college, yet they do not have the resources they need to give students accurate information (Conley & Venezia, 2003).

My role as a learning disabilities teacher consultant (LDTC) has been to administer educational testing, to develop individualized education plans (IEPs), to case manage students deemed eligible for special education and related services, and to work with teachers to deliver programs to students with special needs. The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) and New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC) (NJDOE, 2006) mandate that transition services will consist of a

"coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within a "results-oriented" process." NJAC 6A:14 (NJDOE, 2006) also designates case managers as responsible for transition planning. Currently, there is no "results-oriented" transition planning process in place for secondary education students with disabilities at the Michael J. Hawkins High School (pseudonym).

Research Questions

The goal of transition planning is to help students with disabilities plan for the future and have control over their lives. Effective collaboration, administrative support, professional development, programs, and materials will enable high schools to prepare their students with special needs for the transition from high school to adulthood. Therefore my research questions to be explored were as follows:

1) What were the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?

2) How well did students with disabilities feel that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?

3) What were the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?

4) How did my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented" transition planning process?

It was my intention that as a result of students with disabilities participating in a "results-oriented" transition planning process that their probability for success after high school would increase. The rationale for my research study questions was based on what

was needed in order to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate a "results-oriented" transition planning process to insure IDEA transition services mandates are implemented from the IEPs to the classroom for secondary education students with disabilities. First, I examined the perception of the special education teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors at the high school regarding the present transition planning process. In participatory action research, the stakeholders, regardless of their status, participate in the different aspects of the research effort to improve the program or policy (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Teachers who do not understand transition planning are less effective in ensuring that the students receive the maximum benefits resulting from the transition plan (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Given these needs, it is crucial for educators and other professionals to better understand the individual and program level components that may support effective transition outcomes (Lindstrom et al., 2007).

Secondly, I examined how confident the special education teachers, students with disabilities, administrators, and guidance counselors feel that the students with disabilities are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Parents and teachers believe that most education professional did not have a good understanding of the learning potential of people with disabilities (Luzzo & MacGregor, 2001). "The role of secondary education administrators, including but not limited to principals, guidance directors, curriculum supervisors, department chairs, and special education directors, is important to the success of students with disabilities" (Boscardin, 2005, p.21). The need for all-inclusive transition programming and establishment of personal goals is a critical issue for educators and professionals dealing with students with special needs (Dowdy, Carter, & Smith, 1990). Successful transition from secondary education is becoming

recognized as a chief indicator of the effectiveness of our educational system for preparing youths and young adults for employment, postsecondary education, military service, and adult independence (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006).

In addition to developing and implementing a "results-oriented" transition planning process, I provided the students with a "student transition-planning portfolio" that served as a tool in developing the transition-planning sections of the IEP for students with a disability (NCWD, 2011). The student transition-planning portfolio documents a range of information specific to the student and his or her school and state that students, parents, and school personnel can use to guide decision making and monitor the student's progress toward goals (NCWD, 2011). The student learning plan included the following information specific to the student: skills, abilities, hobbies, and accomplishments; current and past classes and activities; grades and test scores; examples of student work; results from career, college, and interest assessments; personal goal statements; accommodation needs; career exploration, job search; college and financial planning activities; and contact information for parents, advisors, teachers, mentors, and other supportive adults (NCWD, 2011).

Significance of Study

Secondary education transition planning and services have been required components of the IEP for more than a decade, yet IEP teams remained bogged down in a mind-set that separates transition from the traditional IEP components (deFur, 2003). Although the intent of federal policy directives is to reinforce a seamless movement from high school to adulthood, significant evidence exists that transition activities do not function as intended (Cooney, 2002). This study is important because as students with

disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School approach graduation, many are not prepared to enter direct employment, the Armed Forces, or a post-secondary school. Lack of career guidance leads to high school graduates who are undecided about their career goals or who will make poor decisions that they will regret later in life (Hurley & Thorp, 2002).

Additionally, youths and young adults with disabilities have continued to report experiencing high school failure and dropout rates, lower employment rates, lower participation in postsecondary education, and lower satisfaction with their adult lives (Katsiyannis et al., 1998). Like all youths who are moving from adolescence into adulthood, individuals whose lives have touched Foster Care, Juvenile Justice, and Special Education Systems are faced with a series of critical choices (Stenhjem, 2005). Furthermore, they are more likely to drop out of high school, to experience joblessness, to rely public assistance, to give birth while unmarried and unprepared for parenthood, and to undergo periods of homelessness or residential instability (Stenhjem, 2005).

When we talk about the youths with disabilities in the juvenile justice system, we are talking about a high percentage who, not surprisingly, experienced school failure. The Juvenile Justice and Adult Prison Systems are congested with offenders who were classified with Learning Disabilities (LD) and/or Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) while they attended school. These offenders did not always receive the transition services mandated by the Federal Government. Only a third of offenders had appropriate transition services in their schools (Leone & Garfinkel, 2003).

Conclusion

Many of the problems that secondary education students with disabilities face to include crime, joblessness, and homelessness can create a huge and costly burden on the students, their families, their communities and society as a whole. Our students with disabilities need the skills and motivation to compete in today's global job market. The purpose of transition planning is to help students with disabilities plan for the future and have control over their lives. This study is important because as students with disabilities approach graduation, many are not prepared to enter direct employment, the Armed Forces, or a post-secondary school. If we do not help these children now, they are doomed to create another generation of lifelong incarcerated adults. It was my intention that as a result of students with disabilities participating in a "results-oriented" transition planning process that their probability for success after high school would increase. Providing a "results-oriented" transition planning process is not only crucial to students with disabilities, it is the law. Through implementing a "results-oriented" transition planning process at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I anticipate several leadership challenges and rewards as I monitor my leadership development and growth.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2006) revealed that while attendance by students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions has increased in past decades, only 12% of individuals with disabilities graduated college (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acoster, 2005, as cited in Garrison-Wade, 2012, p. 1). Young adults with disabilities continue to face significant difficulties in securing jobs, accessing postsecondary education, living independently, fully participating in their communities, and accessing necessary community services such as healthcare and transportation (Gaylord et al., 2004).The National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) (2007) argues that,

> Teachers and parents of disabled students face a very difficult task when it comes to trying to maneuver through all the red tape, options, forms, etc. that are involved in the special education process. Nowhere is that procedure more intense and important than in the transition of disabled children to adulthood. (p. 1)

The literature reviewed explored the reasons why a "results-oriented" transition planning process must be developed and implemented to ensure that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) transition services mandates are implemented from the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms for secondary education students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School. The review of literature that informed this study included Special Education Legislation and Education Reform Initiatives; Transition Planning and Transition Services and the roles of Guidance Counselors, Special Education Teachers, and Parents of Students with Disabilities,

Career Awareness and Transition Planning; Post-secondary Preparation and Transition

Planning, and research on Individual Learning Plan (STPP).

Special Education Legislation and Education Reform Initiatives

Special Education legislation began to take form in the 1970s with the passage of

the 1975 Public Law 94-142, the Education of Handicapped Children Act (EHCA),

which shaped the model of an IEP for students with disabilities but no requirement was

specified regarding postsecondary outcome planning (deFur, 2003; Durodoye, Combes,

& Bryant, 2004; Fairweather, 1989). The EHCA was the first federal civil rights law to

protect the rights of persons with disabilities (Turnbull, 2005). The EHCA was the most

significant involvement of the federal government with special education to date. The

EHCA mandated that students with disabilities had the right to nondiscriminatory testing,

evaluation, and placement procedures (Yell, 2006). The act also required that the school

districts provide administrative procedures so that parents could dispute decisions made

about their child's education. Public school districts were required to formulate an

individual education plan that would resemble the education experience of non-disabled

peers. The implementation of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 guaranteed students with

disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive

environment (LRE) based on their individual needs (Roberts & Maher, 1995).

In 1983, Public Law 98-199, the 1983 reauthorization of the EHA challenged

secondary education to provide educational opportunities that promoted students'

seamless transition from school to employment by linking students with the appropriate

adult service agency, but no federal requirements accompanied these policy positions

(deFur, 2003; Fairweather, 1989). This amendment also gave incentives to states to

provide services to infants and preschool children with disabilities. In 1990, the EHA was amended and renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandated documentation of needed transition services in the IEPs of all students with disabilities, ages 16 and older (deFur, 2003; Dowdy, 1996; Dunn, 1996; Durodoye, Combes, & Bryant, 2004; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers 2008; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). IDEA 1990 emphasized the inclusion of the student with disabilities in the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) transition process when the student was 16 years or older. Autism and traumatic brain injury were added to the list of disabilities covered under IDEA (Smith, 2005). This amendment also changed the name of the law to address people-first language (example: a person who had been called "a handicapped person" was now called "a person with a disability"; a child who had been called "a mentally retarded child" was now called "a child with mental retardation").

Several recent federal laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have all promoted comprehensive strategies for improving public school programs for all students, including those from diverse, multicultural backgrounds and situations of poverty. Gaylord et al., (2004) argue that,

> With the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, significant new requirements were put into place to ensure students greater access to the general education curriculum and assessment systems. These requirements have been reinforced strongly by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which requires that students with disabilities participate not only in assessments, but also in accountability systems. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure schools are held accountable for these

students' access to the general curriculum, higher expectations, and improved learning. Requirements for students with disabilities to be included in state accountability systems and for measuring whether schools have achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) have heightened the importance of access to the general curriculum for all students with disabilities. (p. 2)

The Educate America Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-227) also includes mandates that raises academic standards for all students and expands the use of computers and technology in the classroom (Nochajski, Oddo, & Beaver, 1999). Technology plays an increasingly important role in educational programs for all students and in facilitating successful transition outcomes for students with disabilities (Nochajski et al., 1999). High schools and community transition programs must provide students with technology-integrated support services so that they can become computer literate and have better access to higher education and career options (Burgstahler & Kim-Rupnow, 2001).

Federal funding for workforce development programs for youth in transition arises from three key pieces of federal legislation and each has provisions regarding certain services for youth. The IDEA funds special education services in public schools; Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) addresses employment needs of traditionally underemployed groups such as high school dropouts, teen parents, the elderly, and people with disabilities; and Title IV of WIA contains the Rehabilitation Act Amendments and reauthorizes Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for individuals with disabilities (McCain, Gill, Wills, & Larson, 2004). VR is a state and federal program whose purpose is to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve gainful employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities (Dowdy, 1996).

The 2004 reauthorized IDEA mandates that when a child turns 16, his or her IEP will be updated annually and must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments that include training, education, employment, independent living skills, and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Garrison-Wade, & Lehmann, 2009; Gil, 2007; Glomb, Lignugaris/Kraft, & Menlove, 2009; NJDOE, 2006). These laws uniformly stress high academic and occupational standards; promote the use of state and local standards-based accountability systems; point to the need to improve teaching through comprehensive professional development programs; and call for broad-based partnerships between schools, employers, postsecondary institutions, parents, and others (Gaylord et al., 2004). Unfortunately, these mandates do not clarify who is responsible or how schools are expected to meet these goals, which leaves this requirement to each individual school's own interpretation.

Education policy makers have long embraced reform but unfortunately, education reforms have consistently been plagued by the reformers' lack of knowledge and appreciation of the history of education (Hunt, 2005). Schools must examine what reforms are most appropriate for their students and implement those that will be of greatest benefit to all students (Plucker, Zapf, & Spradlin, 2004). Policy makers and school leaders need to listen to teacher recommendations when planning reform (Wasburn-Moses, 2006). Too often, low-performing high schools are just satisfied with making it through each day and getting some students through high school (Bottoms, 2002). When schools are monitored because they have failed to make annual yearly

progress (AYP), they are more driven to make continuous improvement in student

achievement (Bottoms, 2002). In addition Gaylord et al. (2004) insist that

> The AYP requirements of NCLB are having and will continue to have a
> significant impact on public schools. Under the Title I requirements of NCLB,
> schools will be held accountable for student progress using indicators of AYP.
> These indicators include measures of academic performance and rates of school
> completion. Schools will be identified as needing improvement if their overall
> performance does not increase yearly, or if any of a number of sub-groups does
> not meet specified criteria. Students with disabilities are identified as one of the
> sub-groups whose performance will count towards assessment of AYP. If these
> students do not perform well, questions must be raised as to what incentives
> schools have to focus effort and resources on these youth. (p. 2)

Despite advances in education, disability rights policy, the support of federal

mandates, and increased funding of programs and initiatives that impact all youth, the

post-school outcomes for far too many of our nation's youth and young adults are still

poor (National Council on Disability Social Security Administration, 2000). The federal

government holds state education agencies responsible for the implementation of IDEA,

making state educational agencies the catalyst for providing transition services to

students with disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 1998).

Transition Planning and Transition Services

> According to Sittlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, and Leconte (2007):
>
> Since the early 1980s, special education has focused on the need for transition
> services to assist students with disabilities to plan for the future. Documentation
> of poor postsecondary outcomes for individuals with disabilities through follow-
> up studies led to development of secondary and postsecondary transition models,
> identification of recommended practices, and training of personnel to provide
> transition services in secondary and postsecondary settings. (p. 3)

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) established

transition as a policy and funding priority in the early 1980s. In 1984, U.S. Assistant

Secretary of Education for Special Education and Rehabilitation, Madeleine Will,

proposed Bridges from School to Work as a conceptual model of transition. In 1985, educational researcher, Andrew Halpern, proposed a revised and expanded conceptual model of transition that included residential, employment and social interpersonal networks under the rubric of community adjustment. In 1989, OSERS funded the implementation of the National Longitudinal Transition Study from 1987-1993 that included over 8,000 youth ages 13-21. Students were interviewed over 2 intervals: 2 years or less post-school and 3-5 five years post school. In 1991, OSERS established and funded the Systems Change in Transition priority. In 1996, The National Transition Alliance was funded to provide technical assistance to states receiving STW development and implementation grants. In 1990, IDEA passed and included provisions for transition services. In 1992, the Rehabilitation Act was amended to include the same definition of transition as IDEA. In 1994, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was passed that required the inclusion of all students. In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act linked amendments of the Rehabilitation Act to generic employment services. In 1999, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act included incentives to return to work and to seek employment related to health care and cash benefits.

Transition services, as mandated by IDEA, are intended to assist students with disabilities during their school years with "an array of activities aimed at increasing employability" (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006, p. 223). The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities' (NJCLD) position makes it clear that providing transition plans and services is crucial in assisting youth with disabilities to prepare for adult life (Clark, 1996). Good transition plans reflect the student's personal choices, preferences, and needs across a variety of domains including education, employment, community living,

and recreational experiences (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Brooke & McDonough, 2008; Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009). A number of studies have indicated that an atmosphere of a shared and open dialogue among all parties is an essential component for transition planning activities to be effective (Cooney, 2002).

The transition planning process is critical to assuring the success of students served through special education services (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Sitlington et al. (2007) argue that transition planning is an integral part of the educational process for students with disabilities during the secondary school years and serves as the foundation for planning for adult roles. "A final critical aspect of transition planning for students with disabilities is self-determination, which has been defined as "one's ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself" (Field & Hoffman, 1994, p. 164). Despite the significant attention and resources devoted to developing and implementing transition services for youth with disabilities, we continue to see a disturbing picture for youth with disabilities in transition (Cushing & Parker-Katz, 2012).

According to Gaylord et al. (2004),

Effective transition planning and service depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services, and other human service and community agencies. However, a number of factors have stood as barriers to effective collaboration, including (a) lack of shared knowledge and vision by students, parents, and school and agency staff around students' post-school goals and the transition resources necessary to support students' needs and interests; (b) lack of shared information across school and community agencies, and coordinated assessment and planning processes, to support integrated transition planning; (c) lack of meaningful roles for students and parents in the transition decision-making process; and (d) lack of meaningful information on anticipated post-school services needed by students and follow-up data on the actual post-school outcomes and continuing support needs of students that can be used to guide improvement in systems collaboration and linkages. (p. 2)

Helping students with disabilities to secure post-high employment is the main priority of special education teachers responsible for transitioning these students to adulthood (Eisenman, 2003).

The Role of Special Education Teachers and Transition Planning

Depending on the nature and severity of the disability, special education teachers and parents may play more of an ongoing role in the child's life even after he or she leaves secondary education (NASET, 2007). Notwithstanding, helping students with disabilities to secure post-high employment is the main priority of special education teachers responsible for transitioning these students to adulthood (Eisenman, 2003). Many educators in secondary education settings understand the need to help students engage in meaningful career exploration and to foster positive beliefs and behaviors in students that will lead to success in future workplace and/or college settings (Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010). According to Smith, Gartin, Murdick, and Hilton (2010), "Special Educators are responsible for facilitating the transition process by encouraging parent and student participation and facilitating their participation in transition planning" (p. 2).

Although families piece together support networks, invest personal resources, and juggle multiple roles and responsibilities to help their children achieve fulfilling futures, teachers must ensure that they equip parents with needed information and resources (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009). Transition related best practices, namely self-determination practices, may not be widely applied in the public schools in which future educators are obtaining experience (Young, 2007). Furthermore, several first-year teachers felt that because these practices were not employed in their schools, it would be

difficult to implement these best practices since there appeared to be little support and knowledge about this approach (Young, 2007).

Because schools rely heavily on special education teachers to implement and manage transition planning and services, it is disconcerting that teachers feel unprepared in those areas (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). Addressing federal mandates regarding both the delivery of transition services and access to the general education curriculum has been a challenge for secondary education special educators (Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008). Condorman and Katsiyannis (2002) conducted a survey of 132 secondary special education teachers in Wisconsin and their results coincided with similar teacher surveys done by Asselin, Todd-Allen, and deFur (1998). Results of their findings indicated that special education teachers carry an ever increasing work load through the addition of multiple roles and responsibilities. In addition to providing direct classroom instruction, teachers listed other time consuming tasks such as writing IEPs and lesson plans, and conducting assessments. According to Benitz et al. (2009) and Knott and Asselin (1999), teachers' level of confidence in providing transition services were found to vary significantly. These surveys of teachers also revealed that those who rated themselves high in their transition knowledge and competencies were found to be most likely to be documenting and implementing transition practices when compared to those who rated themselves lower. Nonetheless, more experience in the teaching field did not result in higher ratings, perhaps because transition mandates, agencies, and paperwork have changed over time. Furthermore, many teachers felt that they lacked the training necessary to be successful in transition plan development and rated their incidences of transition practice implementation as low

(Knott & Asselin, 1999). Knott and Asselin (1999) surveyed 217 teachers in Virginia and found that those who gained transition information through attending conferences were most likely to rate themselves as confident in their background knowledge above those who participated in transition related college courses.

Ten years later Benitez et al. (2009) surveyed 557 teachers across 31 states looking for their perceptions of transition knowledge and levels of implementation. Despite a decade to become familiar with transition practices, Benitez et al. (2009) showed results similar to Knott and Asselin (1999). Both studies found that teachers of students with mental retardation or multiple disabilities were most likely to feel confident in implementing transition practices compared to teachers of students with learning disabilities. Each study also pointed to teacher apprehension when collaborating with outside service agencies. Despite interagency collaboration being listed as the fourth most important factor in creating successful transitions by teachers, Knott and Asselin (1999) found it ranked 25th out of 31 total competencies implemented by those same teachers. Ten years later, out of six domains of transition competency, teachers report collaboration as fifth with regards to levels of preparation and frequency of implementation (Benitez et al., 2009). These two studies, done 10 years apart, present similar findings that suggest improvements in transition may need more than just time.

Based on their research study, Williams-Diehm and Lynch (2007) insist that

The primary step in creating effective transition planning is to fully educate teachers on the transition process. Teachers must not only hear the legal requirements but also be convinced of its importance in predicting and guiding post-secondary success of the students. Teachers who do not understand transition planning are less effective in ensuring that the students receive the maximum benefits resulting from the transition plan. (p. 8)

Given these needs, it is crucial for educators and other professionals to better understand

the individual and program level components that may support effective transition

outcomes (Lindstrom et al., 2007). In addition to impacting educational opportunities for

students, legislation has increased the involvement of school counselors with students

with disabilities (Milsom, 2002).

The Role of School Guidance Counselors and Transition Planning

According to Milsom (2007) for school guidance counselors," there is a distinct

area of need for advocacy in working with students with special needs is in the area of

transition planning" (p. 5). Studies over the past 20 years reveal that while there is an

increase in students with disabilities graduating from high school with a diploma, there

remains a considerable gap between students with and without disabilities when it comes

to postsecondary education (National Council on Disability, 2003). Additionally, Milsom

(2002) reveals that,

> In 1980, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a
> position statement concerning school counselor roles with *students* with
> disabilities. That statement was revised in 1986 and again in 1993 (Baumberger &
> Harper, 1999). ASCA adopted two more focused position statements that discuss
> school counselor roles in relation to working with *students* with attention
> deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ASCA, 2000) and with *students* with *special needs*
> (ASCA, 1999). In those statements, ASCA suggested that school counselors
> advocate for *students* with disabilities in the school and/or community, assist
> *students* with disabilities in planning for transitions to careers or to post-
> secondary institutions, assist with the establishment and implementation of
> behavior modification plans for *students* with disabilities, counsel parents and
> families of *students* with disabilities, and make referrals to other appropriate
> specialists for *students* with disabilities. ASCA also suggested that school
> counselors provide activities for *students* with disabilities to improve their self-
> esteem, provide feedback on the social and academic performance of *students*
> with disabilities to the multidisciplinary team, provide individual and group
> *counseling* to *students* with disabilities, provide social-skills training to *students*
> with disabilities, serve as consultants to parents and staff on the characteristics
> and *special needs* of *students* with disabilities, and serve on the multidisciplinary
> team to identify and provide services to *students* with disabilities. (p. 1)

It is a highly demanding job with expertise needed in psychology, counseling methods and career guidance (School Counseling http://www.school-counselor.org/high-school-counseling.html). Secondary education school counselors are professional educators with a mental health perspective who understand and respond to the challenges presented by today's diverse student population (ASCA, 2010). Secondary education school counselors (ASCA, 2010) responsibilities include goal setting, academic plans, career plans, problem solving, education in understanding of self, including strengths and weaknesses, and transition plans.

Of the four program goals examined in the 2002 FRSS survey, helping students with their academic achievement in high school was the most emphasized goal of high school guidance programs while schools were least likely to report that the most emphasized goal of their guidance programs was helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school. However, no national data exist that provide a current picture of high school guidance counseling programs and activities.

Marshak, Dandeneau, Prezant, and L'Amorneaux (2009) argue that school counselors often undertake inappropriate activities (e.g., scheduling of classes, student discipline, and clerical duties). In addition, according to Marshak et al. (2009), only a minority of school counselors receives course work in the area of disability in their graduate education, yet they are faced with great responsibility for these students. Despite the acknowledged need for education to increase school counselor competence, however, most school counselor education programs in the early 1990s did not require either specific coursework related to students with disabilities or practical experiences with those students (Milsom, 2002). Despite these pressures and constraints, the potential of

school counselors to make a real difference in the lives of students with disabilities is far greater than is often realized (Marshak et al., 2009). School counselors can be more effective in their work with parents of students with disabilities as well as with the students themselves, the students' teachers, and other students if they understand parental perspectives (Taub, 2006).

The Role of Parents and Transition Planning

The primary role of parents during transition planning is to encourage and support students to plan and achieve their educational goals (Leone et al., 2003). Parents and teachers believe that most education professional did not have a good understanding of the learning potential of students with disabilities (Luzzo & MacGregor, 2001). Many economically disadvantaged parents often lack the experience and information concerning college preparation (Conley & Venezia, 2003). Parents of high-risk children may be less involved in their child's education, have lower expectations for achievement outcomes, and have poor relationships with teachers (Leone et al., 2003). Because parents of children with behavior problems are likely to have histories of aversive interactions with the school, they may avoid involvement with school personnel on behalf of their children (Leone et al., 2003).

Research supports a strong family involvement to ensure the success of the transition process (Gillis, 2006). Additionally, research has shown that parent participation and leadership in transition planning play an important role in assuring successful transitions for youth with disabilities (DeStefano, Heck, Hasazi, & Furney, 1999; Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997; Hasazi, et al., 1999; Kohler, 1993; Taymans, Corbey, & Dodge, 1995). In testimony before the Commission, parents reported a lack of

information regarding the purpose and processes associated with transition services, including information related to community agencies and resources. In addition, parents reported that effective strategies for increasing parental participation were not routinely implemented. Parents desire relatively simple measures such as receiving information about the IEP and community resources, creating an atmosphere of open communication, frequently communicating about school services and activities, and formally recognizing the valuable role that parents and students play in the transition process. Parents of children with disabilities also wanted revised, clear requirements ensuring their full inclusion at all stages of the process—from inception to implementation of all transition services.

The Commission recognizes that parents and their children are the most qualified individuals to provide information about the needs, wants, and goals of the children as they transition from school to post-school activities (ASCA, 2010). Therefore, the Commission recommends that IDEA include provisions providing for the full participation of students and their parents in the determination of the type and delivery of transition services provided (ASCA, 20010). Parents also need support in navigating the transition from the entitlement model under IDEA to the eligibility model used by other programs providing post-school services to people with disabilities (Gillis, 2006).

According to the George Washington University HEATH Resource Center (2006), parent involvement is also essential to effective transition planning. Parents know their children's strengths, preferences, learning styles, and goals better than anyone (George Washington University HEATH Resource Center, 2006). Parents also should encourage students to develop independent decision-making and self-advocacy skills. An

additional practice with promise for supporting the transition process is family involvement and participation. Educators are on the front lines with regard to career awareness, but parents have an enormous impact (Davis, 2013).

Career Awareness and Transition Planning

For the past hundred years, career education has lacked a clear direction and the movement has been sporadic due to a lack of funding, dissipation of interest, and no explicit definition of career education (Benning, Bergt, & Sausaman, 2003). Many students with disabilities have not had the same exposure opportunities as their non-disabled peers to the necessary career preparation options (McCain et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the 1994 School-to-Work Act was terminated in 1997 and The National Advisory Council for Career Education terminated in 1982. Career education consists of several concepts that include hands-on training, development of good work habits, the use of private sector resources, and the promotion of positive work ethics (Benning et al., 2003). Positive community perceptions of work-based learning, better rapport with employers, and inclusion with school learning are vital for widespread acceptance and implementation of effective work-based learning for students receiving special education services (Luecking & Gramlich, 2003). These types of experiences should be an integral part of secondary education for students with disabilities, regardless of the nature of the disability or the need for special education services (Luecking & Gramlich, 2003).

When students participate in a post-high school transitioning program that includes job placement, follow-up, and continuation of a transition planning team, they will probably obtain employment (Eisenman, 2003). Career exploration, decision making, learning appropriate ways of interacting in social and work situations, finding

and maintaining employment, and learning self-advocacy skills should be a part of the IEP program. School-to-Careers is a series of activities designed to motivate students to excel academically. With help from teachers and business owners, students can apply their academic learning to real-world tasks and tackle workplace challenges that build on classroom assignments and tests (Neumark, 2004). Middle school students should be provided with a foundation of career awareness and career exploration experiences (Luzzo & MacGregor, 2001). The need for career education at the middle school level is necessary to lay the foundation for future career development and should be embedded into the curriculum (Benning et al, 2003). Students of all ages should be exposed to some type of career education with their everyday subjects so that it is not seen as a separate entity (Benning et al., 2003). There needs to be further research into the possible benefits that junior high school students might obtain from earlier career counseling and the resulting changes in career development that senior high students may experience, would provide information and create greater insight into the potential benefits of earlier career education (Pyne & Bernes, 2002).

It is impossible for students to be prepared for every aspect of life, but common basic job skills can be used to prepare them for future careers. Career education creates an impact on the climate of the classroom through the use of multiple intelligences, career counseling, journaling, field trips, and cross-curricular activities (Benning et al., 2003). Career awareness, or the knowledge of career options and requirements, is necessary to understand the kind of postsecondary preparation to pursue (Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2013).

Post-secondary Preparation and Transition Planning

Bridging the gap in transition services requires that both high schools and postsecondary service providers jointly organize, determine, and evaluate the unique needs of students with learning disabilities (Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994). Professionals who counsel students with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education should help the student choose a college or university that provides the needed services (Hadley, 2007). "While individuals with disabilities are protected under IDEA and NCLB acts, it is crucial for educators, counselors, parents, and students to know that actual disability services provided to students in the post-secondary environment are only provided when asked for; thus, support services are no longer guaranteed for students after high school" (ADA, 2008; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1973; U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d. as cited in Naugle, Campbell, & Gray, 2010, p. 6). Alignment of the high school curriculum content with the skills and knowledge students will be expected to know when entering college can help prepare students for success in college or the workplace (Plucker et al., 2004).

Professional standards for personnel working with children with disabilities were developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), but there are no similar standards for professionals educating adults with disabilities (Norlander, Shaw, & McGuire, 1990). The Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE) is exploring the development of professional postsecondary standards (Norlander et al., 1990). More students with disabilities are graduating from high school than students 10 years ago, college attendance has tripled, and these students have higher employment rates than older individuals with disabilities

(Katsiyannis et al., 1998). Success in college depends on how effectively high schools prepare students to include opportunities for students to take high-level courses that will prepare them for the rigors of college or the workforce (Plucker et al., 2004). Consider student engagement in the selection and development of reform initiatives (Zapf, Spradlin, & Plucker, 2006). Change must be universal if all high school students are to be prepared for college and the workforce (Plucker et al., 2004). The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) assists with changes in instructional placements and key transitions including post-secondary education.

Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and Transition Planning

Concurrent efforts to improve the standard of education by a number of national and state commissions initiated middle and high school reforms that emphasized the movement towards smaller and personalized learning environment (NCWD, 2010). The introduction of the individual learning plan (ILP) was among the various education initiatives recommended by National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 1996) in the Breaking Ranks report. ILP becomes a crucial education strategy for schools to build learning climates that are conducive for learning and an important tool for School Advisory to build relationships between teachers and students (NASSP, 2004). "The ILP movement had its start in the 1990s after several prominent studies showed the need for all students, not just those with disabilities, to be better prepared for 21st Century jobs" (NCWD, 2010, p. 2). The ILP format is mostly web-based and can include information such as a student's academic record, extracurricular activities, and volunteer or intern experiences, along with documentation of those experiences (NCWD, 2010).

Many states have adopted policies that require all high school students to develop and maintain an individual learning plan in order to make schools more personalized and improve student outcomes (NCWD, 2010). Solberg, Wills, and Osman (2012) reveal that "a total of 35 states currently mandate some form of an ILP" (p. 1). Consequently, states and schools have their own definition of what an ILP is, and it is called by many names, including Next Step Plan (New Mexico), Individual Graduation Plan (South Carolina), and High School and Beyond Plan (Washington) (NCWD, 2010). All students in grades K-12, enrolled in non-charter schools of The School District of Philadelphia have an ILP. NCWD (2010) states:

> While Individual Learning Plans are not required by federal law, families should view the ILP as an optional way to strengthen the transition-planning sections of their youth's IEP and to help students become actively involved in creating their transition plan. (p. 5)

According to NCWD (2010), the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy in affiliation with the Institute for Educational Leadership began a research study in 2008 on the effectiveness of Individualized Learning Plans. States were selected based on the unique features of their ILP policy framework, and the prospects for identifying and documenting promising practices. These states include: Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Washington. Based on recommendations from state and district administrators, 15 schools were solicited and agreed to participate in a research study and technical assistance related to ILPs. In fall 2008, an Institute was convened with teams from each school in New Orleans as a kick-off for the project. In spring 2009, schools participated in two research studies. One was an online survey completed by students. A total of 53 one-hour focus groups were completed in the 15 schools.

The focus group results of students who used the ILP process revealed that youth appreciated the online career assessments and especially the "How do I get there?" planning. They also found great value in the self-assessments portion of the ILP, which helps students discover such things as their learning styles and interests. The process also helped them understand the relevance of their academic classes as they were linked to specific career goals. Parents in the focus group witnessed how using an ILP helped their students focus and connect career choices to possible salaries. In some schools, the principal and staff (teachers and counselors) actively engage in the design and use of the ILP, integrating them into the curriculum on an ongoing basis. School staff also reported positive results, such as increased links to community workplace experiences and more students discussing their future plans and considering college. This study also revealed that in many ways, ILPs shared common objectives and intentions with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) by: 1) Individualizing learning for students, 2) preparing students to transit effectively after secondary schools, and 3) striving toward high standards in learning and student outcomes. The design of ILP is modeled closely after the IEP (NCWD, 2010).

In February 2013, the American Youth Policy Forum and the Institute for Educational Leadership, Center for Workforce Development partnered to present the findings of the Center's research on the use of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) (American Youth Policy Form, 2013). Presenters summarized the research findings and discussed practitioners' and policymakers' experiences implementing and scaling up the use of ILPs. The research team established a study group of schools in four states, engaging educators, families, and students in focus groups and surveys. In addition, they

conducted a 50-state web review of ILP purposes and implementation strategies and in-depth conversations with select state, district, and school officials. One researcher indicated the use of ILPs could play a critical role in supporting youth with disabilities. He further explained that there is growing evidence that ILPs strengthen IEPs due to starting planning earlier, explicitly focusing on attention to postsecondary outcomes, and significantly increasing time spent during the week focused on the future planning. A growing number of states are promoting the use of ILP content as an integrated component in the IEP. National collaborations can help move this effort forward. According to NCWD (2013):

> The ILP research studies by NCWD/Youth and its partners indicate that ILPs show promise as an effective strategy for delivering quality career development opportunities that improve several student outcomes. Students who were more engaged in ILP activities reported stronger, goal-setting skills, increased motivation to attend school, and increased academic self-efficacy which leads to better academic achievement, stress and health management, and readiness to engage in career decision-making. Teachers, school counselors, and family members highly value ILPs and believe that it helps students become more focused learners who complete more challenging coursework in order to reach their self-defined career and life goals. (p. 1)

According to research from The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, a Cambridge, Massachusetts based non-profit organization, the effectiveness of ILP programs depends on the teachers, training, and time devoted to working with students, however, they did discover promising results from the process: more engaged students, improved academic motivation, and personal accountability (Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, 2011).

In 2007, the New Jersey Department of Education was piloting a Personalized Student Learning Plan Program in 16middle and high schools. They produced the resource guide which summarizes the research conducted on personalized student

learning plans in other states. Before implementing the pilot, they surveyed 12 states to collect information about types and formats of different plans (web-based or paper, grade levels). Once Chris Christie became Governor, this pilot program ceased. I was really looking forward to this movement in NJ, so, that is why I created a transition planning portfolio for students with disabilities that resembled an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The purpose of the transition planning portfolio, just like the ILP, was to ensure the student's plans for high school and beyond align with available options. Development of the plan involves reviewing school and state specific information including: high school graduation requirements; high school course options; postsecondary education and training programs offered within the state and local community; and occupations/career clusters in demand locally and statewide (NCWD, 2011). The Student Transition Planning Portfolio (STPP) that I designed would follow the student with a disability throughout his or her high school years. The Child Study Teams (CSTs) would be responsible for implementing and monitoring the STPPs for the students on their case loads.

Conclusion

Every person has the potential to benefit from some type of post-secondary education. For many students, graduating from high school is not the end of their educational journey, but the foundation for life-long learning. Whether a student attends a college or university, a technical school, an apprenticeship training program, or joins the military, transitioning planning is paramount to their success. The importance of having transition services developed and implemented is not only vital to students with disabilities, but it is the law. Several areas of further research were determined through

this literature review. I found that there was limited information regarding how school districts were supposed to implement and monitor transition services. The ultimate goal for transition services is to provide practical information and activities to increase the probability of success for high school students with special needs transitioning from high school to adulthood. These services will also provide recommended courses, skills, and academic activities that students should participate in to be successful in high school as well. Students must be involved and engaged in any process regarding their education. This allows them an opportunity to take ownership in their overall education experience.

Chapter III

Methodology

Williamson, Robertson, and Casey (2010) report "that transition outcomes for students with disabilities rank below those of their non-disabled peers. As a result, schools and agencies need to develop programs specifically designed to assist students with disabilities in their transition to adulthood" (p. 10). These students also need guidance from their teachers, child study team members, guidance counselors, and parents as they try to set and achieve post-high school goals. The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (NJAC 6A:14, NJDOE, 2006) mandates that transition services will consists of a "coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within a results-oriented process." Additionally, NJAC 6A:14 (NJDOE, 2006) designates case managers as responsible for transition planning. As a newly assigned case manager at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I realized that a "results-oriented" transition planning process did not exist for secondary education students with disabilities at this particular school. Therefore, the purpose of my action research study was to develop and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensured IDEA transition services mandates were implemented for secondary education students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classroom. The following research questions guided this study:

1) What were the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?

2) How well did students with disabilities feel that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?

3) What were the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?

4) How did my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented transition planning process?

Research Design

According to Burns and Grove (1993), "research design guides the research in planning and implementing a study in a way that is most likely to achieve the intended goal" (p. 261). Action research was the best methodology for this study because "action research is a process of systematic inquiry, usually cyclical, conducted by those inside a community rather than by outside experts; its goal was to identify action that would generate some improvement the researcher believed important" (Hinchey, 2008, p. 4). According to Glesne (2006), action research allowed me an opportunity to improve the transition services for students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School through cycles of planning a transition planning process, implementing a transition planning process, observing and evaluating the findings of my data, and reflecting on the process and outcome to determine the next phase of the transition planning process. Action research is intended to immediately improve practice within the area under investigation (McMillian, 1999). Herr and Henderson (2005) further suggest that "action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (p. 4). Glesne (2006) also found that "action research should reflect the needs of the environment with the sole purpose of creating change to address student

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success" (p. 17). This action research study "was a tool that allowed the researcher to practice to become more effective and to reflect on how effective she was and how she might improve" (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007, p. 221). This action research study goal was to involve the researcher, special education teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and students in working together to improve our skills, techniques, and strategies in order to change our instruction to impact the students with disabilities at our school (Ferrance, 2000).

Participation in action research can encompass many activities (Munt, 2002). It can be the involvement of stakeholders in the initial planning stages of a project, the development of action plans, or being a member of working groups, reference groups and focus groups. It could mean receiving project up-dates in the form of a newsletter, or providing reflections or feedback about the implementation of a project strategy from a project recipient's point of view (Munt, 2002). As a case manager at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I had the unique role of being a participant researcher (Hinchey, 2008). During this action research, I ensured that we structured routines for continuous confrontation with the data regarding the health of our school community by identifying the problem area, collecting and organizing the data, interpreting the data, taking action based on the data, and reflection throughout the three cycles (Ferrance, 2000; Mills, 2003). Using action research allowed me to spend time on-site to study the students and staff in their settings (Bogdan& Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006). I had the opportunity to continue to be a part of the cyclical process for a longer timeframe because I am a case manager responsible for transition planning.

Mixed methods approach. For this action research study, I utilized a mixed methods approach with a transformative design to collect data. Mixed methods is a technique for gathering, investigating, collaborating, or combining both quantitative (measurable) and qualitative (non-statistical) data during certain phases in the methodology portion of a research study. The "transformative design gave importance to value-based, action-oriented research, such as in participatory action research and empowerment approaches" (Creswell, 2009, p. 66). A transformative design has a theoretical view as a predominate viewpoint within a model that contains both quantitative and qualitative data and provides a context for matters of importance, strategies for gathering information, and affects or changes anticipated by research (Creswell, 2009; Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) revealed that mixed methods research "is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (p. 123). Mertens (2007) argues that mixed methods allows for the gathering of various types of data for various purposes.

By employing more than one strategy of collecting and analyzing data, researchers can augment study results, and expand the extent and complexity of understanding the study results (Creswell, 2009). According to Mertens (2007), by vigilantly formulating mixed methods to attain information regarding the conditions that validates the conduct of the study, opportunities are opened for those whose concerns have been customarily ignored. Using both qualitative and quantitative forms of data allows researchers to concurrently take a broad view of the findings from a sample to a

population and to gain a more meaningful understanding of the conditions at hand (Hanson et al., 2005). Another reason for combining both quantitative and qualitative data is to better understand this action research study problem by converging both quantitative (broad numeric trends) and qualitative (detailed views) data and to advocate for change for students with disabilities (Creswell, 2009). "Quantitative data was used with the intentions of making generalizations about social phenomena, creating predictions concerning those phenomena, and providing causal explanation" (Glesne, 2006, p. 4).

There are several challenges when using a mixed methods approach to research. "When methods are mixed without careful consideration of the particular assumptions or rules and expectations regarding their conduct, corruption of those methods can occur such that results obtained by them become subject to question" (Bazeley, 2002, p. 4). According to Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, and Rupert (2007), "Another challenge is the loss of depth and flexibility that occurs when qualitative data are quantized" (p. 25). "Analyzing, coding, and integrating unstructured with structured data is a complex and time consuming process" (Driscoll et al., 2007, p. 25).

According to Sweetman, Badiee, and Creswell (2010), "the concerns are not only the paucity of mixed methods studies that incorporate advocacy, but also that the qualitative component in these studies is deficient in considering the needs of the marginalized that might lead to a redressing of critical social issues" (p. 442). "Unfortunately, forming research questions is much more difficult in mixed methods studies than in mono-method (i.e., quantitative or qualitative) investigations because it

involves the formation of both quantitative and qualitative research questions within the same inquiry" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 477).

Data Collection Strategies

Data collection is a precise, systematic, method of gathering information relevant to the research purpose, or of addressing research objectives, and research questions (Burns & Grove, 1993, p. 766). With action research, I was able to observe, implement, evaluate, and reflect, systematically analyzing the results through a cyclical process. This process allowed me to determine whether the new "results-oriented" transition planning process is an effective tool for students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School, and why it was effective, and if not, determine the area in need of revision, and create a new action to improve the next cycle (Hinchey, 2008). Mixed methods were a key factor in shifting through a cyclical transformative research model that provides an approach for addressing the diverse needs of the community (Mertens, 2007).

Questionnaires. Questionnaires are tools commonly used in quantitative research to efficiently collect data on participants' perceptions (Hinchey, 2008; Patton, 2002). The advantages of questionnaires are many, but when they are administered anonymously, participants feel encouraged to answer honestly, especially when the questions are sensitive (Patton, 2002). Questionnaires can be a written document that is completed by hand, a face-to-face interview, online, or a structured telephone interview-short-answer or multiple-choice questions (Hinchey, 2008; Patton, 2002). The questionnaires employed in this study were questionnaires written on paper and several were submitted electronically.

During Cycle One, I developed and administered the questionnaires for the students with disabilities, special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance

(Appendices A, B, C, D) to gather data in a relatively short period of time, which in turn assisted me in finding emerging themes of the participants' attitudes, perceptions, characteristics, learning, or behavior (Creswell, 2003). A closed-ended likert-scale questionnaire (quantitative) (See Appendix A) was developed to determine how well the high school students with disabilities felt that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. The Likert scale type questionnaire used an ordered, one-dimensional scaling method (Patton, 2002). The scale ranged from "A" to "E." A was equated to strongly agree, B to agree, C to no opinion, D to disagree, E to strongly disagree. An open-ended questionnaire (qualitative) (see Appendices B, C, D) was developed to examine the perceptions of our high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. The questionnaire questions were derived from the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) for 21st Century Life and Career and the New Jersey Administrative Code, 6A, Chapter 14. The open-ended nature of the approach with the school personnel questionnaires allowed them to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Focus groups. The research study used a structured focus group format. Powell, Single, and Lloyd (1996) define a focus group as "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment, from personal experience, on the topic that is the subject of the research" (p. 499). Krueger (1998) reported that focus groups are an effective way to obtain results from a small group of individuals, and they also provide an atmosphere for collecting information that is more relaxed and natural. De Bruin

(2006) states "focus groups aim to draw on the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a such a manner as would not be possible when using any other method" (p. 34). "In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of" (Berg, 2001, p.115).

Field notes. "A field notebook is the primary recording tool of a qualitative researcher" (Glesne, 2006, p. 55). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe field notes as "written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data" (p. 118-119). According to Glesne (2006), as a researcher, "my role will become that of inscriber, and soon it will be expected that if anything at all is going on, I will write it down" (p. 57). Glesne (2006) suggests that "my field notes should be both descriptive and analytic" (p. 56). According to Mulhall (2002) "what may be considered as important and interesting to write into my field notes will be affected by my professional and personal worldview" (p. 310).

Participants' observations. As a participant observer, I took part in the "results-oriented" transition planning process experience by observing the student-to-student and student-to-participant observer dynamics, meeting with these students on a weekly basis, individually, and collectively, meeting with staff individually and collectively, visiting the students and conducting programs within the school, and interacting with the students and staff during the course of the school day. Direct observation of student performance should be conducted within the natural school, employment, education or training, or community setting (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997). The multiple opportunities to engage the students and staff at various levels allowed me to get to know them and build

trusting relationships, which provided me with opportunities to frequently observe and

document my interactions with them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). "Clearly through

observation it is possible to ascertain whether what people say they do and what they do

in reality" (Mulhall, 2002, p. 308). Creswell (2009) explains that observations are those

in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of the participants

at Michael J. Hawkins High School.

Document Analysis. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in

which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an

assessment topic. Analyzing documents incorporates coding content into themes similar

to how focus group or interview transcripts are analyzed. Collecting documents such as

journals and participants' work represents data which are thoughtful in that participants

have given attention to compiling them and serves as written evidence (Creswell, 2009, p.

180). The documents that I collected served as a mechanism to validate my observations

(Glesne, 2006). I also maintained a journal to capture and document my leadership

journey through the development of the "results-oriented" transition planning process.

Journaling assisted me with reconnaissance; taking time to reflect on my beliefs, and

purpose through self-reflection, description, and explanation (Mills, 2003).

Setting and Context

Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS) is a large urban high school in New

Jersey. The city population in the 2010 census was 77, 344. In 2010-2011, over 14, 000

students were enrolled in the school district. Based on this school's low socio-economic

status, it receives Federal Title 1 funding and is also an Abbott District school. In 2009,

MJHHS had 62% of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch programs while New

Jersey overall had 30% of eligible students for free or reduced price lunch programs. Eligibility for the National School Lunch Program is based on family income levels. Student Ethnicity in 2009 was Black 74%, Hispanic 24%, and White 1%. In 2009, MJHHS had 10 students for every full-time equivalent teacher. The New Jersey average is 12 students per full-time equivalent teacher. The student population is approximately 1016 with 39% of students classified with a disability. The teaching staff consists of approximately 61 teachers with 14 being special education teachers.

Michael J. Hawkins High School is one of New Jersey's "persistently lowest-achieving" schools in terms of academic achievement and is a recipient of the NJ School Improvement Grants (SIG). Schools are identified either because of consistently low test scores or graduation rates below 60 percent. As part of the SIG we were required to adopt and implement the Turnaround model. The Turnaround model requires that the district replace the school's principal, unless that principal has been hired in the last two years as part of a reform effort (NJ Dept. of Education, 2011). The Turnaround model also requires schools to extend learning time for students, use student data to inform instruction, and implement strategies such as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions to recruit and retain high-quality staff. Lastly, the Turnaround model contains an additional requirement to replace no less than 50 percent of the staff.

Participants

Four groups of participants were involved in this study. The first group was comprised of 15 students with disabilities that I recruited from my caseload that attended Michael J. Hawkins High School during the 2011-2012 academic school year. The

student participants consisted of 10 males and five females between the ages of 15-21 in grades 9th through 11th. There were six African American males, four Hispanics males, four Hispanic females, and one African American female. There were four eleventh graders, four tenth graders, and seven ninth graders. The students were classified with a disability with at least one of the following conditions: mild to moderate cognitively impaired; specific learning disabilities; and/or emotional/behavioral disorders. The other three groups consisted of eight special education teachers, one school administrator, and three guidance counselors.

A permission letter of parental and student consent for students to participate in the study was attached with the student questionnaire (Appendices E & F). It explained that that the goal of this study was to develop and implement a "results-oriented" process that insures Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) transition services mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms. The letter of consent also explained that with their permission, their child would complete the attached questionnaire that would take less than 10 minutes of their student's time. In this letter I asked the parents to talk with their child about the study because I needed the parents' permission in order for their child to participate in the study. I further explained that even if the parent or guardian said "yes" that the child could still decide not to participate in this study.

I shared that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and their child was free to withdraw his or her participation at any time without penalty. I also explained that there was no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. I disclosed that participation or non-participation would not affect

their child's relationship with me or the school, nor would it affect their child's standing in his/her class. I communicated to the parents that I wanted their child to answer all the questions as honestly as possible and their child need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information would remain anonymous, I informed the parents that their child's name would not be included on the questionnaire and no data that were recorded would be linked to their child's name or any other identifier. Lastly, I discussed that by the parents allowing the students to complete and return the questionnaire was indication that their agreement to have their child voluntarily participate in the research study. The parents were instructed to seal the completed questionnaire and signed permission letter in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided and promptly mail it back to me.

Theoretical View and Change Frameworks

Participatory and transformative are the two paradigms for this action research study. Participatory worldview is influenced by political concerns and the empowerment of a marginalized population in which the researcher collaborates with other participants serving as active members of the research team, helping to form questions, analyzing the data, and implementing the results in practice to improve our society (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008). Mertens (2007) states that "the role of the researcher in a transformative paradigm is one recognizes inequalities and injustices in society and strives to challenge the status quo, who is a bit of a provocateur with overtones of humility, and who possesses a shared since of responsibility" (p. 212). "The transformative paradigm uses a mixed methods approach

because research does not necessarily serve the needs of those who have traditionally been excluded from positions of power in the research world" (Mertens, 2007, p. 212).

The theoretical view/change frameworks for this study are self-determination theory, transition planning framework, and Fullan's Moral Purpose framework. Wehman (2011) argues that "Self-Determination skills are necessary for transition planning to succeed" (p. 6). "Professionals and researchers in the transition field have identified student self-determination as a best practice in transition planning" (Field et al., 1998). Students with disabilities need to learn how to self-advocate on their own behalf before they graduate from high school. Once they graduate from high school they are no longer entitled to transition planning under the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

The Self-Determination theory was initially developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan at the University of Rochester, and has been elaborated and refined by scholars from many countries (University of Rochester, 2008). The Self-Determination theory proposes that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is necessary for effective internalization and for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being (Benz et al., 2004; Denison, 2001; Durlak et al., 1994; Eisenman 2003; Gil, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Trainor, 2005, 2007; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner, & Lawrence, 2007; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007; Young, 2007).

At Michael J. Hawkins High School, we must ensure that teachers, case managers, guidance counselors, and school administrators, facilitate self-determined learning for our students with disabilities that supports the innate need to feel connected, effective, and argentic as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills (Ryan &

Deci, 2000). This staff also needs training in order to address the need for self-determination skills among our students with disabilities (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003). Helping our students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School with self-determination skills will also help them to take control of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process (Bremer et al., 2003). In addition, "students with disabilities need self-determination skills to successfully transition to, adjust to, and remain in college" (Getzel & Thoma, 2008, p. 78). According to Getzel and Thoma (2008) "there is a great deal of literature describing the importance of and critical need for self-determination skills during the transition process of students with disabilities from secondary to postsecondary settings" (p. 78).

"Transition planning framework blends multiple standards in a process of continuous, systematic planning and decision making to define and achieve postsecondary goals" (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006, p. 9). Transition planning is a student-centered activity that requires a collaborative effort. At Michael J. Hawkins High School, the responsibilities for transition planning needs to be shared by the students, parents, and secondary education personnel, and postsecondary personnel, all of whom are members of the transition team (NJCLD, 1994). "Effective transition planning programs are characterized by the consistent involvement and participation of appropriate individuals" (National Council on Disability, 2000, as cited in Levine, Marder, & Wagner, 2004, p. 2). Creating a transition planning process at Michael J. Hawkins High School is essential in that it allows case managers to follow a systematic and thoughtful process of planning a post-school environment for our students with disabilities. For students with disabilities to grow into adults who can function successfully in society,

secondary education educators must provide school services that prepare them for the transition to adulthood (Dowdy et al., 1990; Zigmond, 2006).

Hulett (2007) "described transition planning as the eighth component to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process and is a requirement for every student's annual IEP" (as cited in Tucker, 2012, p. 25). The transition planning process should be results driven to produce high-quality outcomes for postsecondary living (Miller et al., 2007). "The transition plan must be reviewed annually and a statement of the needs or services must be included in the IEP" (Tucker, 2012, p. 25). During an IEP meeting the team must review the student's courses of study, training, supported employment, integrated employment, adult services, community participation, and independent living skills (Tucker, 2012). In addition, they must look at community agencies that assist with the child and these services are at no cost to the student (Miller et al., 2007). As stated previously, transition planning includes a coordinated set of goals and objectives to meet the transition needs of students with disabilities as they transition into postsecondary life (NJDOE, 2006). The IEP should include vocational education, community living, home and family issues, financial planning, recreation and leisure, mobility, and health issues. The student should be the focus of transition planning by taking into account the desires, talents, interests, and preferences of the child (NJDOE, 2006; Wehman, 2011). Vocational training, postsecondary options, and continuing education opportunities should be included in the transition process (Snell & Brown, 2006).

Transition planning requires that service providers develop and implement plans that describe the services provided, assessment and evaluation measures, obligations of team members, person who are part of the plan, and plausible service agencies (Overton,

2009). Team members include the special educators, general educators, community

agencies, student, family members, possible psychologists and counselors, rehabilitation

specialists, and other designated individuals who could provide support in the transition

planning (Overton, 2009; Wehman, 2011). Additionally, the student and parent should be

included in the transition planning process at all stages to secure greater positive

outcomes at the postsecondary level (Escheidt, 2006). Unfortunately, at Michael J.

Hawkins High School, parental participation is very poor during IEP meetings and other

necessary meetings. According to Tucker (2012),

> The National transition goals, which are outlined in IDEA 2004, include
> promoting self-determination and self-advocacy, ensuring that students have
> access to the standards-based curriculum, increasing graduation rates, providing
> access to full participation in postsecondary education and employment,
> increasing parent participation, improving collaboration for optimum school, and
> post-school outcomes, increasing the availability of qualified workforce, and
> encourages full participation in community life, including social, recreation, and
> leisure opportunities. (p. 29)

The change framework for this study is found in Fullan's (2001a) *Leading in a*

Culture of Change work, Moral Purpose. Fullan (2007) argues that change should be

driven by a sense of moral purpose. It is the role of schools to make a positive difference

in their students' lives, and so change must be motivated by a desire to improve the life

chances of young people (Fullan, 2007). Being a parent of a student with disabilities

increases my moral purpose and passion to make a difference in the lives of students with

disabilities. For this study, moral purpose ultimately drives the need to create a transition

planning process for students with disabilities in order to increase their probability of

success as they transition from high school to adulthood. According to Fullan (2001b):

> Public schools need to develop what Coleman (1990) termed "social capital" – to
> help produce citizens who have the commitment, skills, and disposition to foster
> norms of civility, compassion, fairness, trust, collaborative engagement, and

constructive critiques under conditions of great social diversity. Schools also need to develop intellectual capital – problem-solving skills in a technological world – so that all students learn. This too is a moral purpose. To become committed to the development of social and intellectual capital is to understand the goal of moral purpose; to address it productively is to delve into the intricacies of complexity and change. (p. 17)

Additionally, Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2005) imply that "in change knowledge, moral purpose is not just a goal but a process of engaging educators, community leaders, and society as a whole in the moral purpose of reform" (p. 55). During this action research study I attempted to collaborate with educators, community leaders, and other stakeholders to improve the lives of students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School. Fullan et al. (2005) suggest:

Eight drivers that were keys to creating effective lasting change 1) Engaging people's moral purpose; 2) Building Capacity; 3) Understanding the change process; 4) Developing cultures for learning; 5) Developing cultures for evaluations; 6) Focusing on leadership for change; 7) Focusing on coherence making; and 8) Cultivating trilevel development. (p. 54)

"If moral purpose is front and center, the remaining seven drivers become additional forces for enacting moral purpose" (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 55). Through moral purpose, I relied on my passion to make a difference in the lives of students of disabilities to inspire other educators and stakeholders to commit to this study. In regards to building capacity, I provided the policies, strategies, resources, and actions necessary to increase the students' collective power to move transition planning forward. As much as I understood the change process, this step was very difficult and frustrating due to the lack of administrative support. During this action research study, the administration had to take into account factors that were in fact the needs of the students with disabilities, with which they would rather not deal. I felt that since the State of New Jersey did not tackle the plight of students with disabilities with a sense of urgency, neither would the school

administrators. School administrators only address concerns that the State deems critical and the needs of students with disabilities are not critical to the State.

As the school's learning disabilities teacher consultant (LDTC), I developed a culture for learning that involved a set of strategies (Appendix G) designed for the stakeholders to learn during the 10 transition planning process sessions from each other (the knowledge dimension) and become collectively committed to improvement (the affective dimension). Consequently, for the culture for evaluation, I developed several evaluation tools to include exit slips and evaluation forms for ongoing assessment of learning during this action study for action planning. During this action study I could not help but focus on my leadership for change. Based on my position as a LDTC and child study team leader, many faculty and staff members considered me an administrator at the high school. As a result, I was able to get the teachers to perform many of the tasks I needed during this study. For example, several teachers allowed me to utilize their classrooms for the 10 sessions and the majority of the teachers completed the questionnaires. Fullan et al. (2005) reveal that "there is no other driver as essential as leadership for sustainable reform" (p. 57).

Regarding fostering coherence making, during this action research study new patterns of coherence were achieved that enabled the stakeholders to focus more deeply on how they can more effective provide transition planning for our students with disabilities (Fullan et al., 2005). Cultivating Trilevel development was obvious at the school level as well as the district level. Even though there was not drastic transformation at the three levels, I initiated a change movement during this action research study by

implementing a transition planning process (culture of learning) for the students, special education teachers, the Child Study Team (CST), and the District-wide CSTs.

Overview of Action Research Study

The action research project consisted of three cycles that focused on developing and implementing a "results-oriented" transition planning process that insured IDEA transition services mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their IEPs to the classrooms. This study took place over a 19-month period. To develop the framework for the "results-oriented" transition planning process, I began sharing my vision with stakeholders during the fall 2010/spring 2011 semester which entailed meeting with the school principal, the director of special services, and the supervisor of the guidance department.

Cycle 1 – March - September 2011: Pre-planning and Benchmark Data

Cycle 1 was the pre-planning and benchmark data collection cycle to begin the "results-oriented" transition planning process in the fall of 2011. The main purpose of Cycle 1 was to determine how well the high school students with disabilities felt that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood and to examine the perceptions of our high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. During Cycle 1, I developed and administered the questionnaires for the students with disabilities, special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors. A closed-ended likert-scale questionnaire (quantitative) (Appendix A) was developed to determine how well the high school students with disabilities felt that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. An open-ended questionnaire

(qualitative) (Appendices B, C, D) was developed to examine the perceptions of our high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. The questionnaire questions were derived from the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) for 21st Century Life and Career and the New Jersey Administrative Code, 6A, Chapter 14.

Student questionnaires (Appendix A) were mailed home with parental permission and informed consent letters (Appendices E & F). If they decided to participate, they sealed the completed questionnaires and signed parental permission letters in the self-addressed stamped envelopes provided and promptly mailed them back to me. The special education teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators were given their questionnaires (Appendices B, C, and D) during the first week of April 2011. If they decided to participate in the study, they sealed their completed questionnaires in the envelopes provided and promptly forwarded them to my mailbox located in the Michael J. Hawkins High School D-Building main office. The questionnaires were kept anonymous to protect all parties. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose and importance of the questionnaire (Appendices H, I, J). There was a statement at the beginning of the questionnaire to affirm that "completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate the participant's agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study."

During this cycle, I also collected the quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (text) data from the completed student, special education teachers, guidance counselors, and administrator questionnaires. Next, the completed questionnaires' opened-end responses

were transcribed chronologically by question and coded by the number of each participant. For the faculty and staff questionnaires results, I identified themes in advance, "utilizing a priori approach based on my prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). "Priori themes come from the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, commonsense constructs; and from researchers' values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences" (Maxwell 1996, as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). The quantitative data were "reduced to numerical indices or quantifiable bits of information, which are analyzed statistically in order to make generalizations from the study group to other persons and places" (Glesne, 2006, p. 4).

Self-determination theory, transition planning framework, and Fullan's Moral Purpose served as the theoretical/change foundation for developing this results-oriented transition planning process. Research has supported the view that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes. Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives (Bremer et al., 2003). Continued staff development in self-determination skills is needed to ensure that general education faculty understands the characteristics of students with learning disabilities and their need for accommodations (Durlak et al., 1994). Self-determination is not achieved simply because an individual has certain requisite knowledge and skills; it is also important that key people and institutions in the person's life provide a context conducive to self-determination (Bremer et al., 2003).

Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) conducted a study in which they followed up on a group of students who had graduated from high school. The study included 80 students ages 17 to 22 with mental retardation or learning disabilities. Self-determination data were collected prior to their high school exit, using a self-report measure called *The Arc's Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), a 72-item self-report measure that includes a score for global self-determination and subscales for individual autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. Adult outcomes for the students were assessed using a scale completed by parents.

Nearly one year after graduation, findings showed that students whose scores in high school indicated a higher level of self-determination were more likely to have experienced a greater number of positive adult outcomes, including a higher likelihood of being employed and earning more per hour than those who were not self-determined (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 245). The study showed a

> consistent trend characterized by self-determined youth doing better than their peers one year out of school. Members of the high self-determination group were more likely to have expressed a preference to live outside the family home, have a savings or checking account, and be employed for pay. (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 253)

Additionally, according to NJAC 6A (NJDOE, 2006), the expected outcomes of the transition planning process is to focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student; facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, focus on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences and interests, and the student transition-planning

portfolio was designed to enable the development of self-determination skills for students with disabilities.

Cycle 2 - September - January 2012: Program Development and Implementation

The purpose of Cycle 2 was to utilize the student transition-planning portfolios (STPPs) (Appendix K), benchmark data, literature reviewed, self-determination theory, and transition planning framework as the framework to create and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process. A self-determined person is one who sets goals, makes decisions, sees options, solves problems, speaks up for himself or herself, understands what supports are needed for success, and knows how to evaluate outcomes (Martin & Marshall, 1996). Self-determination helps youth with disabilities achieve positive adult outcomes. Several curricula are available to help students learn self-determination skills, and to help families support youth. Beyond youth and their families, others such as teachers, employers, and institutions also need to be committed to creating and maintaining an environment in which self-determination can take place. The result will be a measurable increase in self-sufficiency and, perhaps even more importantly, greater sense of purpose and satisfaction in adulthood.

This cycle also included revising the STPP (Appendix K) that I actually created during my graduate studies that would contain samples of the work that the students had created during the transition planning process and creating a tentative schedule for the transition planning sessions. The student transition-planning portfolio is a strategic planning tool intended to help youth identify and achieve postsecondary goals (NCWD, 2010). Instead of considering the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as the only transition-planning tool, schools and families should view the student transition-planning

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portfolio as an option to expand the transition-planning sections of the IEP (NCWD, 2010). Through the "results-oriented transition-planning process" I literally mapped out a process for students to gain these desired skills, track their progress, and evaluate the program. Students who have self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Transition services must be based on student needs and take into account student interests and preferences. To accomplish this goal, students must be prepared to participate in planning for their future.

During the implementation of the transition planning process, data were collected through journal writing, participants' observations and STPPs, and questionnaires to improve the transition planning process for the 2012-2013 school year. Because this is action research, every week I worked collaboratively with various colleagues and other community stakeholders to improve instruction and increase student achievement. I met with the student participants on a weekly basis during their Period 8 class for 10 weeks to implement the "results-oriented" transition planning process (See Appendix G).

Week 1, the participants were given an introduction and overview of the "results-oriented" transition service process. At this time the students discussed the pre-transition planning questionnaire that they previously completed and were also given their STPPs. As a collaboration activity, an administrator was invited to discuss transition planning process goals. Week 2, the students assessed their interests and skills. I invited community members to discuss their careers. Week 3, students learned how to develop their goals and priorities and create a career plan. As a collaboration activity, I invited vocational teachers to discuss their vocations. Week 4, students learned how to develop a

resume. As a collaboration activity, I invited teachers to review and discuss student resumes. Week 5, students learned how to conduct a job search and job hunting techniques. As a collaboration activity, I invited vocational teachers and administrators to interview students for mock jobs.

Week 6, dress for success. As a collaboration activity, I invited administrators and staff to model dress for success attire for the students. Week 7, students discussed college as an option. As a collaboration activity, my goal was to invite a community college admissions officer or guidance counselor to discuss the college enrollment process. Unfortunately, I was not able to reach this goal. Week 8, Students learned about the military, apprenticeship, and other career options. As a collaboration activity, I invited our JROTC Instructors to discuss the Military. Week 9, students learn about transition assistance resources. As a collaboration activity, I invited the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Independent Living and other agencies to discuss transition assistance resources. Week 10, was the conclusion of the transition planning process sessions. Students completed a post-transition planning process questionnaire to see how far they had come since the beginning of the sessions. The students also evaluated the overall transition planning process.

Cycle 3 - October 2011 – October 2012: Evaluation and Impact Program

The purpose of Cycle 3 was to simultaneously monitor and evaluate the transition planning process outcomes utilizing various measurement devices to include field notes, journals, participant observations, questionnaires, and participants' Student transition-planning portfolios (Appendix K). The transition planning process was implemented as a result of findings from data that were collected throughout Cycles 1, 2, and 3, literature

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review, and the lack of a transition planning process at MJHHS. During this study, students were provided opportunities for empowerment and to feel that their input was valued. Kotter (1996) contends that participants who feel empowered and that their input is valued will work seamlessly to remove barriers to the implementation of change. For many students there was a change in their perspective about school as they took ownership to increase their probability for success for life after high school.

Leadership Reflection, Research Questions, and Recommendations

The purpose of my leadership study was to examine my leadership development and the impact my leadership had on the process through journal writing and a leadership evaluation questionnaire. My leadership study included the assessment of my leadership development through the development and implementation of the transition planning process. Throughout the development and implementation of this program, I monitored and reflected on my leadership growth and development. It was my goal to make the "results-oriented" transition planning process a model program and I was aware that my ability to lead would have a direct impact on the outcome of this study. The collection of my leadership study data includes utilizing field notes, questionnaires, focus groups, and journal entries. My theory-in-use leadership theory is that I am a servant, symbolic, and transformational leader and I used my skills to advance and inspire this program by fostering the leadership abilities in the students and staff working with the program.

During this chapter my research questions were answered and recommendations regarding the transition planning process for 2012-2013 were provided. Research questions were utilized as statements to identify the phenomenon to be studied (Glesne, 2006). My four research questions from Chapter I helped me to concentrate on the

problem of secondary students with disabilities not being prepared for life after high school and the action that I took to implement change. Chapter VII served two purposes: 1) to answer the four research questions, and 2) to provide future recommendations to continue the increased level of transition services that was implemented as a result of the research. During this study, I reviewed all of the data to obtain a better understanding of the research and its impact on the transitional planning needs of the students with disabilities at the school.

This study was validated using triangulation of data sources and instruments including the literature reviewed, both open-ended (qualitative) and Likert-type rating scale (quantitative) questionnaires results, student STPPs, focus group, interviews, field notes, journal entries, and observations. Utilizing mixed methods provides triangulation, explanation, development and expansion, credibility, and the offset of weaknesses in each method (Creswell &Plano Clark, 2011; Johnson et al., 2007; Sandelowski, 2000). For the faculty and staff questionnaire results, I identified themes in advance, "utilizing a priori approach based on my prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). This is important to my study to ensure validity and to provide evidence that as the researcher I have thoroughly sought to understand and report accurate data that will lead to more believable findings (Glesne, 2006).

Conclusion

The importance of having transition services developed and implemented is not only vital to students with disabilities but it is the law. As a case manager at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I developed and implemented a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensured IDEA transition services mandates were implemented for

secondary education students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classroom. For this action research study, I utilized a mixed methods approach with a transformative design. The three major theoretical lenses of self-determination theory, transition planning framework, and moral purpose served as the theoretical/change framework for this study.

Chapter IV

Cycle 1 - Pre-planning and Benchmark Data

Introduction

> Transition planning services are crucial to students' success after high school because students with disabilities often experience limited success after leaving high school. Many new IDEA 2004 provisions seek to improve transition services so that students with disabilities can be more successful in their adult lives. (Federation of Families SC, n.d, p. 1)

When I was first assigned as a case manager at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I discovered that the students with special needs did not have transition services in place that consisted of a "coordinated set of activities" designed within a "results-oriented" process. Consequently, these students were not being prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. When students are provided transition planning services, they become more empowered to take control of their destiny which in turn increases their self-determination skills.

Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives regardless if they have a disability (Bremer et al., 2003). Students who have self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including education, training, employment, and independent living outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). "For families, teachers, and other adults, supporting self-determination requires being open to new possibilities and taking seriously youths' dreams for the future" (Bremer et al., 2003, p. 2). In addition,

According to research, students with disabilities who are more self-determined are twice as likely to be employed one year after high school. Three years after graduation, these students are more likely to have employment that includes benefits and are more likely to be living somewhere other than the family home. (Wehmeyer& Palmer, 2002, p. 135)

Data Collection

Cycle 1 of my research occurred from March 2011 to September 2011. The purpose of Cycle 1 was to collect data to determine how well high school students with disabilities felt they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood and to examine the perceptions of high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. Participants in the study included 40 students, 14 special education teachers, six guidance counselors, and six administrators. Prior to the collection of data, I obtained permission to conduct my research from the Michael J. Hawkins High School Principal on March 15, 2011 and approval from the Rowan University's Institutional Review Board on March 23, 2011 (Appendices L & M).

Various data collection strategies such as observations, field notes, journal entries, and questionnaires were used to collect data to increase credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Hinchey, 2008). As a participant researcher and observer, I performed observations that allowed me to share in activities and discussions that were assessed in order to get a better understanding of the participants' views and experiences. The observations involved spending an extensive amount of time with the participants during the transition planning sessions (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). The Field notes that were taken throughout the observations focused on what I saw (Thomas et al., 2011). These sources helped me to gain insight to the mixed perspectives of the research

participants as I observed, questioned, and interacted with them. Journal entries involved

recording my reactions, concerns, and assumptions during the study (Thomas et al.,

2011). The questionnaires assessed how well the high school students with disabilities

felt they were prepared for life after high school and also examined the present process

for implementing transition services to students with disabilities according to special

education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors.

Student Pre-Transition Planning Process Questionnaires

Student questionnaires were mailed home with parental permission and student

informed consent letters in May 2011. According to the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (HHS) (2011), "parental permission is the agreement of the parent or

guardian to the participation of their child or ward in research" (p. 6). U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services (HHS) (1993) also defines informed consent as

> a person's voluntary agreement, based upon adequate knowledge and
> understanding of relevant information, to participate in research or to
> undergo a diagnostic, therapeutic, or preventive procedure. In giving
> informed consent, subjects may not waive or appear to waive any of their
> legal rights, or release or appear to release the investigator, the sponsor,
> the institution or agents thereof from liability for negligence. (p. 8)

Even with parental permission, the informed consent allows the students to decide if they

still want to participate and/or continue to participate in the study.

These questionnaires were mailed to the 40 students with special needs on my

caseload that attended Michael J. Hawkins High School. There are actually 80 students

on my caseload, but 40 of my students attend schools outside of Michael J. Hawkins

High School. By September 2011, 38 percent (14) of the questionnaires with parental

consent were completed and returned by the students. The student questionnaire was

comprised of 20 questions, 19 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question (See

Table 1). The 19 questions focused on the respondents' level of readiness that they felt

they had demonstrated in the various aspects of life and career-planning skills necessary

for adulthood. These questions were rated using a Likert Scale, an ordered, one-

dimensional scale from which respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or

disagreed with statements about transition planning (Patton, 2002). According to The

Independent Institute of Education (2012), "the likert scale is very convenient when the

researcher wants to measure a construct" (p. 13). "Not only is it a pleasingly simple way

of gauging specific opinions, but it also lends itself very easily to the construction of

multiple-item measures, known as Likert scales, which can measure broader attitudes and

values" (Johns, 2010, p. 1). The scale ranged from A to E. A was equated to strongly

agree, B to agree, C to no opinion, D to disagree, and E to strongly disagree (Appendix

A). Question number 20 was an open-ended question that asked the students how our

high school could further assist them in transitioning from high school to adulthood.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), open-ended question allow the participants to

answer in their own words.

Table 1.

Pre-Transition Planning Process Questionnaire Results (N=14)

		Percentages				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I have identified a career goal.	49	33	6	6	6
2	I have developed a career plan.	7	7	7	52	27
3	I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals.	13	0	40	27	20
4	I have a timetable for achieving my career plan.	27	0	13	33	27
5	I can identify reasons why people work and discuss how work can help a person achieve personal goals.	68	0	19	13	0
6	I can explain the difference between a career and a job.	27	60	13	0	0
7	I can identify various jobs in the community.	60	7	20	13	7
8	I can use online resources to identify jobs that are permitted for minors.	17	17	33	33	20
9	I have gathered information on post-secondary programs	7	0	7	46	40
10	I have identified my post-secondary school I plan to attend.	0	7	20	40	33
11	I can create a simple personal savings plan.	11	6	27	28	11
12	I can explain how my personal behavior, dress, attitudes, and other choices can impact the success or failure of a job applicant.	40	20	0	20	20
13	I can explain the purpose of a will.	22	22	14	21	21
14	I can prepare a sample résumé and cover letter as part of an application for part-time or summer employment.	7	13	7	53	7
15	I am able to explain my disability or special needs.	0	0	13	33	54
16	I can pursue a variety of activities related to career preparation (e.g., volunteer, seek employment, and/or apply for training grants, higher education grants, and loans).	7	0	20	27	46
17	I can differentiate between financial wants and needs.	26	13	7	27	27
18	I can take responsibility for arriving on time to work.	46	20	0	7	27
19	I can use local transportation options outside of family.	47	20	7	13	13

Data Analysis of Student Pre-Transition Planning Process Questionnaires

This questionnaire was given to determine how well the students felt they were prepared for life after high school. After the questionnaire was completed, each item was analyzed separately and responses were summed to percentages. Examining the results of their questionnaires, it was clear that students felt that they were not prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Of the 38% of students who responded to the questionnaire, 79% of the students disagreed with the statement, I have developed a career plan and 60% disagreed and 13% had no opinion on the statement, I have a timetable for achieving my career plan. A career plan is a road map that takes a student from choosing an occupation to becoming employed in that occupation to reaching his or her long-term career goals. "Young adults unprepared for their career startups are also not equipped to cope with their disappointment over who they are turning out to be and what they find themselves doing" (Levine, 2005, p. 17). With help from teachers and business owners, students can apply their academic learning to real-world tasks and tackle workplace challenges that build on classroom assignments and tests (Neumark, 2004). Teachers should incorporate real-world applications into their instruction and discuss how the skills that are being taught are used in occupations that are of high interest to students (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). Teachers can also introduce a career theme for a day and talk about how the subject they are teaching is used in that career (Levinson & Palmer, 2005).

Forty-seven percent of the students disagreed and 40% had no opinion with the statement, I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals and 73%

disagreed and 20% had no opinion with the statement, I can pursue a variety of activities related to career preparation. Many students with disabilities have not had the same exposure to opportunities as their non-disabled peers to the necessary career preparation options (McCain et al., 2004). For the past hundred years, career education has lacked a clear direction and the movement has been sporadic due to a lack of funding, dissipation of interest, and no explicit definition of career education (Benning et al., 2003). When students participate in a post-high school transitioning program that includes job placement, follow-up, and continuation of a transition planning team, they will probably obtain employment (Eisenman, 2003). Lack of career guidance leads to high school graduates who are undecided about their career goals or who will make poor decisions that they will regret later in life (Hurley & Thorp, 2002).

Eighty-six percent of students disagreed with the statement, I have gathered information on post-secondary programs and 73% disagreed with the statement, I have identified my post-secondary school I plan to attend. Secondary education school personnel and administrators, through their own involvement, must show students how to look beyond high school toward postsecondary education (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), 1994). If students with learning disabilities are to maximize their chances for postsecondary vocational and educational success, schools, and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies must do a better job in transition programming (Dowdy et al., 1990). Bridging the gap in transition services requires that both high schools and postsecondary service providers jointly organize, determine, and evaluate the unique needs of students with learning disabilities (Durlak et al., 1994). Professionals who counsel students with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education

should help the student choose a college or university that provides the needed services (Hadley, 2007).

Lastly, 87% of the students disagreed with the statement, I am able to explain my disability or special needs. Having a particular disability can affect transition planning, and students with learning problems experience higher stress, lower peer social support, and poorer adjustment than do other students without disabilities (Hoppe, 2003). Career exploration, decision making, learning appropriate ways of interacting in social and work situations, finding and maintaining employment, and learning self-advocacy skills should be a part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a legal document that must be reviewed annually and accompanies the child when they change schools. It ensures that a child with a disability receives whatever accommodations are necessary to learn. Fiedler and Danneker (2007) affirm that

> the importance of self-advocacy training for students with disabilities during their P-12 education is rooted in legislative mandates and societal changes. Self-advocacy skills are essential for positive transitions and outcomes as students with disabilities leave the P-12 school system and enter the adult world. (p. 3)

A frequently identified problem in promoting self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities is a deficit in teacher training and teachers' knowledge of curricula and strategies (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004).

According to Fiedler and Danneker (2007), "without opportunities to apply the component skills of self-determination, students are more likely to become passive and dependent and will feel incapable of making choices and decisions" (p. 7). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supports greater self-determination on the part of students with disabilities by mandating their involvement in the

Individualized Education Program (IEP) process (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Bremer et al., 2003).

Question 20 asked the students how our high school could further assist them in transitioning from high school to adulthood. Eleven students answered question 20 and their responses were as followed:

"JROTC programs get you ready for Army and there are jobs to help you hook up with a person in your career interest, you have to start somewhere."

"The first thing is to get a job, help me pass the HSPA and go to college. I would have to get a house."

"To study for the test to pass, to help me to read a book, so, I can get better in reading, and to help me have a job for the winter."

"I would like to see more respect and talk about helping me get a job. I would also like you to help me study more."

"I would like to get into a lot of programs, so, I can get better at doing things on my own."

"Help me find a job, sign up for the Army, help me go to college, and become a cop."

"You can help me learn and tell me how to get a job."

"Help me with my homework."

"Help me get a job and do tattoos."

"Well first I need to get a job then study how adulthood is, get a career then go to a trade school that you will like to do for a career."

Curtis, Rabren, and Reilly (2009) argue that transition services are activities that are designed to prepare students with disabilities as they transition from high school to adulthood. Based on the students' responses to Question 20, it is evident that the students are aware that the school system is supposed to provide them with the skills necessary to be successful after high school. Most of the students' responses focused on getting a job. This focus speaks volumes as to how important this study is to the needs of the students with disabilities at MJHHS. According to Bakken and Obiakor (2008), "IDEA clearly specifies that schools must direct attention to outcomes and be responsible for ensuring that a planning process is in place to identify, work toward, and plan for post-school outcomes" (p. 18). For students with disabilities to grow into adults who can function successfully in society, secondary education educators must provide school services that prepare them for the transition to adulthood (Zigmond, 2006).

The student pre-transition planning process questionnaire clearly revealed that students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School were not being prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Good transition plans reflect the student's personal choices, preferences, and needs across a variety of domains including education, employment, community living, and recreational experiences (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Brooke & McDonough, 2008; Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009).

Faculty and Staff Questionnaires

"Questionnaires are non-experimental, descriptive methods that can be useful if the researcher wants to collect data on a phenomenon that cannot be directly observed" (The Independent Institute of Education, 2012, p. 4). A seven question open-ended questionnaire was sent to 14 special education teachers, seven guidance counselors, and

six administrators assigned to Michael J. Hawkins High School. Fifty-seven percent (8) of the special education teachers' questionnaires, 43 percent (3) of the guidance counselors' questionnaires, and 17 percent (1) of the administrators' questionnaires were completed and returned. The special education teachers' questionnaires (Appendix B) pertained to their knowledge of IDEA, transition services, how they apply transition services in their curriculum and how well they felt that their students were prepared for adulthood were completed and returned. The guidance counselors' questionnaire (Appendix C) pertained to their knowledge of IDEA, transition services, how MJHHS implements and monitors transition services for our students with disabilities and how well they felt that their students were prepared for adulthood. The administrators' questionnaires (Appendix D) pertained to their knowledge of IDEA, transition services, how they monitor transition services for students with special needs and how well they felt that their students were prepared for adulthood.

Data analysis of faculty and staff questionnaires. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), understanding the perceptions of an organization's members is critical to implementing change. The methods used to collect faculty and staff perceptions were opened-ended response questionnaires. The researcher received valuable information from the special education teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators' questionnaires. The open-ended responses gave the special education teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators an opportunity to express their perception regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities; how well they believed that their students were prepared for life after high school; and how MJHHS could effectively assist students with disabilities in transitioning

from high school to adulthood. For the faculty and staff questionnaire results, I used

priori themes and one "justification for using priori themes is that the importance of

certain issues in relation to the topic being researched is so well-established that one can

safely expect them to arise in the data" (School of Human & Health Sciences, 2007, p. 1).

The priori themes that I identified were Understanding IDEA and Transition services;

Curriculum and Resources; Students' Preparedness for Life after High School; and

Effective Transition Services Program at MJHHS.

   Understanding IDEA and transition services. Teachers who do not understand

transition planning are less effective in ensuring that the students receive the maximum

benefits resulting from the transition plan (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). In regards

to the participants' understanding of IDEA as it pertains to transition services, several

responses seem to reflect that some special education teachers were aware that transition

services were required and were supposed to prepare students for work, college,

community, adult life and include the students' interests, goals, strengths, abilities, and

skills:

   "IDEA is geared towards helping this population as they begin to prepare to leave

the world of special education in order to make a successful transition from the context of

secondary school to the next phase; either further schooling or work."

   "Transition services were to reduce the dropout rate of students with disabilities

and plan their desired post school vision. Students express their preferences, interests and

vision for their adult life."

   "Transitional plan should be implemented at 16 years old. The family, teachers,

and other stakeholders (schools, businesses, etc.,) should develop/implement a plan for

student's transition from high school and info the community. The plan should focus on goals and strengths."

"High school students should have a plan for what they will pursue after high school. It is on the IEP and involves career opportunities and skills to earn a living."

"My understanding is that students are to be assisted by school staff to transition into work, or higher education after high school."

One guidance counselor commented that

The services are to begin at the age of 14, I believe. They are to be exposed to various agencies within the community as well as develop a plan to implement upon graduation. They are to be registered with DVR/DDD.

The Michael J. Hawkins High School child study team (CST) coordinates with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) to ensure that our seniors are in contact with DVRS to make a seamless transition from the CST transition services to DVRS. According to the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2010),

the goal of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) is to connect with the student while in high school - working with the family, child study team, and guidance counselors to develop a plan for transitioning the student from high school to work. A broad array of individualized services is available to help students achieve their employment goals. After the student finishes school, DVR services focus on gaining work skills needed to achieve an employment goal and job match, job placement, and follow-up. (p. 1)

Unfortunately, some of the participants were not aware of who was responsible for implementing and monitoring transition services. Subsequently, the teachers that are most effective in helping students with special needs prepare for college are usually the teachers of honors and college prep courses (Conley & Venezia, 2003). The following participants indicated on their questionnaires that they were either unaware of or not

familiar with the transition services, IDEA, and transition planning process for special

education students:

"I was not aware that special education students were supposed to receive services

for transition before leaving high school."

"I am not familiar with the transition process for my students, as the process is

handled by the CST/counselor? Not sure."

> I am not familiar with our students' IEP and how transition services are
> documented. I do however have access to student's IEPs, and can therefore read
> the plans, and educate myself. Though I have been invited to some IEP meetings,
> I have not been able to attend.

The sole administrator participant commented: "Students with disabilities are eligible for

services until age 21. They will be placed in least restrictive environment. Numerous

categories of disabilities: i.e. SLD, LD, MCI, MD, ED, ODD, etc."

According to Katsiyannis et al. (1998), the federal government holds state

education agencies responsible for the implementation of IDEA, making state educational

agencies the catalyst for providing transition services to students with disabilities. If

students with learning disabilities are to maximize their chances for postsecondary

vocational and educational success, schools and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies must

do a better job in transition programming (Dowdy et al., 1990). For students with

disabilities to grow into adults who can function successfully in society, secondary

educators must provide school services that prepare them for the transition to adulthood

(Zigmond, 2006).

Curriculum and resources. It has been argued that one of the reasons for the lack

of postsecondary success for students with disabilities is that many high school programs

fail to provide adequate services needed to ensure success for these students (Johnson et

al., 2002, as cited in Gillis, 2006, p. 12). Although some teachers provide transition services, it is not universal. The need for all-inclusive transition programming and establishment of personal goals is a critical issue for educators and professionals dealing with students with special needs (Dowdy et al., 1990). Helping students with disabilities to secure post-high employment is the main priority of special education teachers responsible for transitioning these students to adulthood (Eisenman, 2003). The results revealed that the participants did not share or use the same criteria to incorporate transition services into their curriculum. Consequently, according to the following special education teachers' comments, it was quite obvious that there was no transition services curriculum available or authorized by the school district:

"I am an in-class support teacher in various subjects but whenever the opportunity arises I encourage student to take advantage of career day, and also discuss career opportunities and higher education."

> I am a history teacher so it is easy to incorporate I have resume homework, I use currents to explore jobs that can come out of the current news. I discuss dreams and back up plans. I utilize technology in my lessons and researches. I allow outside agencies to present in my class.

> Special education teachers assist their students' not only academically but career awareness. Teachers strive to help their students in academic and career awareness so they can be prepared for everyday life after they complete school. Teaching routine skills such as writing a check or making a grocery list are ways special education teachers are assisting their students succeed after graduation.

> I teach careers in my classroom. This is allowing students to get an idea of what jobs are awaiting them in the world. I teach writing checks, how to dress for success, paying bills, manners, and anything else needed for my students to be successful.

"I use AGS Math program that covers community activities. Also, I often infuse real life stories about my experiences or others. I know that I also give the actual employment test that Forman Mills uses."

Addressing federal mandates regarding both the delivery of transition services and access to the general education curriculum has been a challenge for secondary special educators (Lee et al., 2008). The following responses seem to reflect that either the participants did not incorporate transition services in the classroom, they incorporated them whenever opportunities arose to discuss career opportunities, there were limited resources, or that they do teach life skills and career:

"I teach life skills and careers but limited with the lack of resources provided by the school (learning material, books, etc.)."

"I do not incorporate a lot of transition services after reading this questionnaire but would try to put these ideas in my future lesson plans."

"I do not formally incorporate career awareness and planning, employability skills or foundational knowledge to the students that I come into contact with. I offer suggestions as to career and training opportunities usually through oral discussions."

Two special education teachers shared that the high school impedes their progress to provide transition services by the lack of resources, no curriculum for life skills and careers:

"The lack of resources (technology, learning material, etc.,) as well as partnership with the learning and business community has impeded ideal transitional services."

"No curriculum for life skills or careers."

This is consistent with the findings of Conley and Venezia (2003) and Neumark (2004) who reveal that some special education teachers have noted that a lack of resources inhibited their ability to fully implement career development activities or programs. Dowdy et al. (1990) insist that many students with disabilities desperately need a high school curriculum with a greater emphasis on their transitional needs. According to Bassett and Smith (1996), without special educators' participation, new initiatives, such as transition for students with disabilities, will not move forward successfully, and students will not be afforded opportunities that should be available.

These comments are also supported with the findings by Wasburn-Moses (2006) who argued that too often special education teachers are expected to teach academic skills as well as provide students with the life and vocational skills necessary for self-sufficiency. In reality, it is difficult for special education teachers to coordinate the IEP goals with specific transition classroom activities and address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) at the same. As revealed by Neumark (2004), some schools' staff members have noted that a lack of resources inhibited their ability to fully implement career development activities or programs. Teachers play a major role in helping students prepare for college, yet they do not have the resources they need to give students accurate information (Conley & Venezia, 2003).

A special education teacher commented:

> The classroom/special education teacher does not formally prepare the students with disabilities for life as adult citizens and workers in the 21th century. Our daily schedule does not include any of this preparation. Except, maybe the self-contained classes. Vocational training/skill development may be electives offered as part of the students' class schedule.

Mastropieri (as cited in Wasburn-Moses, 2006) states "that special education teachers are required to work in different settings (e.g., resource room, general education classroom) and tailor instruction to students with a variety of special needs" (p. 21). Until recently, the concept of transition has implied a separate post-school planning process in which students with disabilities worked with special educators to develop transition plans while students without disabilities worked with guidance counselors to develop graduation plans (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006). Several guidance counselors shared:

"I am in the process of working with staff, colleagues and child study teams regarding this process: students are provided fair and equal opportunities, but receive accommodations and modifications identified in the Individualized Education Plan/Program."

"Guidance counselors cannot ensure that teachers satisfy this goal. Guidance counselor can, however, meet on a regular basis with each class to assist in developing these skills via classroom guidance lessons."

"I am a first year guidance counselor and have been lead to believe that such evaluation and monitoring is reserved for the special education teachers' supervisors, department chairpersons, and administration."

Williams and Katsiyannis (1998) stated, "A primary implication of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the need for all educators to share in the responsibility for services provided for all students including those with disabilities" (p. 17). Although legislation encourages greater school counselor involvement with students with disabilities, little research has been conducted to examine the actual roles that school counselors perform for those students (Milsom, 2002).

"The role of the school counselor in the lives of students with disabilities is often not clearly understood, and this ambiguity can lead to role confusion for practicing school counselors" (Marshak et al., 2009, p. 6). "The first problematic view is that the responsibility for addressing the needs of students with disabilities is a matter for the special education department, not the school counselor or school counseling program" (Marshak et al., 2009, p. 6).

"The widespread belief that students with disabilities belong to the special education department further marginalizes them and does not allow them to benefit from the school counselor's expertise or the school counseling programs" (Marshak et al., 2009, p. 6). The counselor's training and expertise in career development and academic planning will definitely come into play during this time of need. Challenges that school counselors confront range from basic disability awareness to ability to participate in interagency collaboration (Gillis, 2006). Another significant implication for school counselors is administrative support and improved understanding of the professional role of the school counselor in serving students with disabilities (Gillis, 2006). In order to enhance the transition process for students with disabilities, school counselors must familiarize themselves with the following legislative acts: Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA); No Child Left Behind (NCLB); Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA); and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (ASCA, 2010; Naugle, Campbell & Gray, 2010).

> Principals can assume a leadership role by encouraging and establishing links with community agencies, promoting a trans-disciplinary approach to the assessment and planning process, assisting in the development of specific policies and procedures relevant to the process, and ensuring that adequate resources are devoted to assessment and planning. (Levinson & Palmer, 2005, p. 13)

Disappointingly, out of six administrators contacted, only one administrator completed the administrator questionnaire. This administrator appeared fairly knowledgeable of the transition services requirement for students with disabilities (Field Notes, April 12, 2012). She stated that the students were fairly to moderately-prepared to transition from high school to adulthood based on career inventory assessments and IEP exit interviews. She also indicated that the high school implements and monitors transition services through guidance, CST, special services personnel, and teachers. Lastly, she stated that she evaluates and monitors how special education teachers incorporate transition services into the curriculum through monitoring lesson plans, walk-throughs, classroom observations, and conferences with staff.

Administrators must provide staff members with adequate training, access to support personnel, and opportunities for professional development regarding best practices in teaching students with disabilities (Martínez & Humphreys, 2006; Thurlow, 2005). According to Gillis (2006), "Few school districts are preparing their administrators and professional staff to combat the obstacles for students with disabilities and their families" (p. 8). Training for building administrators is often sporadic and lacking in continuity that often results in one or two day workshops on a special education topic. Many principals report that they receive little or no training for supervising special educators (NJCLD, 1994).McLaughlin and Nolet (2004) offered additional implications for school principals who want to foster a collaborative culture in order for students with disabilities to receive appropriate transition services. They suggested the following five things a principal needs to know about special education:

> (a) Understand the legal entitlements of special education; (b) understand how to match effective instruction with the learning characteristics of students; (c)

understand that special education is a program, not a place; (d) know how to meaningfully include students with disabilities in assessment; and (e) know how to create an inclusive environment in school settings. Even with all of these components in place, principals may continue to face challenges in providing effective transition services for students with disabilities. (as cited in Gillis, 2006, p. 9)

Throughout the transition planning process the building administrator and school counselor play an important role in working with special educators to monitor the implementation of each student's transition plan. According to Levinson and Palmer (2005), principals can promote the importance of staff member attendance and provide input at transition planning meetings.

One special education teacher commented: "Administration should implement an accountability system. Once a proper process is put in place to ensure that students with disabilities are fully prepared to transition at the end of their high school year."

"Additional challenges are presented for school administrators who either do not know or do not have the resources to provide adequate transition services" (Gillis, 2006, p. 8). Stephens and Nieberding (2003, as cited in Gillis, 2006) affirmed the major lack of opportunity for building principals to secure the knowledge and understanding for implementing and sustaining special education programs in their schools. Stephens and Nieberding (2003, as cited in Gillis, 2006),

suggested the need to accommodate principals by providing them with stipends or scholarships, materials, child care, distance learning, and video conferencing as methods of professional development to compensate for their lack of knowledge and understanding of special education law, implementation of the law, and supervision of special education programs in their buildings. (p. 10)

School administrators are vital members in assuring that students with disabilities are included in as many post-secondary opportunities as their non-disabled peers (Gillis, 2006). School administrators must set a positive and effective climate in the school that is

conducive for school faculty and staff to buy into supporting the needs of students with special needs. Based on the lack of administrative support of this study, it substantiates why the students with special needs are not receiving the transition services that they so greatly need.

Students' preparedness for life after high school. After more than two decades of federal transition legislation, students with disabilities continue to have significantly poorer post-school outcomes as compared to their peers without disabilities. One reason for these outcomes is that educators are inadequately prepared to provide the services required under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Anderson et al., 2003). The questionnaire results revealed that a majority of participants indicated that the students were not prepared for life after high school, but each of the participants had various comments to reflect this finding:

"It is difficult to observe the students with disabilities and monitor their progress to adulthood. The student's IEPs would be the indicator which would reveal that they have any career pans for life after high school."

"Generally, most of the students have to further develop life skills (communication skills, time management, etc.) to be an effective employee. The students also have to be exposed to different careers to develop their goals and career aspirations."

"I think it is difficult based on the weakness of our economy and the lack of hard work ethic."

> Most of our students don't have an idea of what they would like to do after high school. Based on my observation many of students are not prepared to enter adulthood. They think that adulthood is having any kind of job so they can buy the latest fashion, car rims, electronic devices and to start a family. They have no idea what all of this entails. Asked about role models, answered NFL players, entertainers and basketball players.

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"They do not seem to be knowledgeable about what is need for post- secondary or

vocational/career success."

My observations suggest that my students are ill-prepared for adulthood. However, because I live in this city I often see former students. For some of them, the "light" goes on and they are able to find employment and sustain themselves.

A few participants felt that the students were prepared and/or have had the

opportunity to be prepared for life after high school.

Students with disabilities are given the opportunity as the general population to meet with grade level guidance counselors to plan and discuss career goals. They also have a very supportive Child Study Team that helps prepare them for the next step after high school.

Some of my students are focus and are well prepared to transition in to adulthood. The students who are not are the students who have been allowed to cut class run the halls for years. They disturb other classes and become problem in halls and attendance and community. They can be 18 and still not have enough credits to be in the sophomore year. These students are non-productive due to the lack of administration from being support by the BOE guidelines.

"In the past, students with disabilities were given various opportunities to have

outreach services, assistance with assessment with assessment's and services for

preparation beyond high school; such as Division of Vocational Services, Counseling

Programs, etc."

By conducting classroom guidance sessions I can say which students are ready and which students need more directions. Those students that follow through with our appointments, DVR appointments, job applications, testing appointments, college visits … are ready. Others are still awaiting someone else to complete and follow through on the task or having really big dreams that at this time are unattainable and need smaller steps to achieve. Without the willingness to take the small steps the ultimate goal will not be achieved.

I have observed that most of the students with disabilities are as prepared and sometimes even more prepared to transition from high school to adulthood than some regular education students. Many of these students appear to take special interest in vocational classes and do well in them.

The administrator participant revealed:

"Students were fair to moderately-prepared for life after high school and this is indicated through career inventory assessment and IEP exit interviews."

In contrast, another participant felt:

"It was difficult to observe and monitor students' progress to adulthood."

The data analysis also revealed that the study participants (guidance counselors and administrator) who spent the least amount of time with the students in the classroom felt that the students were more prepared for life after high school. Consequently, the majority of the special education teachers spent the most time with the students and felt that the students were not prepared for life after high school.

Effective transition services program at Michael J. Hawkins High School.

Many students with disabilities desperately need a high school curriculum with a greater emphasis on their transitional needs (Dowdy et al., 1990). Success in college depends on how effectively high schools prepare students to include opportunities for students to take high level courses that will prepare them for the rigors of college or the workforce (Plucker et al., 2004). Change must be universal if all high school students are to be prepared for college and the workforce (Plucker et al., 2004). According to Washburn-Moses (2006), "Policymakers and school leaders need to listen to teachers' recommendations when planning for reform" (p. 29). The following special education teachers shared what they felt was needed to improve transition services at Michael J. Hawkins High School:

"More resources availability would be helpful in effectively assisting our students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to adulthood."

"Better resources and tighter relationship with the community to get more stakeholders involved - also exposure to possible career paths."

"Also, parent support group and services so that parents realize the importance of the transition process."

"The district should continue to address as often as possible professional development needs of counselor, teachers and support staff in the area of transitional planning for students with disabilities."

> To facilitate educational and vocational planning that will allow a student to make a successful adjustment to work, postsecondary education, and community living. A comprehensive assessment of a student's skills, it is difficult to identify the needs that should be addressed in the student's transition from high school to adulthood.

Students of all ages should be exposed to some type of career education with their everyday subjects so that it is not seen as a separate entity (Benning et al., 2003). In addition, the following special teachers suggested that Michael J. Hawkins High School provide:

"More hands on activities and field trips to actual work places, interviewing actual workers and having more guest speakers. Transitioning is important because education is useless if it does not have practical applications."

"Mandatory life skills classes."

Middle school students should be provided with a foundation of career awareness and career exploration experiences (Luzzo & MacGregor, 2001). The need for career education at the middle school level is necessary to lay the foundation for future career development and should be embedded into the curriculum (Benning et al., 2003). "IDEA requires that transition planning begin at the earliest age appropriate" (NCSET, 2002,

p. 1). Two special education teachers agreed that transition services should begin before a

student starts 11th grade:

"Transition services need to start earlier than 11th and 12th grade."

"Begin preparing these students before their junior and senior year to be

successful in career, vocation, and post-secondary school life. Special education

teachers/in class support should be more involved with the IEP implementation of the

students with disabilities."

> I think the work that has been done this year with DVR is a step in the right
> direction. Our students need life coaches that are assigned to them as freshmen.
> We need to develop closer relationships with businesses such as Wal-Mart, hotels,
> and motels: positions in which many of our students can actually work and train
> for advancements.

"IDEA requires that parents and students be involved in all aspects of transition

planning and decision making" (NCSET, 2002, p.1). Two guidance counselors

commented:

"As a school, we need to educate students, parents with services provided.

Parents should have workshops, in-services and other services pertaining to opportunities

for their child. Brochures, pamphlets and websites would be informational."

> Students with disabilities are required to take the same courses as the mainstream
> population. This is fine for the student with the ability to succeed within an
> inclusion setting. But for the students with more severe academic issues they need
> to be allowed to take classes that allow them to learn hands on life skills. They
> need more ability appropriate shops that they could work through and then
> transition into a like job. There should be a school store that prepares them to go
> out into society, where they can learn all aspects and then transition once ready
> into an actual job.

The administrator participant implied: "Increase exposure to Career Technical Education.

Having students take 3 levels of CTE courses, Reading programs, Life Readiness/Social

Skills curriculum and meaningful interaction/communication of DVR."

Researchers have found that special education programs do not appear to individualize instruction, curriculum is often watered down or nonexistent, and service delivery models are unfocused and fragmented (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Winzer, 2000, as cited in Gillis, 2006, p. 21). The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills standards identify key skills that students must meet upon graduation to include career awareness and planning, employability skill, critical thinking, self-management, interpersonal communication, character development and ethics, consumer and personal finance, and safety. Unfortunately, many teachers have difficulties meeting the requirements to teach Career Education and Consumer, Family and Life Skills because this is not a core-content subject and has to be taught whenever possible. According to NCSET (2004),

> It is critically important to increase the number of secondary special education teachers who can ably support students with disabilities through the process of transition to adult life. However, few institutions of higher education offer pre-service training programs providing specialized emphasis on secondary education and transition services. (p. 15)

The ultimate goal for transition services is to provide practical information and activities to increase the probability of success for the MJHHS students transitioning from high school to adulthood. These services would also provide recommended courses, skills, and academic activities that students should participate in to be successful in high school as well. Alignment of the high school curriculum content with the skills and knowledge students will be expected to know when entering college can help prepare students for success in college or the workplace (Plucker et al., 2004). Students must be involved and engaged in any process regarding their education. This allows them an

opportunity to take ownership in their overall education experience. Consider student engagement in the selection and development of reform initiatives (Zapf et al., 2006).

Conclusion

Examining the results of the students' questionnaires, it was clear that these students felt that they were not prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. The open-response questionnaire gave the participants an opportunity to express their perception of the present process at MJHHS for implementing transition services to students with disabilities; how well they believe that their students are prepared for life after high school; and how MJHHS can more effectively assist students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to adulthood. Based on the returned questionnaires, the majority of the participants believed that the students were not prepared for their transition from high school to adulthood. Additionally, according to the guidance counselors and administrator questionnaire responses, it is evident that they depend on the CST to provide the transition services for the student with disabilities.

Many students with disabilities desperately need a high school curriculum with a greater emphasis on their transitional needs (Dowdy et al., 1990). The federal government has continued to mandate that students must have measurable post-secondary goals in place. The New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC), Title 6A, 14, mandates that all students classified as having a disability are required to have an IEP, which is a written plan that describes the student's present levels of educational performance, progress in the general curriculum, services to be provided, annual goals, and complies with many other statutory requirements (NJDOE, 2006).

Chapter V

Cycle 2 – Program Development and Implementation

Program Development

Cycle 2 served as an opportunity to put in place best practices and strategies to address the transition planning needs of the students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS) while maintaining compliance with state and federal mandates. Cycle 2 occurred between September 2011 and January 2012. I utilized the literature reviewed and the data collected in Cycle 1from the students, special education teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators to develop and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process. This cycle also included reviewing the Student Transition Planning Portfolio (STPP) (Appendix K) that I created during my graduate studies that would contain samples of the work that the students created during the transition planning process and a tentative schedule for the transition planning sessions.

"Supporting a young person in becoming self-determined is not about simply removing limits and structure. It is, rather, about providing opportunities so a young person can make meaningful decisions about his or her own future" (Bremer et al., 2003). The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills standards identify key skills that students must meet upon graduation. In accordance with NJCCCS Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life skills standards (NJ Department of Education, 2009) and as a result of participating in the "results-oriented" transition planning process, students will learn:

career awareness and planning, employability skills, critical thinking, self-management, interpersonal communication, self-determination, character development and ethics, consumer and personal finance, and safety. In the 1990s, promoting and enhancing the self-determination of students with disabilities, particularly as a function of the transition planning process, became best practice (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

The theory and frameworks that guided each session were the Self-Determination Theory, Transition Planning Framework, and Fullan's Moral Purpose Change Framework. Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) found that youths with disabilities who learned self-determination skills were more often productively engaged after high school, received higher hourly wages, were more likely to live independently and to have a job with a range of benefits, and exhibited more financial independence than those youths who did not demonstrate self-determination. According to Fingles, Hinkle and Van Horn (n.d.) "transition planning is important because it provides a framework for identifying long-range goals and the services and strategies that will help students as they make the shift from school to adult life" (p. 6). The transition planning activities that the students were scheduled to participated in were: to discuss the pre-transition planning process questionnaire, discuss career choices, discuss transition resources, develop career plan, prepare sample resumes, participate in an interview, have students role-play, students will participate in a mock interview, look up colleges, complete a college application, take a practice ASVAB test, and take a post-transition planning process questionnaire.

According to Fullan (2002):

Moral purpose is social responsibility to others and the environment. School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students. They are concerned about closing the gap between high-performing and lower-performing schools and raising the achievement of - and closing the gap between

- high-performing and lower-performing students. They act with the intention of making a positive difference in their own schools as well as improving the environment in other district schools. (p. 5)

Student Transition Planning Portfolio (STPP)

The student transition-planning portfolio is a strategic planning tool intended to help youth identify and achieve postsecondary goals (NCWD, 2010).The student transition-planning portfolio clearly identified the competencies and skills students gained as a result of participating in the "results-oriented" transition planning process. These portfolios were maintained and monitored by the researcher and accompanied the students during their high school years. To ensure that a student with special needs plans for high school and beyond align with available options, development of a student individual learning plan involved reviewing school and state specific information including: high school graduation requirements; high school course options; postsecondary education and training programs offered within the state and local community; and occupations/career clusters in demand locally and statewide (NCWD, 2011). Additionally, NCWD (2011) argues that an ILP is a tool that high school students use – with support from school counselors and parents – to define their personal interests and goals related to their career and postsecondary education and to plan what courses to take and what activities to participate in during high school to further their interests and achieve their goals.

The ILP movement had its start in the 1990s after several prominent studies showed the need for all students, not just those with disabilities, to be better prepared for 21st Century jobs (NCWD, 2010). While the ILP can take many forms, most are web-based and follow the same basic format. They include information such as a student's

academic record, extracurricular activities, and volunteer or intern experiences, along with documentation of those experiences. The ILP can be used as a resume or to augment a postsecondary application (NCWD, 2010). Many states have adopted policies that require all high school students to develop and maintain an ILP in order to make schools more personalized and improve student outcomes (NCWD, 2010). States and schools have their own definition of what an ILP is or needs to be, and it can be called by many names, including Next Step Plan (New Mexico), Individual Graduation Plan (South Carolina), and High School and Beyond Plan (Washington) (NCWD, 2010).

During my graduate studies (Jan 2005- Dec 2006), I created and piloted a student transition-planning portfolio (STPP) (See Appendix K) based on the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) design. The STPP included the necessary components that students needed to practice to increase their probability for success as they transition from high school to adulthood. These components included assessing the students' skills and career interests, choosing a career path, completing a career categorization activity, reviewing the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), and comparing their skills and interests with the occupations they selected. Since this STPP was last utilized in 2006, I realized that I needed to review this STPP to ensure that it met the needs of students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS). Consequently, I asked the Child Study Team (CST) to review the current STPP and answer a questionnaire to provide their feedback.

Child Study Team (CST) STPP Feedback

There were five members on the Child Study Team (CST), including the researcher, but only two members provided feedback. Both of these respondents have

been CST members for several years, so, I appreciated their willingness to participate in this segment of the study. The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions: what was the most useful part of this process; what was the least useful part of this process; what areas I should provide more information about, and finally, they were asked to write down any additional comments.

When asked what was the most useful part of this plan, one CST member replied, "The most useful part of this plan was the list of apprenticeships" and the other member shared, "The entire process is very informative and breaks the information into manageable chunks for the students to absorb and apply."

When asked what was the least useful part of this plan, one CST member commented, "Although the information is pretty straight forward, lower functioning students may find it overwhelming because there is a lot covered." The second member mentioned, "The entire plan was useful."

When asked what areas I should provide more information about, one CST member stated, "A timeline in high school regarding when to submit applications to college, financial aid, visits, etc." The other member argued, "There should be information on writing a personal statement for college. Also, informing students that they can use the job interview prep questions as a guide for a college interview."

The last question asked the CST members to write down any additional comments. One CST member wrote, "Maybe it would be good to take key components of this plan for lower functioning students and clarify areas that should be covered for those particular students." The other member stated, "This was an excellent plan and very informative."

CST STPP Feedback Discussion

After reviewing the CST responses, I met with them to discuss their comments. I explained:

> That this initial transition planning process was a broad introduction to help the students to understand the transition planning process. A timeline in high school regarding when to submit applications to college, financial aid, visits, etc., would be beneficial and we can collaborate with the guidance counselors to design a timeline for the 2012-2013 school year. (Field Note, Oct 01, 2011)

> In response to the comments that "there should be information on writing a personal statement for college and also, informing students that they could use the job interview prep questions as a guide for a college interview"; We can explain the necessity of a personal statement for college then the student can follow-up with their particular CST member or guidance counselor. (Field Note, Oct 01, 2011)

In addition, according to ASCA (2010) school counselors should advocate for students with disabilities in the school and/or community, and assist students with disabilities in planning for transitions to careers or to post-secondary institutions. In response to the comments that

> maybe it would be good to take key components of this plan for lower functioning students and clarify areas that should be covered for those particular students and although the information is pretty straight forward, lower functioning students may find it overwhelming because there is a lot covered,

> I responded:

> This initial process was designed for all levels of functionality and there will be a special education teacher available to assist the students when necessary. Additionally, the lower functioning student will actually be meeting with his or her case manager on a regular basis to follow-up with any key component of this plan throughout the school year. (Field Note, Oct 01, 2011)

After responding to the feedback of the two CST members, I realized that I was on track with the transition planning process. The transition planning process would be a tool that each CST member would be able to modify to meet the needs of their particular

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students. Additionally, they could address the concerns that they shared when they actually meet with their students on their caseloads.

Transition Planning Process Sessions Development

In 2004, transition planning became mandatory as part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Based on the activities that I developed in the student transition-planning portfolio (STPP) (Appendix K), I divided the transition planning process into 10sessions (see Appendix G). Next, I divided the 10 weekly sessions into themes: 1) Introduction and Reviewing Transition Planning Process Questionnaire; 2) Assess Interests & Skills; 3) Transition Assistance Resources; 4) Develop Goals, Priorities, & Career Plan; 5) Resume Writing; 6) Job Search & Job Hunting Techniques; 7) Dress for Success; 8) College as an Option; 9) Military, Apprenticeship, & Other Options, and 10) Post-Transition Planning Process Questionnaire (See Appendix N) and Conclusion. Then I developed essential questions based on the themes that would help the students exercise decision making, problem solving, and goal setting skills that support eventual self-determined characteristics (Eisenman, 2003; Thoma & Getzel, 2005; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Next, I developed lesson goals based on the themes that would help guide each session (see Appendix G). Self-Determination and student involvement are identified as evidence-based practices in secondary transition (Test et al., 2009).

By proactively and systematically working towards improving the levels of involvement in the various stages of a project, the outcomes were more likely to suit local circumstances, ensure community 'ownership', and increase the sustainability of a project (Munt, 2002). In this study, community participation and involvement in a project is one

of the key elements of action research (Munt, 2002), therefore, for each session my goal was to invite people that could contribute to the theme: an administrator/ supervisor to discuss transition planning process goals; community members to discuss their careers; Child Study Team (CST) to discuss transition assistance resources; vocational teachers to discuss their vocations; vocational teachers to review and discuss student resumes; vocational teachers and administrators to interview students; administrators and staff to model dress for success; guidance counselors to discuss college enrollment; and JROTC Instructors to discuss the Military.

Utilizing the STPP (See Appendix K) and other handouts, the students completed the following items: pre and post transition planning process questionnaires, goal worksheet, Interest and Skills Inventory Worksheet, Transition Assistance Resources Handout, Career Plan, Student's Resume, Job Search Worksheet, Student Dressed for Success collages, College Planning Worksheet, and Program Evaluation form.

Administrative and Staff Support

One of the most difficult tasks was trying to secure a room to conduct the transition planning process sessions. On October 11, 2011, I emailed the following information to the building principal and assistant principals:

> Good Morning - As part of my action research study, for the next 10 weeks (starting this Friday, Oct 14, 2011) I will need a classroom in the D Building on Fridays during periods 7 and 8 to meet with the student participants of my study. The weeks that we have Fridays off, I would like to hold my session on Wednesdays. Attached is my tentative schedule for my weekly sessions with these students. I am anticipating at least 25 student participants. A few of the sessions will also require these students to have access to a computer. Please contact me if you have any questions or suggestions. Thank you so much for your continuous support.

During this cycle, I made numerous attempts in person and by emails to obtain administrative participation and support of this study. When I did not hear from any of the administrators, I contacted several teachers I knew in the D building who taught students with special needs who could accommodate the weekly sessions in their classrooms (Field Note, October 15, 2011). As a result, four teachers allowed me to use their classrooms to conduct these sessions.

The Invitation to the Transition Planning Process Sessions

Because this is action research, every week I attempted to work collaboratively with various colleagues and other community stakeholders to improve instruction and increase student achievement. The week prior and the day before each transition planning session, an email with the names of the 40 students on my caseload physically at Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS) was sent to the entire school staff requesting that they send these students to my session. In addition, these emails also invited the school staff, administrators, and director of special services to participate in these transition planning sessions. Attached to every email were the Results-Oriented Transition Planning Process Schedule (Appendix G) and the Student Internet Access Release and Authorization Form (Field Note, Oct 17, 2011). The following email was sent to Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS) staff on Oct 17, 2011:

> Good Morning, Camden High
> Many of the problems that high school students with disabilities face include crime, joblessness, and homelessness which can create a huge and costly burden on the students, their families, their communities and society as a whole. Poor post-school outcomes have been linked to the lack of vocational preparation, transition planning, and linkage to existing adult services and supports prior to graduation (Condon & Callahan, 2008).
>
> Our youths need the skills and motivation to compete in today's job market. Effective collaboration, administrative support, professional development,

programs and materials will enable high schools to prepare their students with special needs for the transition from high school to adulthood.

On, Friday, October 21, 2011, I will be conducting the second session of Transition Planning and need the following students to report to the D Building, room D108, 7th period after you have taken attendance. Attached is the transition planning schedule for the next 8 weeks. I will send out a reminder email on Thursday, Oct 20, 2011. I welcome your participation and ideas. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me anytime. Thank you!

One teacher took the time to respond to one of my invitations even though she

was not able to attend any of my sessions:

I totally agree with the need for more vocational courses that can prepare our kids for jobs right out of high school. Presently, as in the past dating back as far as Mr. Heron's tenure as principal....I have tried to establish a Floral Arranging class....I even donated a floral refrigerator to the school, but it hasn't happened yet. Ms. Kirwin is aware of my curriculum. We need to push for sensible, enjoyable, engaging vocational opportunities for some of our students. Cafe, Bakery, Flower Shop, Pizza Shop......please dream about it....it can happen!

I persistently reminded teachers and students about the sessions when I saw them

in the hallways (Field Notes, Oct 17, 2011). Hall passes and flyers were placed in the

mailboxes of these students 8th period teachers the day before the scheduled sessions as

well. Due to the weekly emails, I was approached on a daily basis by staff members who

promised to stop by one of the sessions and/or offered their support and praise for the

study (Field Notes, Oct 19, 2011).

Additionally, one of the four teachers (computer technology teacher) that allowed

me to utilize her classroom for the study reminded me that I needed to ensure that the

student participants had consent from their parents to access the Internet (Field Notes,

October 20, 2011). This entailed taking a list of these students to the Technology

Coordinator to ensure that they had access. Several of the students still did not have

Internet access and I had to provide these students with the Student Internet Access

Release and Authorization (AUP) Form for parental permission in order for them to have

access to the computer. In addition, on October 27, 2011, I forwarded the following email

to the staff at Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS) soliciting help from them with

the AUP forms:

> Good Morning, Camden High
> The intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to ensure that when a child with a disability turns 16, there are transition services in place to assist the child in transitioning from high school to adulthood. The transition planning process is critical to assuring the success of students served through special education services (Dowdy, Carter, & Smith, 1990; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Attached is the transition planning schedule (Forgot this attachment in previous email) and hopefully, starting next week the students will be utilizing the Internet for their activities. Technology plays an increasingly important role in educational programs for all students and in facilitating successful transition outcomes for students with disabilities (Nochajski, Oddo, & Beaver, 1999). Unfortunately, there are still several students who have not completed and turned in their AUP forms to Ms. Gaskins in order to use the school computers. I have identified those students and attached the AUP form as well.
>
> On, Friday, October 28, 2011, I will be conducting the third session of Transition Planning and need the following students to report to the D Building, room D-108, 8th period (2:11pm) after you have taken attendance: Name   ID# Please feel free to visit any of these sessions because I truly welcome your participation, ideas, and overall support. If you have any questions, please contact me anytime. Thank you!

I reminded the faculty and staff in the email that technology plays an increasingly

important role in educational programs for all students and in facilitating successful

transition outcomes for students with disabilities (Nochajski et al., 1999). As a result of

the emails, all of the student participants had their AUP forms completed by the fourth

session of the transition planning process.

Program Implementation

Zigmond (2006) insists that for students with disabilities to grow into adults who

can function successfully in society, secondary education educators must provide school

services that prepare them for the transition to adulthood. I conducted an action research study with 15 students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS). These students and I participated in 10 weekly 50-minute transition planning process sessions with various school personnel. These sessions gave the students, school personnel, and the participant researcher an opportunity to express what they felt would assist these students as they transition from high school to adulthood. This study provided the researcher yet another opportunity to see how well these students were prepared for their transition from high school to adulthood. During the direct observation, the researcher focused on each student's attitude, understanding, and motivation towards each career planning activity. Since the student participants had lunch fourth period and the sessions were during their eighth period class, they were provided light refreshments every session. At the end of each transition planning session, the students completed a transition planning session exit slip (Appendix O) in which they were asked to tell me about at least two things they liked and disliked in the transition planning process. The open-endedness of the exit slip allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire (Turner, 2010). According to Fisher and Frey (2004), exit slips help students reflect on and process new information, and offer teachers the opportunity to differentiate upcoming instruction based on these reflections.

Highlights of Transition Planning Process Sessions

Week 1: Introduction and review of pre-transition planning process questionnaires, Friday, Oct 14, 2011. I began the session with an introduction and overview of the "results-oriented" transition service process. During this time, the students also received their Student Transition Planning Portfolios (STPPs) (Appendix

K). Portfolios can provide structure for involving students in developing and understanding criteria for good efforts, in coming to see the criteria as their own, and in applying the criteria to their own and other students' work (U.S. Dept of Education, Office of Research, 1993). As a collaboration activity, Ms. Johnson (Special Education Teacher) assisted me in reviewing the questionnaires with the students. The pre-transition planning process questionnaires (Appendix A) were returned to the students in order to explain every question to the students. Various students were called on to answer questions to check for understanding (Field Note, Oct 14, 2011). Students discussed the following questions: what was a career goal; who had a career plan; what were some jobs in the community; what was the difference between a job and a career, and what was the purpose of a will (Field Note, Oct 14, 2011). As reported in Cycle 1, by examining the results of the students' questionnaires, it was clear that these students felt that they were not prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Of the 15 students who responded to the questionnaire, 79% of the students disagreed with the statement, "I have developed a career plan." Forty-seven percent of the students disagreed and 40% had no opinion with the statement, "I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals." Sixty percent of the students disagreed and 13% had no opinion with the statement, "I have a timetable for achieving my career plan." Eighty-six percent of the students disagreed with the statement, "I have gathered information on post-secondary programs." Lastly, 73% of the students disagreed and 20% had no opinion with the statement, "I can pursue a variety activities related to career preparation."

Week 2: Assess interests and skills, Friday, Oct 21, 2011. Transition Assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information on the students' strengths,

preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, education, living, and personal and social environments (Sitlington et al., 2007). The stakeholders for this activity were Ms. Sullivan (CST) and Ms. Johnson (Special Education Teacher) who assisted me in discussing various careers with the students. During this session, students completed an Assessing My Interests activity in their STPP (Appendix K) to assess their interests and skills. For this activity, students were required to list at least three activities that that enjoyed, and explain why they enjoyed them. Students shared:

"I enjoy hanging out with my friends."

"I enjoy texting on the phone because it keeps me from being bored."

"I enjoy basketball because it is fun and keeps me out of trouble."

"I like being athletic."

"I enjoy football because it keeps me running."

"I enjoy cheerleading because I love to dancing and learning new moves."

On their pre-transitional planning questionnaire (see Appendix A), 82% of the students stated that they had identified a career goal, but during this activity, the students demonstrated that they have never assessed their interests and skills prior to this session. Because many of these students had some difficulty grasping and/or focusing on the material, Ms. Sullivan recommended that I shorten the instruction into smaller chunks for future sessions.

Week 3: Transition assistance resources, Friday, Oct 28, 2011. "A goal of transition is to help youth understand their disability and choices to determine their future" (NCSET, 2012, p. 1). During this session, students learned about transition

assistance resources and how to get help regarding their disabilities after high school. As a collaborative activity, Ms. Damiani (CST) and I discussed the purpose of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and transition assistance resources from the STPP (see Appendix K) which included Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Independent Living, and other agencies. We also discussed NICHCY Connections to Transition for Students with Specific Disabilities (see Appendix K) and the importance of advocating for one's self. Students were asked to explain what they knew about their disability and not one student could explain it. Students were also asked what an IEP was and they could not answer that question either.

Eighty-seven percent of the students stated on the student questionnaire that they were not able to explain their disability or special needs. Teaching self-advocacy skills and helping the student describe the supports he/she needs to be successful are important to the transition process. It may be useful for the student to learn about laws protecting people with disabilities from discrimination, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Fingles et al., n.d.).

Week 4: Develop goals, priorities, and career plan, Friday, Nov 04, 2011. The beginning of adulthood is celebrated at this time with an expectation that youth will develop an increasing independence and autonomy and move on to further education, meaningful jobs, and finding their own places to live, friends, companions, and life in the community (NCSET, 2012). During this session, students learned how to develop their goals and priorities and create a career plan. First the students completed the Choosing a Career Plan activity in their STPPs (see Appendix K). For this activity, students were asked to describe their ideal job and some of the responses were:

"Army, Special Forces because they pay for everything."

"I want to be a tattoo artist, own a graffiti store, and own an abandoned building for graffiti writers to come and do graffiti on instead of the streets."

"Maybe I would like to be a game designer."

"I want to be a mechanic person because it is fun to take a part of a car and fix then put it back on."

"My ideal job is to make games or to test games. For making games, you'll need a lot of skill and would have to be good at math. For game testing, you get paid for playing games before they get sold in the stores."

As a collaborative activity, Ms. Cowan (Computer Teacher) and Ms. Brown (CST) utilized the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) section from the STPP (see Appendix K) to assist in helping the students look up careers on the Internet. There are hundreds of different types of jobs in the OOH handbook. This handbook also provides the following information about a job: the training and education needed, earnings, expected job prospects, what workers do on the job, and working conditions.

Even though 58% of the students indicated that they had a career plan in place on the pre-transitional questionnaire, none of these students could share what a career plan entailed. There was inaptness between the careers that the majority of the students selected and their cognitive abilities. For instance, one student who was classified mild cognitively impaired (MCI) with a full scale IQ of 60 consistently indicated that he wanted to be a U.S. Marshall. He is an 11th grade student reading at a 1st grade level. Consequently, due to his disability, it was very difficult to persuade this student to look at other realistic careers.

Week 5: Resume writing, Friday, Nov 18, 2011. I began the session by explaining the importance of a resume and how students could develop a resume based on their high school experiences. As a collaborative activity, Ms. Johnson (Special Education Teacher) and Ms. Flack (One on One Assistant) utilized the Developing a Resume Activity from the STPP (see Appendix K) to assist in helping students create their resumes. Some of the items on the resume worksheet that one student shared were: Major studies and GPA/class rank: Computer Aid; Important courses: Computer Aid; Club activities and positions held: Tennis and 3rd Singles; Description of participation: we practiced every day after school and participated in games; and Duties and responsibilities: Playing rival schools. Twenty percent of the students stated in the pre-transitional questionnaire that they could prepare a sample resume and cover letter, but none of these students could complete these tasks on their own.

Week 6: Job search and job hunting techniques, Friday, December 02, 2011. Students learned how to conduct a job search and job hunting techniques. As a collaborative activity, after discussing the Conducting a Job Search and Job Hunting Techniques and the Job Interview sections from the STPP (see Appendix K), Mr. Collins (General Education Teacher), Ms. Johnson (Special Education Teacher), and Ms. Flack (One on One Assistant) assisted in mock interviews with the students. We also discussed the right and wrong things to say and do at a job interview. One activity required the students to role-play as the interviewee and the researcher was the interviewer. Students practiced how to properly enter an office when they are being interviewed. Students had to knock on the classroom door, wait until they were told to enter, walk in, shake the

interviewer's hand, then they could finally take a seat. Unfortunately, a few students had to make several attempts before they actually mastered entering the office.

During these activities, it was obvious that these students could not explain how their personal behavior, dress, attitudes, and other choices could impact the success or failure of a job applicant. Sixty percent of the students stated on their questionnaire that they could explain how their personal behavior, dress, attitudes, and other choices can impact the success or failure of a job applicant.

Week 7: Dress for success, Friday, Dec 09, 2011. The goal of the Dress for Success session was to have the students come to school in business attire instead of the school uniform. Due to the lack of administrative support for this study, I could not authorize the students to not wear the uniforms. As an alternative activity, the students created collages of what not to wear at a job interview (see Appendix K). Prior to this session, I sent out the following email on Dec 07, 2011:

> Good Morning, Camden High
> On, Friday, December 09, 2011, I will be conducting the 7th session of Transition Planning and the topic is "Dress for Success." The students will be creating collages of Dress for Success (negative and positive perspective) and we need magazines. Please contact me and I can come to your classroom/office to pick up these magazines on Friday morning. I would like to thank the following teachers for allowing me to use their rooms to conduct these sessions - Ms. Elaine Johnson, Ms. Cowans, Ms. Rodriguez, and Ms. Hobbs. Staff as always, please feel free to visit any of these sessions because I truly welcome your participation, ideas, and overall support. If you have any questions, please contact me anytime. Thank you!

Several school staff members responded and donated supplies for this activity, which included magazines, glue, scissors, and construction paper. As a collaborative activity, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Flack assisted the students in creating their collages. The students cut out pictures of people who were not dressed for success (Figure 1). Some of

the students still struggled with fine motor skills and needed assistance with using

scissors to cut out pictures.

Figure 1. Week 7, Student Dress for Success "What Not To Wear" Collages

Week 8: College as an option, Friday, Dec 16, 2011. During this session,

college as an option was discussed. Utilizing sections from the STPP (Appendix K) we

discussed the characteristics to consider when choosing a school, gathering information,

and applying to school. According to the student questionnaires, 79% of the students did

not have a career plan developed, therefore, they still needed to work on their career

plans. Regarding a collaborative activity, the students did not have career plans

completed so they were not prepared to discuss college (Field Notes, Dec 16, 2011).

Based on the student questionnaire results and class observation, I felt that when the

students were ready to look at college as an option, I would invite a guidance counselor

to discuss the college enrollment process during the 2012-2013 school year (Field Notes,

Dec 16, 2011). NCSET (2012) argued that:

> Although more students with disabilities are entering higher education
> than in the past, the majority leave before completing their program or
> degree. One reason for this is that many youth with disabilities lack the
> self-determination skills—such as the ability to articulate their strengths
> and advocate for their needs—necessary for success in postsecondary
> education and ultimately the workplace. (p.1)

Week 9: Military, apprenticeship, and other options, Friday, Jan 13, 2012.

During this session, students learned about the military. Being a military veteran, I was

able to discuss the Air Force, Air Force Reserves, and New Jersey Army National Guard

with these students. As a collaborative activity, utilizing the Beyond High School section

of the STPP (See Appendix K), First Sergeant Lockhart (Michael J. Hawkins High

School JROTC Instructor) also discussed the Military and all that it had to offer. My

supervisor, Ms. Ballard, also discussed the importance of transition planning to the

students. On January 19, 2012, I sent the following email to the Michael J. Hawkins High

School (MJHHS):

Good Morning, Camden High

   First of all, I would like to thank First Sergeant Michael Lockhart for collaborating and presenting with me on Friday, January 13, 2012 at session #9. We discussed the benefits of joining the military and taking the ASVAB test. I would also like to thank Ms. Elaine Johnson for allowing me to use her room, constantly, to conduct these sessions.
   The intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to ensure that when a child with a disability turns 16, there are transition services in place to assist the child in transitioning from high school to adulthood. The transition planning process is critical to assuring the success of students served through special education services (Dowdy, Carter, & Smith, 1990; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007).
   On Wednesday, January 25, 2012, I will be conducting the tenth and final session of Transition Planning and need the following students to report to the D Building, room D-103, 8th period (2:11pm) after you have taken attendance: Staff, as always please feel free to visit this final session because I truly welcome your participation, collaboration, ideas, and overall support. If you have any questions, please contact me anytime.
Thank you!

Week 10: Conclusion, Friday, Jan 25, 2012. During this final session, students completed a post-transition planning process questionnaire (Appendix A) to determine their progress and gather their feedback from the transition planning process. These results will be discussed in Cycle 3.

"Most importantly, students with disabilities need to understand how they can use transition assessment activities to identify their needs, strengths, preferences, and interests as they prepare for adult roles" (Sitlington et al., 2007, p.2). The post-questionnaire was given to determine if the students felt that they were more prepared for success after high school since Week 1. Due to the low reading levels and disabilities of several of the students, we still had to review every statement in the student questionnaire. This time, the students understood the terminology used in the transition planning process.

The Sessions

Overall, the sessions went well, but my goals were marginally achieve. For starters, one goal was to see how much support/participation I would receive from students, staff members, and administrators during these sessions. Unfortunately, I was very disappointed that more students with disabilities, staff members, and administrators did not participate. Another goal of these sessions was to see what the actual needs of the students with disabilities were. The overall results of the exit slips and questionnaires indicated that many of the student participants wanted help with finding a job. Lastly, the final goal was to see if these sessions were something that we could implement at Michael Joseph Hawkins High School. I found that as long as I was able to have access to classrooms and computers I could practically implement these sessions throughout the entire school year.

Conclusion

Cycle 2 was a crucial step in my study. The transition planning process represents the single greatest opportunity to ensure that the goals of the special education system – to allow students to become as independent and self-sufficient as possible – are realized (Fingles et al., n.d.). A transition planning process was developed and implemented based on data collected, literature reviewed, and the STPP, and not on suppositions and temporary solutions. I also came upon a startling revelation that I had minimal administrative support for this study. Overall, the experience provided me an opportunity to utilize my leadership skills to obtain the classrooms I needed, establish teacher partnerships, and to conduct successful transition planning process sessions.

Chapter VI

Cycle 3 - Evaluation and Impact of the Program

Introduction

If students with disabilities are to maximize their chances for postsecondary vocational and educational success, schools, and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies must do a better job in transition programming (Dowdy et al., 1990). The purpose of Cycle 3 was to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the transition planning process that began in the fall of 2011. Currently, a "results-oriented" transition planning process does not exist for secondary education students with disabilities at the Michael J. Hawkins High School (MJHHS). NJAC 6A:14 (NJDOE, 2006) designates case managers as responsible for transition planning, consequently, as the case manager at MJHHS, I developed and implemented a "results-oriented" transition planning process. I simultaneously monitored and evaluated the transition planning process outcomes during Cycle 2, utilizing various measurement devices including field notes, journals, participant observations, exit slips, questionnaires, focus group, and student transition-planning portfolios (Appendix K). According to Rogers and Smith (2006), "evaluation is either about *proving* something is working or needed, or *improving* practice or a project" (p. 69).

In this cycle, I also used a priori approach to create themes "based on all of the following: literature reviewed, the chosen theoretical basis, and previous cycles of the study" (Delucca, Gallivan, & Kock, 2008, p. 55). The priori themes were Program Impact on Students, Impact on Faculty and Staff, Session Activities that had the Most Impact on

the Students, Program Impact on District-Wide Child Study Teams (CSTs), and New

Awareness of Transition Planning.

Program Impact on Students

According to Solberg, Howard, Gresham, and Carter (2012):

Since the transition mandates were first introduced into the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 1990, numerous research, policy, and advocacy efforts have been directed toward establishing a compelling set of services and supports to equip youth with disabilities to transition successfully to life after high school. (p. 85)

In order to determine if the transition planning process sessions would be effective for the students, I examined the Transition Planning Process Questionnaire Responses from Week 1 and Week 10. The review and analysis of the student transition planning awareness data impacted how effective the Transition Planning Process was in the 2011-2012 school year. Table 2 highlights the analysis of the participants' awareness of the transition planning process. The table shows that when data were compared, students were more aware of transition planning by Week 10 than before the sessions first began.

Sixty-nine percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I have developed a career plan" in contrast to 14% of the students from Week 1. One hundred percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals compared to 13% of the students from Week 1. Fifty-two percent of students agreed with the statement, "I have gathered information on post-secondary programs" compared to seven percent of the students from Week 1. Sixty-four percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I have identified my post-secondary school I plan to attend in contrast to7% of students from Week 1. Lastly, eighty-three percent of the students agreed with the statement, "I am able to explain my disability or special needs

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compared to none of the students from Week 1.Examining the results of their post-

questionnaires, it was clear that these students felt more prepared to transition from high

school to adulthood than they did Week 1.

Table 2.

Student Pre and Post Transition Planning Questionnaire Results (N=14)

		Pre	Post	Change
		Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Agree/Agree	
1	I have identified a career goal.	82	100	18
2	I have developed a career plan.	14	69	45
3	I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals.	13	100	87
4	I have a timetable for achieving my career plan.	27	31	4
5	I can identify reasons why people work and discuss how work can help a person achieve personal goals.	68	100	32
6	I can explain the difference between a career and a job.	87	92	5
7	I can identify various jobs in the community.	67	100	33
8	I can use online resources to identify jobs that are permitted for minors.	34	100	66
9	I have gathered information on post-secondary programs	7	52	55
10	I have identified my post-secondary school I plan to attend.	7	54	64
11	I can create a simple personal savings plan.	17	53	64
12	I can explain how my personal behavior, dress, attitudes, and other choices can impact the success or failure of a job applicant.	60	86	26
13	I can explain the purpose of a will.	44	69	25
14	I can prepare a sample résumé and cover letter as part of an application for part-time or summer employment.	20	46	26
15	I am able to explain my disability or special needs.	0	83	83
16	I can pursue a variety of activities related to career preparation (e.g., volunteer, seek employment, and/or apply for training grants, higher education grants, and loans).	7	54	47
17	I can differentiate between financial wants and needs.	39	92	53
18	I can take responsibility for arriving on time to work.	66	92	26
19	I can use local transportation options outside of family.	67	92	25

Student Focus Group

Six student participants participated in a focus group discussion to get some clarity to the responses that were provided on the exit slips and transition planning process forms. Krueger (1994) describes focus groups as "a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (p. 6). Students were asked various open-ended questions. When asked why they liked the transition planning process, one student revealed that this "class was different than the other classes" that he had. I asked how different and another student interjected that "the class was fun; he could be with his friends, and talk without getting in trouble." Another student shared that this process was "fun while learning; it wasn't just all bookwork and listening to people to talk." One female shared that the process "was interesting." Everyone talked about their future and who they wanted to be. She also shared that they "had a good time and were allowed to joke around and laugh." Another student stated that he had fun because "they did projects and art work."

Students were asked why they thought this program existed, one student felt that this program gave them a head start. Another student commented the program existed "to see what we were going to do in the future." When asked why they like the snacks given during the sessions, one student stated that it was "the only way to get the kids' attention." Three students agreed that the snacks kept them focused and from getting hungry again. One student revealed that he eats lunch fourth period and the sessions were during eighth period, so, the snack kept him full. When asked why they liked the mock interview activity, one student stated that "it helped me to better understand the topic." Also because it was "more hands on." Another student shared that the activity taught him

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"what not to do on an interview." One female student revealed that the activity showed her "how to walk into a job interview." When asked why the students liked First Sergeant Lockhart's discussion, one student stated that he "liked that he was talking about the military and what kind of jobs they had." Another student liked that First Sergeant Lockhart talked about "how he got in the Army and what college he went to." One student shared that "First Sergeant Lockhart made it okay to go into the military and gave us some of the ups about the military."

The focus group provided me an opportunity to have a more intense discussion with six student participants. Due to the severity of their disabilities, it was still somewhat difficult to have a mature discussion. In addition, their comments were very short and limited.

Overall Program Impact on Faculty and Staff

In addition to the student participants, each staff member that participated in a transition planning session completed a transition planning evaluation form (Appendix P) to evaluate the overall transition planning session and my leadership skills. The questionnaire had five closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions. Twelve staff members completed transition planning evaluation forms. The five closed-ended questions were designed based on a likert-type scale (Table 3) and were used to generate statistics (Dawson, 2002). The four open-ended questions were designed to find out what staff thought about my transition planning sessions (Dawson, 2002). The results of the staff transition planning evaluations (Table 3) revealed that one hundred percent of the staff agreed that the transition planning sessions were very useful for the students. One hundred percent of the staff agreed that my leadership skills were effective and I had

expert knowledge of the transition planning process. One hundred percent of the staff

agreed that the content of the sessions were presented in an organized fashion and the

student activities stimulated learning.

Table 3.

Staff and Faculty Questionnaire Results (N=12)

		Percentages				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The transition planning sessions was very useful for the students.	92	8	0	0	0
2	Mrs. Sutton's leadership skills were effective.	83	17	0	0	0
3	Mrs. Sutton has expert knowledge of the Transition Planning Process.	92	8	0	0	0
4	The content of the session was presented in an organized fashion.	82	8	0	0	0
5	The student activities stimulated learning	92	8	0	0	0

Session Activities that Had the Most Impact on the Students

According to the student, faculty and staff, evaluation forms, the session activities

that had the most impact on the students were the dress for success collage, mock job

interviews, talking about jobs and transition resources, and First Sergeant Lockhart

talking about the military. In addition four special educations teachers participated in

interviews in order for me to obtain their perspectives regarding their questionnaire

responses during the transition planning process sessions. "Interviews may be useful as

follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their

responses" (McNamara, 1999, p. 1).

Dress for Success. The students created collages of what not to wear at a job

interview. One staff member shared, "the students got numerous chances to identify what

not to wear." When the students were asked what the most useful part of this process was,

four students felt that the Dress for Success collage was the most useful part of this

process. Based on their exit slips, several students also shared:

"It was fun looking for what you are not to wear at a job."

"I like this class because we talk about jobs. I like this because of the snack."

"That we can have fun and learning more things"

"I liked dress up and when we had to cut out pictures."

"Cutting pictures and gluing them."

I reflected upon their comments regarding the Dress for Success collage as I wrote in my

journal:

> The students expressed how useful the Dress for Success collage part of the
> process was but this was the most challenging part of the process for me. I had to
> constantly monitor the supplies and make sure the students did not injury
> themselves with the scissors. During this session, the scissors came up missing
> before the end of class and I would not allow the students to have their snacks.
> They all were so upset but I had to remain firm. (Field Note, Dec 10, 2011)

I even received an email from a teacher regarding this situation:

> Hi Rhonda;
> This is for you only. The young adults from your transition group were very upset
> about the incident on Friday. Remember I have half of them the next period. The
> students spoke with me and give an account about the person who they most
> suspect and some incidents after the situation makes me believe it may be
> possible. I tried to call you right after I left the room but the secretary at the desk
> said you had left for the day. I will talk with you on Monday. Nonetheless, the
> scissors were found in the garbage can in the classroom after all the students left
> the classroom. (Field Note, Dec 10, 2011)

One teacher that was interviewed shared, "Dress for Success activity gave the students an

opportunity to learn how to dress for success. They learned that wearing a baseball cap

and a shirt with profanity is a no no for interview." Another teacher admitted,

> This was a fun interactive activity for the students. It helped the students to
> understand that your appearance is very important especially as it relates to your
> future goals. Students were able to determine how they should dress for certain

professions. It was a great visual tool for them to understand what was appropriate professional wear and what you should not wear.

Mock Interviews. We discussed the right and wrong things to say and do at a job interview. One staff member shared that the following activities were very useful for the students: "Employer and employee interview," "I liked 'what not to wear' for a job interview," and "How to dress for a job interview and collages." One staff member that was interviewed shared that she liked the mock interview activity because "students received a firsthand look at how interviews were conducted. It also gave them an opportunity to practice interviewing skills." In addition, several students felt that the interviews were the most useful part. On their student exit slips, Students revealed:

"I like how we got to talk about a job interview, I learned a lot and it is fun doing this."

"The job dress and you can't smell like you were smoking."

"Showing us how to act when we go for a job interview."

"We got snacks and we talked about jobs."

"That you told us how to pass an interview and it was fun."

"You talked to us about how we go into an interview and how you should not go into an interview."

First Sergeant Lockhart and the Military. During this session, students learned about the military with First Sergeant Lockhart (Michael J. Hawkins High School JROTC Instructor) and all that it had to offer. According to First Sergeant Lockhart, "The student with disabilities handout was a great tool for the students to follow. It was a great tool for me to use to explain about the military." Two students agreed that First Sergeant

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Lockhart talking about the Army was the most useful part. Several students also shared the following on their exit slips:

"I like when 1SG Lockhart was talking and I like when you gave us snack."

"Learning more about the Army and having an experienced person coming in to talk to us."

"One thing I liked is that there are over 250 jobs in the military. Also I liked the many things you could get from being in the military."

"I liked that we can learn about different things and I liked that we can have people come in teach our class."

"1SG Lockhart talked about the military."

"We had a JROTC member come speak to us."

"I like that you can go to the military and it helps you out when you have a job. I liked how 1SG Lockhart was taking his time to talk to us."

One teacher who was interviewed shared that, "First Sergeant Lockhart gave the student a straight up talk. This is how it is done and you must conform to the ways of the world and society."

Student Engagement. Several teachers felt that student engagement was a key factor in the success of the transition planning process sessions. Three teachers shared the following comments:

"Ms. Sutton and Ms. Damiani discussed different aspects of transition. There was also discussion about the different agencies and how they can help the students."

"Ms. Sutton engaged the students well. They asked questions when needed."

"The students had to think."

"That the students are able to articulate their future plans, and have meaningful conversations about their goals."

One teacher who was interviewed shared that "most of the process was hands on, so, the students did not have to worry about a lot of book work." Another teacher interviewed, stated he "believed it was fun for the students because many of the activities were interactive."

The students also shared:

"You really trying to help use with our careers and that's what I like about you."

"You were nice to us."

"I liked that we are doing transition planning."

"I liked how she was talking about what the class is about and answer everything we asked her. She was nice."

"I learned what I am going to do when I get out of high school."

"I like all the opportunities."

"I learn about the Army."

"I had fun and the teacher was cool and I learned by staying in this I will get help."

"My career is game programming and learning how to use my IEP."

"I liked that we got to discuss our career and we talked more."

"I liked when we had to write about what we liked and I also liked the snacks."

In addition to the impact of the program, the students, faculty, and staff also provided some suggestions for improvement. Several students felt that I needed to provide more information to help them stay on track and help them with their behavior

issues. Four students requested more information about jobs to include the military, law school, Robotics, and tattoos. I reflected upon the students' comments regarding more information as I wrote in my journal: "I plan to provide the information that the students' requested during the transition-planning process of the 2012-2013 year" (Field Note, April 17, 2012).

The following responses are a reflection how five staff members felt the sessions could be improved:

"More topics to engage students."

"Shorten the amount of time for students to meet. After a lengthy amount of time, the students lost interest."

"Maybe have handouts about transition and the different services that are offered."

"Have a guest speaker."

"The sessions could also include students who are actually working in some of the desired areas of interest for the students attending. Ex: auto repair interest, use student from the auto shop to come in talk."

In addition, the following staff members shared:

"Teach students how to shop, pay bills, make a bed, using ATM."

"PowerPoint presentations."

Four staff members shared that the sessions did not need any improvement. After reading how the staff members felt the sessions could be improved, I was compelled to write the following journal entry: "I had being asking for suggestions and participation from school staff since I started this transition-planning process and it would have been

more effective if the staff had been more pro-active with their support of this process" (Field Note, April 17, 2012).

When asked if the staff members were interested in collaborating with Mrs. Sutton in future transition planning sessions, seven staff members stated that they were interested. One staff member shared, "I would enjoy teaming with Mrs. Sutton at any time. Anything that I could provide her to assist in the education of our youth I will be first in line."

Twelve students felt that there was no least useful part of this process. When students were asked to write down any additional comments, six students stated that what I did was pretty good, and that I was great, helpful, friendly, fun, and awesome. I was very satisfied with the feedback that the students provided during this final discussion. I felt that they were sincere and responded to the best of their ability. Their feedback provided me with much needed information to ensure that the future transition planning process program will be successful.

Meeting with Special Education Teachers and CST

On April 23, 2012, I met with the special education teachers and CST at a special education department meeting and presented the results of their questionnaires and an overview of the action research study. Only eight special teachers and one CST member were in attendance. I explained the importance of my study and also how disappointed I was that they did not encourage all their students to attend the sessions. Several teachers stated that they made attempts to give the transition planning process passes to the students, but the students refused to attend. Two other teachers shared that some of the students were not in attendance the day of the sessions. I also shared that if they were not

providing results-oriented transition services to their students in the classroom then it was even more important that they encourage their students to attend these sessions. I reminded them how I emailed information and hand-carried hall passes to them every week for their students to attend these sessions. Moving forward, the special education teachers and child study team member seemed very interested in participating in the transition planning process for the 2012-2013 school year and promised to more effectively support this program in the future.

Impact of Program on District-Wide CST

On October 26, 2012, I had the opportunity to conduct a district-wide CST professional development presentation on the Transition Planning Process based on my action research study. In attendance were the Director of Special Services and 52 Child Study Team members, which included school social workers, school psychologists, learning disabilities teacher/consultant (LDT/C), and speech therapists. This presentation consisted of a short motivational video, an Introduction, Overview of Literature Reviewed, Transition Planning (Scope & Sequence) Schedule 2012-2013 (Appendix G), Student Transition Planning Portfolio (STPP) (Appendix K), IEP Statement of Transition Services: Coordinated Activities/Strategies (See Appendix Q), and Conclusion. After the presentation was over, an eight-item questionnaire was given to evaluate the transition planning process. There were four likert scale items (Quantitative data), followed by four open-ended questions (Qualitative data). Qualitative data were used "to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same subjects or site" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 37). Based on the CST Transition Planning

Presentation Questionnaire Responses frequency tallies (Table 4), it was clear that the

CST members believed that the transition planning process was an effective practice.

Table 4.

District-wide CST Questionnaire Results (N=45)

		Percentages			
		Strongly Agree/ Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The transition planning sessions was very useful for the students.	87%	0	0	0
2	The presenter had expert knowledge of the Transition Planning Process.	85%	2%	0	0
3	The content of the session was presented in an organized fashion.	87%	0	0	0
4	The transition planning activities will stimulate student's	81%	6%	0	0

The following themes emerged from the open-ended responses: Information and

Handouts, Presenter's Knowledge and Passion, and Presentation and Activities.

Information and handouts. Prior to the presentation introduction, I showed a

short motivational video (Jill and Kevin's wedding entrance dance) to get the audience in

a good mood and prepared to hear what I had to say. The introduction provided a brief

overview of the many problems that high school students with disabilities face, including

crime, joblessness, and homelessness, which can create a huge and costly burden on the

students, their families, their communities, and society as a whole. I also shared that poor

post-school outcomes have been linked to the lack of vocational preparation, transition

planning, and linkage to existing adult services and supports prior to graduation (Condon

& Callahan, 2008). According to Levine (2005), "work-life un-readiness can afflict an

entire community or even a global society" (p. 10). Our youths need the skills and

motivation to compete in today's job market. The costs of sitting back and doing nothing for our youths can be enormous.

The Transition Planning Schedule, STPP, and IEP Statement of Transition Services Coordinated Activities/Strategies that I designed for Michael J. Hawkins High School were handed out and discussed during the presentation. Of the 45 CST members who replied to the questionnaire, 100% (agreed or strongly agreed) with the statement, "The transition planning sessions were very useful for the students." Comments included:

"I like the packet with information so that student will be prepared for the work world."

"The handouts will be extremely helpful."

"It was very informative and inspirational."

"Everything in the presentation was useful for transition planning."

"Handouts will be useful for students."

Eighty-four percent (agreed or strongly agreed) and 16% (had no opinion) with the statement, "The transition planning activities will stimulate student's learning." Additional comments included:

"New information to implement and to provide choices and inform students."

"The sample scope and sequence and statement of transition services: coordinated activities/strategies."

"Handout was very detailed."

"The presentation was informative and gave great info on transition planning."

"The handouts were helpful and will provide teams with resources to increase career development."

"The transition planning portfolio and the practical suggestions for implementation."

"Resources provided through handouts."

"Concrete examples and specific ways to incorporate ideas into IEP, transition portfolio is great."

Presenter's knowledge and passion. In addition to the background of the problem, I reiterated that NJAC 6A:14 (NJDOE, 2006) designates case managers as responsible for transition planning and how we as case managers must make sure that our students are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. The literature review outlined the readings discussed during the presentation. Eighty-eight percent (agreed or strongly agreed) and 12% (had no opinion) with the statement, "The presenter had expert knowledge of the transition planning process." Comments included:

"Activities and passion about subject topic and the detail planning."

"Trainer knowledgeable, forcing us to review each section was a good way to capitalizing the information."

"Rhonda was able to effectively communicate how all child study members (elementary to high school) play a part in transition."

"That she was prepared and knowledgeable – Good handouts!"

"All info was very valuable and the presenter was very good."

"The presenter was passionate about the topic, keep up the good work."

I explained how I designed the STPP and consequently, created the 10-session Transition Planning Schedule. Next, I discussed how once the 10 sessions were successfully completed, we were able to actually document each of these sessions on the

IEP Statement of Transition Services Coordinated Activities/Strategies. At the conclusion

of my presentation I asked my colleagues, "What will you go to the wall for?" Then I

read the following poem:

> Imagine if we loved other people's children enough to do what we would do for our own— to fight for them, to protect them, to work to give them the best of everything. That level of compassion takes courage... Courage to act on what we know is best for children—to dig in our heels and say no to bad decisions, to risk condemnation, or even our jobs to support what we know is right for children. The real heroes in education are the people willing to take a stand for what is right. (Dr. Marian Galbraith, 2002 Connecticut Teacher of the Year)

Overall presentation and activities. In addition to the handouts, I also had a

large bag of incentives to encourage participation from the audience. The incentives

included toiletries and snacks. After the end of each section, I asked several end of

section review questions and the members that responded correctly were allowed to select

an item out of the incentive bag. One hundred percent (agreed or strongly agreed) with

the statement, "The content of the session was presented in an organized fashion."

Additional comments included:

> "The presenter was well organized, the materials provided."

> "Everything was presented well."

> "All aspects of presentation were done well."

> "Interaction with audiences."

> "It was fun, relaxed – intro was great."

> "The review after each section to talk about what we discussed."

In addition to the organized fashion, several CST members enjoyed the way the presenter

motivated the attendees to participate in the presentation:

> "It was great … and so were the treats."

"Presenter gave rewards to keep audience motivated and in addition, provided valuable information and loved the handouts."

"How the presenter engage the team members with incentives."

"The period quiz of what was just presented on w/ the incentive of a small token gift out of the gift bag."

"Humor, participation gifts; all the work is already done –so the information provided will eliminate excuses for helping to ensure a successful future for students."

The Transition Planning Process presentation that I gave on October 26, 2012 provided me with several opportunities. First, I was able to share my passion for ensuring that our students with special needs are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Secondly, I was able to see firsthand how my director, supervisors, and fellow district-wide child study team members unanimously supported my action research study.

In addition, I also received the following emails:

On November 02, 2012 from Dr. Ogbonna, the Director of Special Services:

"Ms. Sutton,

I want to use this opportunity to thank you for the outstanding presentation you made your colleagues on October 26, 2012. I have no doubt that your presentation on "Transition: Making IDEA Work" will make a difference on how our child Study Teams handle this portion of their responsibility.
Special Services THANKS YOU!!!!

On October 31, 2012 from a school social worker:

I just wanted to thank you for giving the presentation on Transition the other day. Although information has been shared with Child Study Team members in the past about this topic, I thought that your presentation was very informative. I have worked in the middle schools for a number of years, now I work with both middle school and high school populations. The information that you shared shows me that I will have to stay on my toes, in an effort to work with our students in the area of Transition. LOL Again, I'd like to thank you for sharing.

In addition to the overwhelming support rendered to me on October 26, 2012, I loved the fact that I had a platform to demonstrate to the Special Services Department that I was ready for increased responsibility within our department and the school district in general. Lastly, all the Child Study Team members in attendance are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that the students on their caseloads are provided transition planning services.

New Awareness of Transition Planning

A careful analysis of various artifacts including the scope and sequence of the 10 sessions, sign-in sheets, exit slips, STPPs, leadership evaluation forms, field notes, and faculty, staff, CST members, and student transition planning evaluation forms provided me data to determine the impact of the plan. I discovered that I could document all 10 sessions on the Statement of Transition Services: Coordinated Activities/Strategies section of the 2012-2013 Individualized Education Plan (Appendix Q) for all the students on my caseloads (Field Note, February 01, 2012). Additionally, for the first time since the student participants attended Michael J. Hawkins High School, they are finally receiving results-oriented transition planning services. Also, due to this study, more special education teachers, guidance counselors, and CST members are aware of the importance of a results-oriented transition planning process. My study was so important to the school district that my director insisted that I provide him with copies of my student sign-in sheets and agendas so that he can present this as evidence to the State that we are providing transition services in our district (Field Note, February 15, 2012). The few parents that attended the IEP meetings were very impressed with the Statement of Transition Services: Coordinated Activities/Strategies section of the 2012-2013

Individualized Education Plan (Appendix Q) (Field Note, March 02, 2012). Several

Michael J. Hawkins High School CST members shared that they wanted to collaborate

with me for the 2012-2013 school year and utilize my transition planning process for the

students on their caseloads (Field Note, April 23, 2012). The District-Wide Transition

Planning Presentation was a success and provided CST members valuable insight to the

importance of ensuring that our students receive the mandated Transition Services. The

following CST members shared:

"The focus it brought to the needs for our students to have transitional services."

"The reality was even more evident that the district is not providing needed

resources for our children to have a fair chance and opportunity of being successful."

"I enjoyed learning about the various resources available for students to transition

from youth to adulthood."

"The overall presentation of information that I was unaware of prior to the

presentation."

Conclusion

Cycle 3 served to determine the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition

planning process. The results of the data confirmed that the students needed and would

benefit from a results-oriented transition planning process at Michael J. Hawkins High

School. One hundred percent of the staff agreed that the transition planning sessions were

very useful for the students. One hundred percent of the staff agreed that my leadership

skills were effective and that I had expert knowledge of the transition planning process.

One hundred percent of the staff agreed that the content of the sessions were presented in

an organized fashion and the student activities stimulated learning. I like the fact that

several students felt that I needed to provide more information to help them stay on track and help them with their behavior issues, this factor demonstrates an increase in their self-determination skills. The construct self-determination "refers to the volitional acts that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to maintain or improves one's quality of life" (Wehmeyer, 2006, p. 117). I plan to add a behavioral self-management component to the transition planning process for the 2012-2013 school year.

Chapter VII

Leadership Reflection, Research Questions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Secondary education school personnel and administrators, through their own involvement, must show students how to look beyond high school toward postsecondary education (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), 1994). This leadership study represented the journey of my leadership development through my goal to develop and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensures IDEA transition services mandates are implemented for secondary students with disabilities from their IEPs to the classroom. The purpose of this chapter was to reflect upon my leadership growth throughout this doctoral program and action research study. I also examined the impact my leadership had on this study in order to determine if my espoused theory correlated with my theories-in-use. "Espoused theories" signify what someone says they would do in a certain situation whereas "Theories-in-use" signify what they actually do (Argyris, 1980). Argyris (1980) also maintains that my effectiveness will emerge from the similarities that developed between my theory-in-use and my espoused theory. I utilized data from literature reviewed, questionnaires, experiences throughout the doctoral program and at Michael J. Hawkins High School, and my journal to create a story of my leadership.

Leadership has always been a position that I found myself in whether I chose it or not. I was the person when no one else wanted to be in charge, I would take charge. Based on my desire to serve, inspire, and change and the knowledge that I have gained,

my styles of leadership are servant, symbolic, and transformational. I believe that being a servant, symbolic, and transformational leader drives my effective implementation of my change framework to make a positive difference at Michael J. Hawkins High School.

Theory-in-use: Servant Leadership

"Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time." ― *Marian Wright Edelman*

As a servant leader, my ultimate goal was to make sure that my students with disabilities' needs were met on a daily basis. Also as the Child Study Team leader, I find myself always making sure that my colleagues have the resources that they need to service our students with disabilities. I constantly remind them when they get frustrated with the barriers and red tape within our school district that that is the reason that we exist. Our students have no one outside of the Child Study Team (CST) who ensures that their educational needs are met. When an issue comes up, I will challenge the team to tell me who would do this particular task for our students if we do not. Challenging tasks include getting the guidance department to change a student's schedule to meet the requirements of the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Quite often, our guidance department does not want to change a schedule for one of our students or exempt a student from passing a state assessment, so, I have to intervene with the State mandates in hand in which the guidance counselor will make the change. Our roles as CST members are to ensure that our students with disabilities are given the services to enable them to be included in the general education setting. Servant-leadership represents a model of leadership in which the leader assumes a supportive, service-orientated role among stakeholders and followers (Greenleaf, 1977). The goal of this study was to develop and

implement a process that would better serve our students with disabilities as they transition from high school to adulthood. Greenleaf (1970) described a new leadership philosophy, one that advocates the servant as leader:

> It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 4)

According to Spears (2002), the characteristics associated with servant leadership include incorporating active listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building. As a case manager for students with disabilities, I have a responsibility to ensure that the school administrators, guidance counselors, child study team, and teachers maintain compliance with state and federal mandates as pertained to my students. According to Bass (2000),

> Servant leadership has a place in educational organizations in the new millennium because its style is based on teamwork and community, involving others in decision-making, is strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and enhances the growth of people in the learning organization. (p. 33)

In addition to the students that I service within my community, I also have two sons with special needs and I treat my students and their families the way I would want my sons treated. As Lee and Zemke (1993) confirm, "The servant-leader's belief system says he or she is no better than those who are led" (p. 86). Wheatley (1999a, 1999b) views servant leadership as learning how to work together in a unified manner. Effective servant leaders exist within the web of relationships and choose to act as helpers for the people who desire them as leaders (Wheatley, 1999b). During Cycle 1, I was constantly

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mindful of how I scheduled the transition planning process sessions. I wanted to hold these sessions in the afternoons when they would not interfere with the student participants' content-area classes. In addition, their lunch periods were earlier during the day, therefore, I provided snacks every session for my students. The students looked forward to the snacks and this incentive also ensured that none of my students were hungry.

Theory-in-use: Symbolic Leadership

"Leadership is the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by passion, generated by vision, produced by a conviction, ignited by a purpose."-
Dr. Myles Munroe

The symbolic theory consists of a leader inspiring people, making them feel part of the team, leading by example and sharing experiences. Bolman and Deal (2008) imply that "symbolic leaders communicate a vision that addresses both the challenges of the present and the hopes and values of the followers" (p. 369). Wren (1995) argues that in modern situations, the most appropriate leader is one who can lead others to lead themselves. This is why the self-determination theory is such a factor in my study. During the transition planning sessions, my symbolic leadership was in full effect. During these sessions, I revealed my experiences, my goals, and vision with these students in order to convey information, morals, and values (Bolman & Deal, 2008). These students all truly wanted to graduate and be successful in their adult life. I tried to expose as much of my life experience as I could with them to encourage them to follow their dreams. I shared with them how important it was to visualize what they want to be in life. You have to see yourself doing whatever it is you want to do in life. I told them

that each time that I was pursuing a degree (Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate's), I visualized myself walking across the stage with that degree.

As a symbolic leader, I also communicated to my students to find positive pictures of the things (symbols) that are important in their lives whether it be their future goals, a loved one, or their families. I instructed them to put these pictures in their favorite places, especially around their home. I have pictures of my husband and me happily together, figurines and pictures of couples in love, pictures of my parents, and pictures of all our children all over the house. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), symbols help find meaning in chaos, give clarity in confusion, and predictability in mystery. When I am discouraged or just need some motivation, I walk around my house, look at these artifacts and my focus is immediately restored. I also have copies of these pictures with me, so when I am away, I can still stay focused.

I share with my students that they have to surround themselves with the people that they want to be like. My closest friends are all successful even though we are in different career fields. We motivate each other with our energy and will to make a difference in the lives of others. When I am talking to my students, I get to reveal how important their contributions to society are and that they are the future leaders of the world. As a symbolic leader, after each session, I had my students complete exit slips, to provide direction, and anchor hope and faith (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Throughout my study I kept the administrators and staff informed of my plans every week with the students. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), an organization without a plan is rudderless, short-sighted, and reactive. Every week I made it my business to stress the importance of communication through my interactions with the

school personnel and my emails. Communication allowed me to discover and communicate my vision (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Because I informed every one of my plans, I became sort of a magnet in which the school staff constantly sought me out for assistance regarding classroom and behavioral management, transition Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), organizational skills, lesson plans, and special education law. Plans are symbols, plans become games, plans become excuses for interaction and plans become advertisements (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Consequently, because of the effect that I had on the staff, it made it easy to solicit the necessary support that I needed for my study. Because of these skills, I consider myself a connector, a salesman, and a maven.

According to Gladwell (2000), connectors are individuals who have ties in many different realms and act as conduits between them, helping to engender connections, relationships, and "cross-fertilization" that otherwise might not have ever occurred. Salesmen are people whose unusual charisma allows them to be extremely persuasive in inducing others' buying decisions and behaviors. I also look for opportunities to create stickiness factors, power of contexts, and laws of the few as well. Mavens are people who have a strong compulsion to help other consumers by helping them make informed decisions. I consider myself a "maven" at MJHHS because I am the one who ensures that everyone is getting the information necessary to perform their jobs more effectively. Come to think of it, I am like that everywhere I go. I am also considered an expert in my field in my military unit and in my community as well. I am also a lifelong learner who has high standards, ambitious goals, and a real sense of mission in my life.

Theory-in-use: Transformational Leadership

"The Time is Always Right to do What is Right" - *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The primary goal of second-order change is to affect the culture of the organization (i.e., deep-seated assumptions, values, and beliefs that are enduring, unconscious, and difficult to change). Organizational culture tends to be much more difficult to change. Second-order change alters the core ways we conduct business or even the basic business itself. Engaging in second-order change, however, requires transformational leadership. Those who grew up in an environment where they were rewarded to be good transactional leaders are often inexperienced and unprepared to provide the kind of transformational leadership that is required to effect the kind of second-order changes (on mission and strategy, leadership, and organizational culture) that is being asked of them. This kind of leader is capable of having a profound and extraordinary affect on their followers, inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization.

Gladwell's (2000) "The Law of the Few" contends that before widespread popularity can be attained, a few key types of people must champion an idea, concept, or product before it can reach the tipping point. I plan to create and implement a program for high school students with special needs transitioning to adulthood. This will be my legacy; my "stickiness factor" to the MJHHS Special Education Department. I figure if I start helping my students first, then the epidemic will stick in people's minds within the school. When I review these steps, I am reminded how "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) evolved. It had a sense of urgency, it started nationally, it used our children as the vision and strategy, we communicated NCLB in colleges, school districts, with the media,

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teachers either retired or became highly qualified, teacher hiring standards were more

demanding and students were now in position to achieve academic excellence. Fullan

(2001a) also implies that change is more than the external workings of the process. To

truly understand the change process one must take into account the system and all

stakeholders. Without considering those involved, lasting change will be impossible. My

study allowed the school staff to see my transformational leadership first hand in the role

of a researcher. As I stated in Cycle 2, I made numerous attempts to obtain administrative

participation and support of this study despite the fact that they vowed to support my

study. One of the most difficult tasks was trying to secure a room to conduct the

transition planning process sessions. Since I did not hear from any of the administrators, I

made an executive decision and contacted several teachers that I knew who would

support my sessions. As a result, four teachers allowed me to use their classrooms to

conduct my sessions. I perceived first-order change as the Model I (espoused) theory and

is utilized normally by a transactional or structural leader. On the other hand, I also

understood that second-order change is Model II (theory-in-use) theory and is utilized

mainly by a transformational leader. Unfortunately, most of the leadership that I have

observed at my school district has evolved around first-order change. The primary goal of

first-order change is to affect the organizational climate (i.e., people's perceptions and

attitudes about the organization – whether it is a good or bad place to work, friendly, or

unfriendly, hardworking or easy going, etc.).

 According to Argyris (1990), the Model I theory is influenced by our social

virtues. I agree that many of the negative situations at my workplace are due to the fact

that people have different degrees of social virtues (Argyris, 1990), which could have

hindered my researched. Argyris (1990, 1993) insists that the Model I theory leads to often deeply entrenched defensive routines and these can operate at individual, group, and organizational levels. This might explain the lack of administrative support for my study. According to Argyris (1990), in order to improve our organizations, we must move from a Model I (espoused) theory concept to a theory-in-use. Argyris (1990) also suggests that organizations must stop agreeing to do business as usual because it has always been done that way. Not having a transition planning process for our students with special needs in our school district will not continue. As leaders, we must establish programs to help students transition to and stay in high school and conduct themselves in a manner that does not result in loss of classroom time through suspensions and other unexcused absences.

According to Goleman (2004), "not surprisingly, the visionary mode comes naturally to "transformational" leaders – those who seek to radically change an organization" (p. 59). A transformational leader is capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on her followers, inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization (Wren, 1995). During Cycle 3, the Special Education Department met on April 23, 2012, and I presented the results of their questionnaires and an overview of the action research study which provided an opportunity for me to utilize my transformation leadership. As I explained the importance and highlights of my study, I was able to share my passion and vision for the plight of our students with disabilities as well. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest "transformational leaders are visionary leaders whose leadership is inherently symbolic" (p. 368). I provided them with excerpts of my

dissertation proposal, the Transition Planning Process Schedule, and the Student

Transition Planning Portfolio (STPP).

Fullan (2001a) argues that we move have a moral purpose in order to begin the

change process. In education, administrators or teachers must see making a difference in

the lives of students as an "end" and a "means" (Fullan, 2001a). In addition, Deal and

Peterson (1999) insist "mission and purpose is the unseen force that motivates teachers to

teacher, leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have

confidence in their school" (p. 9). Fullan also revealed that we were more likely to learn

something from people who disagree with us than we are from people who agree (Fullan,

2001). I found that during this study several staff members and administrators did not

always agree that students with disabilities needed additional support in transition

planning. These individuals felt that the guidance counselors were responsible for this

support. During this study I was able to share the laws and policies that require schools to

provide these additional supports for our students. As leaders we should have good ideas

and present them well (the authoritative element) while at the same time seeking and

listening to doubters (aspects of democratic leadership).

The staff members and administrators who did not support my study could be

considered resisters. According to Argyris (1990), resisters can make or break an

organization's desire to transform its culture. Argyris (1990) insists "once defensive

routines are created they cause human beings to act in ways that are counterproductive to

the formal goals or objectives of their organization" (p. 45). Fullan argues that leaders

must try to build good relationships (be affiliative) even with those who may not trust

them. During this study, I was relentless in trying to build good relationships and

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appreciate the ones that I was able to build. Bolman and Deal (2008) attest that "planning without broad-based participation that gives voice to the opposition almost guarantees stiff resistance later on" (p. 378). Fullan (2001a indicates

> We need to represent resisters for two reasons. First, they sometimes have ideas that we might have missed, especially in situations of diversity or complexity or in the tackling of problems for which the answer is unknown. Second, resisters are crucial when it comes to the politics of implementation. Successful organizations don't go with only like-minded innovators; they deliberately build in differences. (p. 42)

> Fullan (2001a) further implies that leaders "also trust the learning process they set up, the focus on moral purpose, the attention to the change process, the building of relationships, the sharing and critical scrutiny of knowledge, and traversing the edge of chaos while seeking coherence" (p. 43).

Moving forward, the special education teachers and child study team member reassured me that they would support and participate in the transition planning process for the 2012-2013 school year. In transformational leadership, focus on the leader is directed toward the organization, and the leader's behavior builds follower commitment toward the organizational objectives through empowering followers to accomplish those objectives (Yukl, 1998). According to Fullan (2001a), when change occurs there will be disturbances, and this means that there will be differences of opinion that must be reconciled. As a transformational leader, my ultimate goal at Michael J. Hawkins High School is to guide us from a Model I organization to a Model II organization.

> Every significant Model II action is evaluated in terms of the degree to which it helps the individuals involved generate valid and useful information (including relevant feelings), solve the problem in a way that it remains solved, and do so without reducing the present level of problem solving effectiveness. (Argyris, 1976, pp. 21-22)

Deal and Peterson (1999) suggest that effective school leaders are always alert to the deeper issues agitating beneath a seemingly rational veneer of activity.

Fullan (2001a argues that "when the individual soul is connected to the organization, people become connected to something deeper; the desire to contribute to a larger purpose, to feel they are part of a greater whole, a web of connection" (p. 52). According to Bolman and Deal (2008), for an organization, group, or family, soul can also be viewed as a resolute sense of character, a deep confidence about who we are, what we care about, and what we deeply believe in. Fullan (2001a) suggests that

> The following elements are essentials to developing relationships (1) setting clear standards, (2) expecting the best, (3) paying attention, (4) personalizing recognition, (5) telling the story, (6) celebrating together, and (7) setting the example. Fullan explains that development of individuals is not sufficient but that new relationships are crucial. These relationships must work at the hard task of establishing greater program coherence and the addition of resources. (p. 54)

Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is looking. This characteristic requires an individual to be honest and knowledgeable. I still believe that when a person is doing the right thing when no one is around is respectful and truthful as well. I do not feel that I am perfect, but I consider myself to be full of integrity and honesty. I am still learning about the leader in me and how I can be a more effective leader. I imagine that this requires persistence, confidence, motivation, and commitment. I believe that I have all these characteristics, but unfortunately, sometimes that is not enough. I want to see my students and colleagues do well in life, but they have to want success for themselves.

I still consider myself a servant, transformational, and symbolic leader. I found it somewhat challenging at times to hold true and steadfast to my beliefs during my research. What really was challenging and disappointing was the lack of support I received for my research study by my school. Every new special education teacher sought

me out because they were told that I have excellent lesson plans, effective behavior management, and co-teaching strategies. I could not understand why many of my colleagues did not complete my questionnaires. In addition to my introduction letter and emails, I spoke to several of these teachers in passing and during our common planning time. Of course, many of them promised to complete the questionnaires and asked me how much time they had. I always told them that they still had time to get the questionnaire to me. One of my colleagues mentioned that the organizational climate could have been a factor. I remember completing my organizational climate report a couple of years ago for my school specifically with the special education department. I remember how disgruntled the teachers were and they were not satisfied with administration. Though, I agree with their complaints and concerns; I had a more effective way of dealing with it. As a transformational leader, I approach anyone that I feel is impeding my progress as an educator. I am not one to sit around and complain. I will pray about it, wait, and then set out to handle the situation.

This study helped me to understand how I could utilize my leadership in my school district. During uncertain times, I would remind myself what type of leader I needed to be. For example, when the administrators did not respond to my room request emails, I would say to myself how can I exercise my leadership to get what I needed done for my study? At times, it was my servant leader influence that I utilized with the special education teachers. For example, Ms. Johnson (Special Education Teacher), "can I please use your room to conduct my transition planning sessions for our students with disabilities?" Another time it was the transformation leader - Child Study Team, "I really need you to review this portfolio to make sure that we are meeting the transitional needs

of our students with disabilities." I already knew that the CST was not conducting results-oriented transition planning and I needed their support for this study. Since the transition planning work was already done by me, it was easy to get them to buy into the process.

Lastly, as a symbolic leader, I realized that the students, faculty, and staff liked listening to my stories and life experiences. I told inspiring stories and shared pictures of my military career, correctional officer, and educational experiences. I never imagined that the chronicles of my life would be so interesting to so many. In addition, I was able to inspire the faculty and staff as an effective team leader and learning consultant through the professional development trainings I provided, my expertise in the field of special education, and my passion for the needs of our students.

Research Questions

The questions developed for this research were based on the need to develop and implement a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensures IDEA transition services mandates are implemented for secondary students with disabilities from their IEPs to the classroom. Previous studies have supported the notion that effective transition services increase the probability of success for students transitioning from high school to adulthood. The purpose of this chapter was to answer the four research questions that guided this study, and provide future recommendations and implications for stakeholders in the special education transition planning. In this dissertation, I developed and implemented a "results-oriented" transition planning process that ensured IDEA transition services mandates are implemented from the IEPs to the classroom for secondary education students with disabilities. It was paramount that the questions that I designed guided this study. I have been working on this topic since my Master Thesis and

I knew that my dissertation would take this topic to a higher level to truly have an impact on the lives of my students.

What were the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?

The first question focused on the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. The purpose of Cycle 1 was to collect data to gather the perceptions of administrators, special education teachers, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities. Based on the results of the special education teachers, guidance counselors, and administrator questionnaires, the majority of the participants believed that the students with disabilities were not prepared for their transition from high school to adulthood. Additionally, according to the guidance counselors and administrator questionnaire responses, it is evident that they depend on the CST to provide the transition services for the student with disabilities.

How well did students with disabilities feel that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?

The second question focused on how well the students with disabilities felt that they are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. The purpose of Cycle 1 was to collect data to determine how well the high school students with disabilities felt that they were prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Cycle 1 was organized to report the questionnaire results in order to answer the question.

This question was also answered in Cycles 2 and 3 by way of the pre and post transitional planning process questionnaires, participants' observations and STPPs.

By examining the results of the students' pre-transition planning process questionnaires, it was clear that these students felt that they were not prepared to transition from high school to adulthood. Of the 15 students who responded to the questionnaire:

- 79% disagreed with the statement, "I have developed a career plan."

- 47% disagreed and 40% had no opinion with the statement, "I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals."

- 69% disagreed and 13% had no opinion with the statement, "I have a timetable for achieving my career plan."

- 89% disagreed with the statement, "I have gathered information on post-secondary programs."

- 73% disagreed and 20% had no opinion with the statement, "I can pursue a variety activities related to career preparation."

What were the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?

The third question focused on what are the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process. According to NJAC 6A (NJDOE, 2006), the expected outcomes of the transition planning process will be to focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student; facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, focus on the individual student's needs, taking into

account the student's strengths, preferences and interests, and the student transition-planning portfolio was designed to enable the development of self-determination skills for students with disabilities.

I initially derived information from my two major theoretical lenses of self-determination theory and transition planning framework. I also obtained information from the NJCCCS Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills Standards, which identified the key skills that students must meet upon graduation. After retrieving the information, I mapped out a process for students to gain these desired skills, track their progress, and evaluate the program. Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives (Bremer et al., 2003). The framework for the student transition-planning portfolio was based on the "transition planning framework." Transition planning is a student-centered activity that requires a collaborative effort. At MJHHS, the responsibilities for transition planning will be shared by the students, parents, and secondary education personnel, and postsecondary personnel, all of whom are members of the transition team (NJCLD, 1994). Creating a transition planning process at MJHHS is essential in that it allows case managers to follow a systematic and thoughtful process of planning a post-school environment for our students with disabilities. For students with disabilities to grow into adults who can function successfully in society, secondary education educators must provide school services that prepare them for the transition to adulthood (Dowdy et al., 1990; Zigmond, 2006). The results of the Cycle 3 data confirmed that the students needed and would benefit from a results-oriented transition planning process at Michael J. Hawkins High School. One hundred percent of the staff agreed with the following statements:

- The transition planning sessions were very useful for the students; my

  leadership skills were effective.

- I had expert knowledge of the transition planning process.

- The content of the sessions were presented in an organized fashion and the

  student activities stimulated learning.

How did my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented transition planning process?

The fourth question focused on how my leadership facilitated the development and implementation of a "results-oriented" transition planning process. This question was answered in my leadership study. My leadership enabled me to successfully conduct an action research study within my school district. Based on the data results, I was able to serve, inspire, and transform the minds of many students, faculty, staff, and administrators under my leadership. I provided my expertise in the field of special education and my passion for the needs of our students. Additionally, for the first time since the student participants attended Michael J. Hawkins High School, they were finally receiving results-oriented transition planning services. Also, due to my leadership, more special education teachers, guidance counselors, and CST members are aware of the importance of a results-oriented transition planning process. The District-Wide Transition Planning Presentation was a success and provided CST members valuable insight to the importance of ensuring that our students receive the mandated Transition Services.

Implications and Recommendations

Although the literature, laws, and needs of the students with disabilities point to the necessity of transition planning, many students with disabilities are not receiving it.

Clearly, the implementation of the transition planning process at the Michael J. Hawkins High School was hindered by staff and faculty perceptions and lack of administrative support. The following implications are based on the findings of this study.

Many of the special education teachers, guidance counselors, CST members, and administrators lack the necessary training to implement an effective transition planning process at Michael Joseph Hawkins High School (MJHHS). Due to the lack of training it was difficult to collaborate with all the stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of transition planning. The lack of effective student participation could have also been due to the lack of parental involvement at the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Many parents are unaware of the need of transition planning because they do not attend these meetings, therefore, are not able to ensure that their child participates in transition planning.

The following recommendations for the Michael J. Hawkins High School were based on my findings and are needed to ensure that IDEA transition services mandates are implemented from the IEPs to the classrooms for secondary students with disabilities:

1) Need to provide professional development for special education teachers, guidance counselors, CST, and administrators regarding the implementation and monitoring of transition services and IEPs and incorporating transition services into the school curriculum.

2) Create small learning communities (SLC) to increase awareness and collaboration of all stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of transition services.

3) Provide workshops for parents to increase parental involvement in transition services.

4) Create procedures to monitor and evaluate student overall preparedness for life after high school.

Several members shared comments supporting the above recommendations:

"Yes, workshop for 8th grade students to assist w/ transition to high school."

If done correctly - Camden schools should assign at least one team to do nothing but transition planning for the classified students. To do it right, it takes a lot of time and effort to work with students and agencies in preparing students for careers.

"If possible, if there are materials that can be provided for students on the elementary level."

Limitations of Study

This study was conducted in a short period of time (19 months) with a limited number of respondents and sample. Other variables, such as School Improvement Grant (SIG) initiatives, Regional Achievement Center (RAC) initiatives, perception of special education, constant changing of staff members, faculty and administrators at the Michael J. Hawkins High School, the validity of student answers, assumptions that all respondents answered truthfully, unconscious influences by the researcher - I had previous knowledge and experience working with transition planning, and student mobility between various schools within the school district may have influenced or deterred the implementation of the transition planning process. Additionally, this research study did not include the perception of general education teachers and parents.

Another limitation of this study concerned the relationship of the researcher to the participants. As the researcher, I needed to develop a relationship with the participants

where the participants could be candid and frank with me. I overcame this limitation by empowering the participants and building trust with the participants. The participants should not be inhibited by the researcher observing them and questioning them. Patton (2002) recommends a goal-free evaluation, which means that the fieldwork and the data collected for assessment are from a wide range of sources and outcomes. Next, Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher compare the collected data and the outcomes with what the participant needs. I followed Patton's (2002) suggestion for my study.

Lastly, the fact that I was using action research for my method of inquiry was yet another limitation. The research process is dependent on the practitioner's knowledge and training in transition planning. Therefore, the researcher needed to keep in mind that the study results might prove to be incomplete or invalid. The main criticism of action research is that attempting to do a good deed and find a remedy to a problem, does not necessarily mean that the good act transfers into good social research. Consequently, a practitioner needs to be aware of these issues when using action research (Bloor & Wood, 2006). To counter this limitation, I used a mixed methods approach to collect data.

Conclusion

For many high school students with special needs, transition services were not being implemented and monitored as mandated by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), therefore, the probability for a successful transition from high school to adulthood for these students was severely jeopardized. The literature review explored the reasons why a "results-oriented" transition planning process must be developed and implemented to ensure that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) transition services mandates are implemented from the Individualized Education

Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms for secondary education students with disabilities at Michael J. Hawkins High School. As a case manager at Michael J. Hawkins High School, I developed and implemented a "results-oriented" transition planning process based on data collected, literature reviewed, and the STPP, and not on suppositions and temporary solutions. For this action research study, I utilized a mixed methods approach with a transformative design. The three major theoretical lenses of self-determination theory, transition planning framework, and moral purpose served as the theoretical/change framework for this study. I also came upon a startling revelation that I had minimal administrative support for this study. Overall, the experience provided me an opportunity to utilize my leadership skills to obtain the classrooms I needed, establish teacher partnerships, and to conduct successful transition planning process sessions.

As a result of this action research study, the Student Transition Planning Portfolios (STPP) was given to the District-Wide Child Study Team members to begin a results-oriented transition planning process at their schools. The "results-oriented" activities and strategies that were developed and implemented were outlined in the student's IEP on the "Statement of Transition Services: Coordinated Activities and Strategies" page (Appendix Q). The transition planning process will be an effective tool to increase the probability of success for secondary students with disabilities transitioning from high school to adulthood. This service will provide students with opportunities such as assessing their skills and interests, creating a career plan, exploring career options, and preparing for a job interview. The students for whom this service was designed will have prepared for a career that will increase their potential to compete and succeed in adulthood, regardless whether they pursue direct employment, attend college, or enter the

military. The importance of having transition services developed and implemented is not only vital to students with disabilities, but it is the law.

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Appendix A

Student Pre/Post Transition Planning Process Questionnaire

Questionnaire Directions

Please circle the answer that best describes your opinion of the level of readiness that you as a student have demonstrated in the various aspects of life and career-planning skills necessary for adulthood.

A = Strongly Agree   B = Agree   C = No Opinion   D = Disagree   E = Strongly Disagree

Try to answer each question completely and honestly based on how well you feel that you are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood and how our school can more effectively help you in this process.

Additionally, feel free to write any further comments or concerns that would assist the high school in preparing our students in transitioning from high school to adulthood in item 10.

*In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, **please do not include your name**. Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study.*
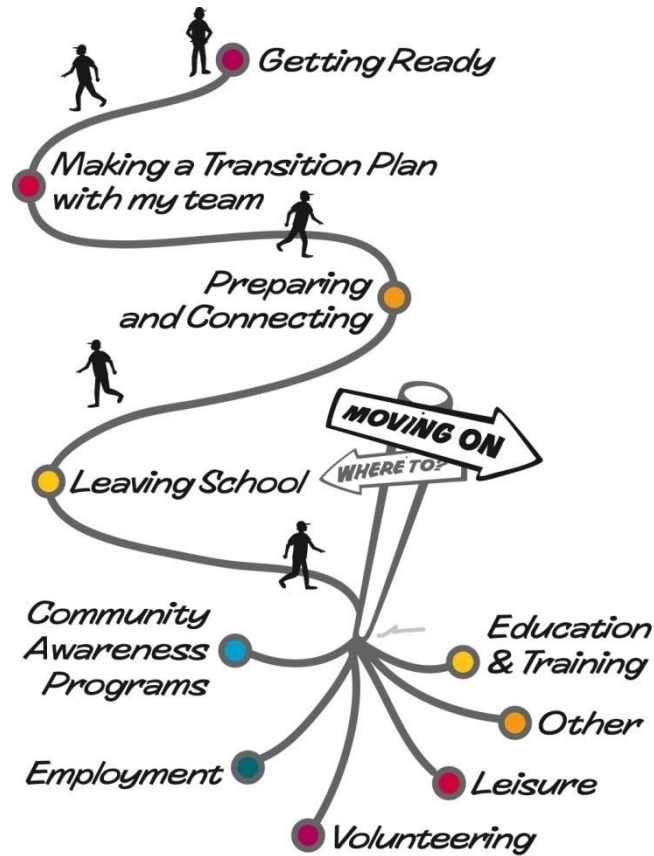
A = Strongly Agree   B = Agree   C = No Opinion   D = Disagree   E = Strongly Disagree

1. I have identified a career goal.   **A B C D E**

2. I have developed a career plan.   **A B C D E**

3. I have developed personal interests that support declared career goals.   **A B C D E**

4. I have a timetable for achieving my career plan.   **A B C D E**

5. I can identify reasons why people work and discuss how work can help a person achieve personal

    goals.   **A B C D E**

6. I can explain the difference between a career and a job.   **A B C D E**

7. I can identify various jobs in the community.   **A B C D E**

8. I can use online resources to identify jobs that are permitted for minors.   **A B C D E**

9. I have gathered information on post secondary programs   **A B C D E**

10. I have identified my post-secondary school I plan to attend   **A B C D E**

11. I can create a simple personal savings plan.   **A B C D E**

12. I can explain how my personal behavior, dress, attitudes, and other choices can impact the success

or failure of a job applicant.   **A B C D E**

13. I can explain the purpose of a will.   **A B C D E**

14. I can prepare a sample résumé and cover letter as part of an application for part-time or summer

employment.   **A B C D E**

15. I am able to explain my disability or special needs.   **A B C D E**

16. I can pursue a variety of activities related to career preparation (e.g., volunteer, seek employment,

and/or apply for training grants, higher education grants, and loans).   **A B C D E**

17. I can differentiate between financial wants and needs.   **A B C D E**

18. I can take responsibility for arriving on time to work   **A B C D E**

19. I can use local transportation options *outside of family*   **A B C D E**

20. How can our high school further assist you in transitioning from high school to adulthood?

_____

_____

_____

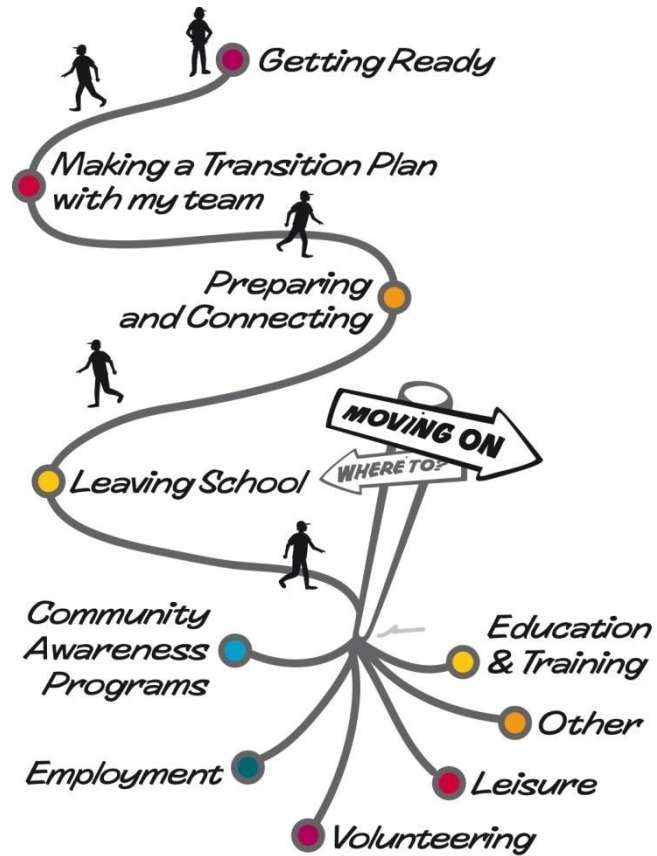# Appendix B

Teacher Questionnaire

Questionnaire Directions

Please answer each question completely and honestly based on your perception regarding the present process for implementing transition services to our students with disabilities.

Additionally, feel free to write any further comments or concerns regarding how our high school can more effectively prepare our students with disabilities to transition from high school to adulthood in items 8, 9, and 10.

In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, ***please do not include your name****. Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study.*

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected from this study will provide valuable information to assist in the development and implementation of a "results-oriented" process that insures Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms.

1. As a special education teacher, what is your understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in regards to transition services being provided for students with disabilities?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Please describe your familiarity with your students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and how transition services are documented.

_____

_____

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3. Based on your knowledge, how does the high school implement and monitor the

transition services outlined in your students' IEPs?

_____

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4. As a special education teacher, how do you incorporate career awareness and

planning, employability skills, and the foundational knowledge necessary for your

students to be self-sufficient into your curriculum?

_____

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5. Based on your daily observation of your students with disabilities, how well are they

prepared to transition from high school to adulthood? Specifically, what indicators reveal

that they have any career plans for life after high school?

_____

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6. In what ways has the high school facilitated or impeded your progress to prepare your students with disabilities for life as adult citizens and workers in the 21st century?

_____

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7. How can our high school more effectively assist our students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to adulthood?

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Comments:

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Appendix C
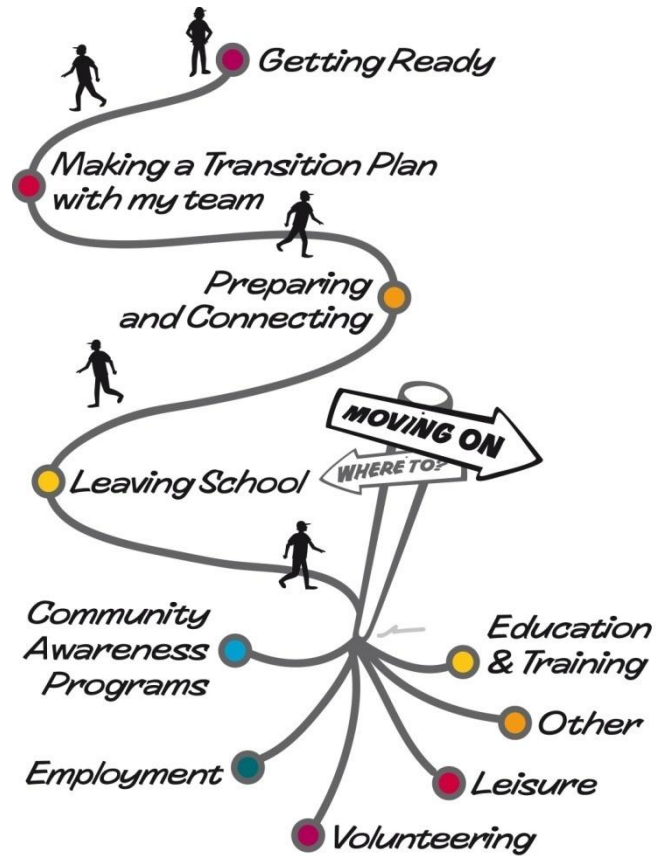
School Guidance Counselor Questionnaire

Questionnaire Directions

Please answer each question completely and honestly based on your perception regarding the present process for implementing transition services to our students with disabilities.

Additionally, feel free to write any further comments or concerns regarding how our high school can more effectively prepare our students with disabilities to transition from high school to adulthood in items 8, 9, and 10.

*In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, **please do not include your name**. Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study.*

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected from this study will provide valuable information to assist in the development and implementation of a "results-oriented" process that insures Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms.

1. As a guidance counselor, what is your understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in regards to transition services being provided for students with disabilities?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Please describe your familiarity with our students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and how transition services are documented.

_____

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_____

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3. Based on your knowledge, how does the high school implement and monitor the

transition services outlined in your students' IEPs?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4.As a guidance counselor, how do you evaluate and monitor how special education

teachers incorporate career awareness and planning, employability skills, and the

foundational knowledge necessary for your students to be self-sufficient into their

curriculum?

_____

_____

_____

5. Based on your daily observation of your students with disabilities, how well are they

prepared to transition from high school to adulthood? Specifically, what indicators reveal

that they have any career plans for life after high school?

_____

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6. In what ways has the high school facilitated or impeded your progress to prepare our

students with disabilities for life as adult citizens and workers in the 21st century?

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7. How can our high school more effectively assist our students with disabilities in

transitioning from high school to adulthood?

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Comments:

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Appendix D

School Administrator Questionnaire

Questionnaire Directions

Please answer each question completely and honestly based on your perception regarding the present process for implementing transition services to our students with disabilities.

Additionally, feel free to write any further comments or concerns regarding how our high school can more effectively prepare our students with disabilities to transition from high school to adulthood in items 8, 9, and 10.

*In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, **please do not include your name**. Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study.*

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected from this study will provide valuable information to assist in the development and implementation of a "results-oriented" process that insures Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms.

1. As a school administrator, what is your understanding of the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in regards to transition services being provided for

students with disabilities?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Please describe your familiarity with our students' Individualized Education Plans

(IEPs) and how transition services are documented.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Based on your knowledge, how does the high school implement and monitor the

transition services outlined in your students' IEPs?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4.As a school administrator, how do you evaluate and monitor how special education

teachers incorporate career awareness and planning, employability skills, and the

foundational knowledge necessary for your students to be self-sufficient into their

curriculum?

_____

_____

_____

5. Based on your daily observation of your students with disabilities, how well are they

prepared to transition from high school to adulthood? Specifically, what indicators reveal

that they have any career plans for life after high school?

_____

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_____

_____

6. In what ways has the high school facilitated or impeded your progress to prepare your

students with disabilities for life as adult citizens and workers in the 21st century?

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7. How can our high school more effectively assist our students with disabilities in

transitioning from high school to adulthood?

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Comments:

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Appendix E

Parent/Guardian Permission Letter

Rowan University
Parent/Guardian Permission Letter to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. James Coaxum. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I plan to examine how confident your child feels that he or she is prepared to transition from high school to adulthood and how our school can more effectively help your child in this process. The goal of this study is to develop and implement a "results-oriented" process that insures Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) transition services mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to the classrooms. With your permission, your child will complete the attached questionnaire that will take less than ten minutes of his or her time.

Please talk this over with your child because I need your permission in order for your child to participate in this study. Even if you as the parent or guardian say "yes" your child can still decide not to participate in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary and your child is free to withdraw his or her participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. Participation or non-participation will not affect your child's relationship with me or the school, nor will it affect your child standing in his/her class.

I ask that your child answer all the questions as honestly as possible and your child need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, **your child will not include his or her name on the questionnaire.** Please be assured that any data that is recorded will not be linked to your child by name or any other identifier. Questionnaires will be kept anonymous to protect all parties. ***Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to have your child voluntarily participate in this research study.*** Seal the completed questionnaire and this signed permission letter in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided and promptly mail it back to me.

Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below.

_____I grant permission, for my child _____ to participate in this study.

_____I do not grant permission for my child
_____to participate in this study.

_____ _____
(Parent/Guardian Signature)   (Date)

Appendix F

Student Inform Consent Letter

Rowan University
Student Inform Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Student:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University and as part of my graduation requirement; I must complete a small research project. For this project, I will be examining how well you feel that you are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood and how our school can more effectively help you in this process.

Please talk this over with your parent or guardian before you decide whether or not to be a part of this project. We will also ask your parent or guardian to give permission for you to take part in this project .Even if your parent or guardian says "yes" you can still decide not to be in the study. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. Participation or non-participation will not affect your relationship with me or the school, nor will it affect your class standing.

If you decide to take part in this project you only have to complete the attached brief questionnaire that will take less than ten minutes of your valuable time. I ask that you answer all the questions honestly as possible and you need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, **do not include your name on the questionnaire.** Please be assured that any data that is recorded will not be linked to you by name or any other identifier. Questionnaires will be kept anonymous to protect all parties. ***Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study.*** Seal the completed questionnaire and your parent's signed permission letter in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided and promptly mail it back to me.

Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Appendix G

Transition Planning Process Schedule
Scope and Sequence

WEEK	1 Fri Oct 14	2 Fri Oct 21	3 Fri Oct 28	4 Fri Nov 04	5 Fri Nov 18	6 Fri Dec 02	7 Fri Dec 09	8 Fri Dec 16	9 Fri Jan 13	10 Fri Jan 25
THEME	Intro Reviewing Survey	Assess Interests & Skills	Transition Assistance Resources	Develop Goals, Priorities, and Career Plan	Resume Writing	Job Search & Job Hunting Techniques	Dress for Success	College As An Option	Military, Apprenticeship and other Options	Conclusion
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	How prepared am I for life after high school?	What are my interests? How can I pursue them?	After high school, where can I get help regarding my disability?	What do I want to do with my life?	What is the purpose of a resume? How do I write a resume?	How can I find the right job?	How do I dress for a job interview?	What college is right for me?	What else can I do besides going to college?	How prepared am I for life after high school?
GOALS	To see how prepared students are for life after high school Help students set goals for the year	Help students learn about their interests & skills	Help students learn about transition resources	Help students learn about career awareness & planning	Help students to write resumes that can get them an interview	Employability Skills Help students land the job that they are looking for	Help students to learn what to wear on an interview What is not appropriate interview attire	Help students understand and prepare for the college application process	Help student learn about other career options	To see how prepared students are for life after high school
THEORY	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination	Transition Planning Framework Self-Determination
ACTIVITIES	Discuss the survey	Discuss career choices	Discuss transition resources	Develop Career Plan	Prepare sample resumes	Participate in an interview Have students role-play	Students will participate in a mock interview	Look up colleges; Complete a college application	Take a practice ASVAB test	Student will take a post-survey
COMMUNITY - INVOLVEMENT	Invite an administrator/supervisor to discuss transition planning process goals	Invite community members to discuss their careers	Invite DVR, Independent Living and other agencies to discuss transition assistance resources	Invite vocational teachers to discuss their vocations	Invite vocational teachers to review and discuss student resumes	Invite vocational teachers and administrators to interview students	Invite administrators and staff to model dress for success	Invite community college admissions officer to discuss college enrollment	Invite JROTC Instructors to discuss the Military	
STUDENT PRODUCTS	Survey Goal Worksheet	Interest and Skills Inventory Worksheet	Transition Assistance Resources Handout	Career Plan	Student's Resume	Job Search Worksheet	Picture of Student Dressed for Success	College Planning Worksheet	Military, Apprenticeship, and other Options Handout	Survey Program Evaluation

Appendix H

Teacher Questionnaire Cover Letter

Dear Colleague:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University and this gives me the opportunity to conduct action research on topics that are relevant and beneficial to our high school. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. James Coaxum in which as part of this action research study, I plan to examine the following five factors:

As a special education teacher, you are invited to participate in this research study. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete the attached brief questionnaire that will take less than ten minutes of your valuable time. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible and you need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, please do not include your name. Please be assured that any data that is recorded will not be linked to you by name or any other identifier. Questionnaires will be kept anonymous to protect all parties. Seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and promptly forward to it my mailbox located in the D-Building main office.

 Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Appendix I

School Guidance Counselor Questionnaire Cover Letter

Dear Guidance Counselor:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University and this gives me the opportunity to conduct action research on topics that are relevant and beneficial to our high school. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. James Coaxum in which as part of this action research study, I plan to examine the following five factors:

1) What are the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?
2) How confident do students with disabilities feel that they are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?
3) What are the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?
4) How will my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented transition planning process?

As a guidance counselor, you are invited to participate in this research study. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete the attached brief questionnaire that will take less than ten minutes of your valuable time. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible and you need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, please do not include your name. Please be assured that any data that is recorded will not be linked to you by name or any other identifier. Questionnaires will be kept anonymous to protect all parties. Seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and promptly forward to it my mailbox located in the D-Building main office.

 Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Appendix J

School Administrator Questionnaire Cover Letter

Dear School Administrator:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University and this gives me the opportunity to conduct action research on topics that are relevant and beneficial to our high school. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. James Coaxum in which as part of this action research study, I plan to examine the following five factors:

1) What are the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?
2) How confident do students with disabilities feel that they are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?
3) What are the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?
) How will my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented transition planning process?

As a school administrator, you are invited to participate in this research study. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for responding and no known physical or psychological risks involved in this study. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete the attached brief questionnaire that will take less than ten minutes of your valuable time. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible and you need not respond to all questions. In order to ensure that all information will remain anonymous, please do not include your name. Please be assured that any data that is recorded will not be linked to you by name or any other identifier. Questionnaires will be kept anonymous to protect all parties. Seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and promptly forward to it my mailbox located in the D-Building main office.

Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your agreement to voluntarily participate in this research study. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Student Transition-Planning Portfolio

Students with Disabilities: Making IDEA Transition Services Work

Student Transition-Planning Portfolio

Name: _____

Rhonda L. Sutton
Fall 2011

Table of Contents

I t M a t t e r s   T o   T h i s   o n e

An old man was walking on a beach
that was covered with millions of starfish
which had washed up after a recent storm.
As he was walking,
he saw a small child picking up stranded starfish,
one starfish at a time,
and tossing them back into the ocean.
The old man became curious
and walked over to the child.
He said, "Why do you bother throwing starfish back
when there are millions of stranded starfish on the beach?
You can't possible save all of them.
Does it really matter, anyway?
The small child picked up a starfish,
looked at the old man,
and as he tossed the starfish into the water
he replied,
"It matters to this one."
Author Loren Eisley

Adapted from www.webtree.ca/inspiration/thestarfishthrower.html

Introduction

As an Educator,

I have witnessed countless students struggle and fail as they transition from high school to adulthood.

When these students reached their senior year, they realized that they were not prepared to graduate.

Unfortunately, they did not have a career plan in place.

The purpose of this guide is to assist you, the student, in your career planning process as you transition from high school to adulthood.

Please use this guide as a tool to help you develop a career plan that is best for you.

You have to plan your future because it is not going to be handed to you.

People do not plan to fail; they fail to plan!

People do not plan to fail; they fail to plan!

Your FUTURE (options after high school)
It's not too soon to start thinking about your future!

College - If you are considering attending school (four-year college, university, vocational/technical school, or two-year college) after high school, you may find it helpful to do the following:

- Make a **list of the schools** that interest you.
- **Gather information** from each school and study it.
- **Register to take the ACT or SAT Assessment** before December of your senior year (spring of your junior year is recommended).
- **Visit the campus** of each school you are seriously considering.
- **Apply early** for admission and housing.
- Apply early for **financial assistance**. Pay attention to deadlines listed in the financial aid information you receive from your counselor and the schools you are interested in attending.
- **Find out** about local, state, federal, and private student financial assistance programs.
- **Make your decision.** Take time to review all information carefully and weigh your options.

Armed Forces - If you are considering serving in the **Armed Forces** after high school, you might find it helpful to do the following:

- **Visit with friends, neighbors, and relatives** who have served in various branches of the Armed Forces.
- **Study the military literature** available in your counseling office.
- **Evaluate any physical limitations** that might prevent you from serving in the Armed Forces.
- **Compare military training opportunities** with possible civilian occupations.
- Arrange with your counselor to visit with various **military recruiters** during your junior and senior years of high school. When meeting with recruiters, listen very carefully, ask tons of questions, and ask to see it in writing.
- **Compare benefits, tours of duty, training, and promotion opportunities** of military programs.

Employment - If you are considering **direct employment** after high school, you might find it helpful to:

- **Explore your special abilities and interests** with your school counselor.
- Collect and study materials about **writing resumes** and letters of application.
- **Consider whether you want to move** away from your home region after high school.
- **Visit with individuals** working in various occupations that may be of interest to you.
- **Become familiar with major employers** in the areas where you are interested in working.

- Be knowledgeable about the **vocational/technical program offerings** available in your high school.

(Adapted from http://www.mappingyourfuture.biz/collegeprep/mhscfuture.htm)

How Do I Get Started?

1. **Start developing a career plan**. Think about what you want to do and find out more about the kind of training, education, and skills you will need to achieve your career goal.

2. **Assess your skills and interest.** Think hard about what you enjoy, what you are good at, what kind of personality you are, and the values you hold.

3. **Research occupations.** Find out more about the nature of the jobs that interest you, such as educational requirement, salary, working conditions, future outlook, and anything else that can help you narrow your focus.

4. **Compare your skills and interests with the occupations you selected**. The career that matches your skills, interests, and personality the closest may be the career for you.

5. **Choose your career goal.** Once you've decided what occupation matches up best with you, then you can begin developing a plan to reach your career goal.

6. Select a school that offers a college degree or training program that best meets your career goal and financial needs.

7. **Find out about financial aid to help support you in obtaining your career goal.** If you haven't done so, begin saving for college.

8. Learn about job hunting tips as you prepare to graduate or move into the job market.

9. Prepare your resume, and practice job interviewing techniques.

10. Go to your teacher, case manager, or local library for additional information and help on career planning, or check out other internet resources.

(Adapted from http://mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/sicprint.pdf)

Identify Your Goals and Priorities

Outline Your Mission

You do not have to be a superhero or social activist to have a mission. It just means that you have an idea of what you want out of life. Fortunately, this is the time in your life when you get to take the lead; you get to decide what you want out of it. Knowing who you are and what you want can help set you in the right direction, and the earlier you start thinking about your life mission, the easier it is to make the appropriate decisions and plans to reach it. So how do you go about developing a life mission? It is not as big and scary as it sounds.
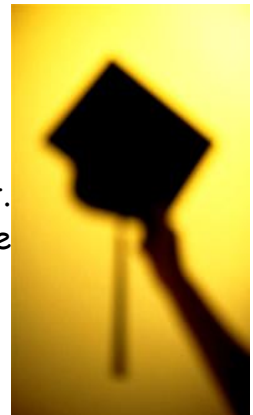
- Choose your values. Your values are what you hold near and dear to you. They can be principles, standards or beliefs that you find most worthwhile. You probably already have a core set of beliefs that guide you. Think about what is most important to you.
- Analyze your values, interests, and skills. Are there things that have influenced your thinking and behavior? Think about what you enjoy and what you are good at. What about the skills you have learned from full- or part-time jobs, volunteer experiences, or school and social activities. There could be a connection between your activities and skills and your values. Will any of these skills help you get where you want to go?

(Adapted from http://mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/sicprint.pdf)

- Set realistic goals. To make your dream future your reality, set some reasonable, short- and long-term goals for yourself based on your top values. You are more likely to get where you want to go if you set a goal and commit yourself to it. To increase your chances of success even further:
  - Choose some logical steps toward your goal.
  - Take each step and fill out the details. Include the what, when, where and how for each step.
  - Now it is time for action. Do your plan.
  - Keep your plan close by, so you can see how each action step is working and make improvements to the plan as you go.
- Do some research. Think about your dream job, and then learn more about it. Find out how other people in that field developed the career you want. What kind of training, education and skills are required? What are the real-life work conditions, the work environment and the work schedule? What are the likely rewards -- salary, fringe benefits, room to grow, retirement plans? Are these rewards important to you? Would other rewards be more important to you?

Based on the work you have just done, define your life mission and start living it with every decision you make. Soon you will be able to look back and see how far you have come.

Establish Your Priorities

Once you know your mission, be brutally honest with yourself: Are the activities that take up most of your time really moving you towards your goals? If not, it is time to set some priorities that support your goals, and make sure they get plenty of your time and attention.

Time is a precious commodity; you *use it or lose it*. The good news is that we all have the same amount of time every day, so use it to your advantage. Since there will always be plenty of diversions to distract you from your goals, practice staying in the driver's seat when it comes to time management.

(Adapted from http://mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/sicprint.pdf)

Here are some time management tools that can bring a sigh of relief to your busy college life:

- Use task lists and a calendar to manage school, family, and social responsibilities. You have enough important facts and figures to remember right now without committing your ongoing calendar to memory. Help yourself out with one cheat sheet that is allowed, and even recommended -- a time management tool to coordinate all of your daily, weekly, monthly tasks, obligations, social events, tests -- and anything that is important for you to do..
- Understand the difference between *important* and *urgent*. Important tasks must be done; urgent tasks must be done NOW. Some things can be taken care of tomorrow, later this week, or next week. Really!
- Work with your natural rhythm, not against it. Everyone has specific periods of peak productivity, so capitalize on *your* best time of day. If you are a morning person, plan to tackle the most difficult tasks before lunch. Likewise, if you are a night owl, do not force yourself to study or work on complicated projects until late afternoon or evening.

- **Accept that you just cannot do everything**. Do not be a popularity addict. It may feel good in the moment to be "in demand," but wouldn't it feel even better to achieve the life you really want? Limit your commitments by choosing activities that you truly enjoy and are consistent with your goals. Practice saying no without feeling guilty; the mastery of the tactful decline is a skill that will come in handy throughout your life!

- **Take care of yourself by paying attention to your physical, emotional and financial health**. The same rules still apply: eat well, get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, and build time into your schedule for relaxation. Without proper attention to your body, it could rebel -- you could literally make yourself sick. (Then you have an added stressor to deal with.) Pay attention to your financial health as well. Be realistic about your money, create a realistic budget and stick to it. Using a spending plan to control your finances can actually feel great -- it's empowering. Develop that muscle of determined discipline, and watch how it drives you towards your goals.

(Adapted from http://mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/sicprint.pdf)

Career Plan

What do you want to be?

With all career possibilities available, how do you make a decision? Once you know what career path you want to follow, how do you get there?

One way to answer questions about your future career is to develop a career plan. A career plan outlines the steps you need to take to reach your <u>career goal</u>. Click here to see a <u>sample career plan.</u>

Steps to Developing a Career Plan

1. Develop a career plan to determine your <u>interests and skills</u>. Thinking about your skills and interests can help you find a satisfying career.

    To determine your interests, think about what you like to do. Think about experiences you have enjoyed. Evaluate what you liked, what you found challenging, and what you may have learned from those experiences. Make a list of activities you have enjoyed during the past few years.

2. Make a list of skills you have. Your skills may include training you have gained through part-time or full-time jobs. Even if you haven't been employed before, you do have some skills which will help you find a job. For example, you may have skills you learned through volunteer work or through social activities.

    Evaluate those skills and interests you have listed. Are there similar activities on the two lists? Are there any experiences that could turn into a career? For instance, if you volunteered at a hospital and enjoyed the experience, you may want to consider a medical career.

3. Find out about the <u>types of careers</u> available to you. If you don't research careers, you may not know about the best occupations to fit your <u>interests and skills</u>.

(Adapted from: http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/)

It's also important to decide if the career you are considering is really what you expect and whether it offers the salary and benefits you want. One good way to learn about a career is to intern in the position. (Internships are also a great way to gain experience in your selected career field). Another good way to find out about a job is to network -- talk to someone who is in the career now.

4. Once you have determined what career path you want to follow, assess what you need to do to prepare for that career. Do you need special training? If so, research the <u>schools</u> that offer the kind of training you need. What kinds of experience will you need to be successful in the career? Consider an internship as a way to get work experience in the career field.

By developing a career plan, you can focus on what you want to do and how to get there. And when you are ready to write your <u>resume</u> for your <u>job search</u>, you will have a better understanding of your skills and experiences to discuss with potential employers.

(Adapted from: http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/)

Sample Career Plan

A career plan is developed after you have analyzed your <u>skills and interests</u> and researched possible <u>occupations</u>. Match your skills and interests to an occupation, decide on a <u>career goal</u> and plan how you will reach that goal.

Career Plan

Career goal:

To become a civil engineer. To design, plan, and supervise the construction of buildings, highways, and rapid transit systems.

Requirements:

- Bachelor's degree in engineering.
- Ability to work as part of a team.
- Creativity.
- Analytical mind.
- Capacity for detail.
- Presentation and writing skills.
- Knowledge of physical sciences and mathematics.
- Accreditation by Licensing Board.

Current skills and interests:

- Summer worker for Smith Construction Co.
- High School mathematics courses (earned A's).
- High School science courses (earned A's).
- Experience working as a team.
- Attended high school writing courses.
- Gave presentations in high school courses.
- 3.9 High School G.P.A.

Plan to reach career goal:

- Bachelor's Degree - Attend the University of Texas School of Engineering.
- Job Experience - Continue working for Smith Construction Co. Seek internships through University career placement office.
- Networking - Join campus organizations for engineering students.

(Adapted from: http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/)

Think About Your Interests and Skills

What do you like to do? Think about experiences you have enjoyed. What kind of school, religious, social or sports activities do you like? Make a list of 10 activities you have enjoyed doing in the past four years.

Evaluate those interests. Think about what you liked about the activities. What challenges did the activities offer? What skills do you need to develop further to continue in those activities? Consider your skills and evaluate school, volunteer, work, or leisure experiences.

Make a list of your school activities (clubs, organizations to which you belonged). Make a list of any volunteer work you have done (either through social, civic or religious organizations).

After you have assessed your interests and skills, determine the relationship between skills and interests and possible careers. You may need to research types of careers. Once you have found a career that matches your interests and skills, you are ready to set your career goal. Complete the worksheets on the following pages to help you to further assess your interests and skills, choose a career path and expand your horizons.

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/)

CONNECTING Activity

Assessing My Interests

What do you like to do in your spare time? Do you have any hobbies? Do you prefer indoor or outdoor activities? List at least three activities that you enjoy, and explain why you enjoy them.

I enjoy . . .

① _____ because
_____ .

② _____ because
_____ .

③ _____ because
_____ .

Are you most interested in people, facts, or things? Look at the lists below, and circle each skill activity that you enjoy. Put an X through the number of any item you particularly do not enjoy.

Skills with People

1. Taking instructions
2. Serving
3. Sensing, feeling
4. Communicating
5. Persuading
6. Performing, amusing
7. Managing, supervising
8. Negotiating, deciding
9. Founding, leading
10. Treating
11. Advising, consulting
12. Counseling
13. Training
14. Working with animals

Skills with Information

15. Observing
16. Comparing
17. Copying, storing, and retrieving
18. Computing
19. Researching
20. Analyzing
21. Organizing
22. Evaluating
23. Visualizing
24. Improving, adapting
25. Creating, synthesizing
26. Designing
27. Planning, developing
28. Expediting
29. Achieving

Skills with Things

30. Handling objects
31. Being athletic
32. Working with the earth or nature
33. Feeding, emptying
34. Minding
35. Using tools
36. Operating equipment
37. Operating vehicles
38. Precision working
39. Setting up
40. Repairing

Under which category did you mark the most skills? Do you enjoy working with people, information, or things, or a combination of the three? Examine the charts on the next page to see where you might fit in the world of work.

(**Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_3.pdf**)

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Activity (continued)

Skills Working with People

Skill	Work-related Skill	Job Area
Taking Instructions	Pay attention, carry out orders	Executive secretary
Serving	Fulfill wishes of others	Public relations, Nursing, Social work
Communicating	Giving and taking of information	Telemarketing, Sales
Persuading	Motivating others to action	Advertising, Sales
Performing	Working in front of a group	Law, Acting, Teaching
Managing	Working to achieve an objective	Public affairs, Strategic planning
Negotiating	Giving and taking to achieve compromise	Politics, Sales
Leading	Motivating others by example	Corporate management
Advising	Giving expert advice	Counseling, Medicine
Training	Giving new information, guiding	Drama coach

Skills Working with Information

Skill	Work-related Skill	Job Area
Comparing	Identify similarities/differences	Quality control inspector
Computing	Mathematical skills	Banking, Finance
Researching	Persistence	Scientist, Chemist, Engineer
Analyzing	Observe whole and parts	Movie/Book critic
Organizing	Expert at structure	Administrator
Evaluating	Good judgment	Guidance counselor
Visualizing	Symbolic perception	Interior design, Architecture
Improving, Adapting	Updating	Editing, Journalism
Planning	Prioritizing	Systems engineer
Expediting	Work with speed	Data Processor

Skills Working with Things

Skill	Work-related Skill	Job Area
Handling	Use of hands/body	Construction
Physical Strength	Athletic coordination	Machinist, Metal worker
Monitoring	Service machinery	Mechanic
Mechanical	Manual dexterity	Carpenter, Painter, Book binder
Vehicle Control	Regulating, controlling	Airline pilot
Precision	Working within limits	Surgeon, Diamond cutter
Assembling	Organizing	Assembly line worker, Electrician
Repairing	Understanding how things work	TV repairperson, Plumber

School to WORK

Activity With a partner review the skills listed above. Also review the employment section of your newspaper. Choose a particular job and write an advertisement for it as it might appear in a newspaper. Make sure to include references to all skills needed for that particular job. Trade advertisements with your partner and comment on how effective each other's ad might be. ▼

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_3.pdf)

• •

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

CONNECTING Activity

Choosing a Career Path

One of the most important decisions you will make is your choice of a career. This decision is important because our world is constantly changing. The jobs of the future will require more education and training than ever before. The better prepared you are, the greater your chances for success.

To choose a career that fits your goals, dreams, and expectations you will need to ask yourself: What kind of career have I always wanted? Why?

Find out what it is you love to do, and then find out what kind of jobs and careers are available in that area of interest.
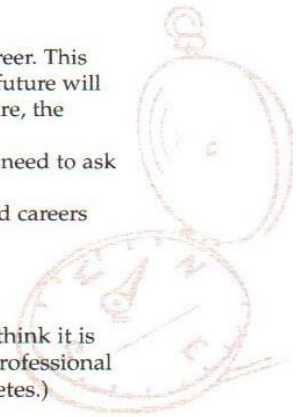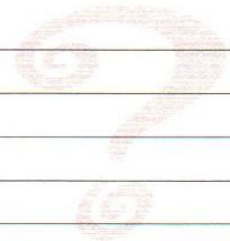
Envision Your Ideal Job

1 Describe below your ideal job. *Do not* rule out any options because you think it is impossible or impractical to achieve them. (Although we cannot all be professional basketball players, we can discover *why* we want to be professional athletes.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2 Now list the characteristics of your ideal job that make it appealing to you. For example, if your ideal job is in advertising, think about what it is about that kind of work that appeals most to you. Be very specific.

Ask yourself the following questions:

✓ What activities make me feel good about myself?

✓ What gets me excited?

✓ What did I want to be when I was young? Why did this interest me?

✓ Which interests have stayed with me for a long time?

✓ Which activities make me feel confident?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_1.pdf)

....

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

CONNECTING Activity

Expanding Your Horizons

Career Skill Building

Career Categories Complete the chart below by adding specific job titles under the appropriate headings. Research career options and fields in your school or public library. Some good resources to check are the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*.

CAREER CATEGORIES

Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Occupations	Professional Specialty Occupations	Technicians and Related Support Occupations
• Accountants • Budget Analysts • Cost Estimators • Purchasing Agents and Managers • Construction and Building Inspectors • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____	• Attorneys • Computer System Analysts • Designers • Landscape Architects • Urban Planners • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____	• Aircraft Pilots • Broadcasters • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____

Marketing and Sales Occupations	Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical	Service Occupations
• Insurance Sales Workers • Real Estate Appraisers • Manufacturers' Sales Representatives • Service Sales Representatives • Telemarketers • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____	• Bank Tellers • Billing Clerks • Computer Equipment Operators • Mail Carriers • Dispatchers • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____	• Corrections Officers • Gardeners • Barbers • Janitors • Skincare Specialists • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_2.pdf)

Name _____ **Date** _____ **Class** _____

Activity (continued)

CAREER CATEGORIES

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Related Occupations	Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	Construction Trades and Extractive Occupations
• Farmers • Environmental Engineers • Logging Tractor Inspectors • Forest Rangers • _____ • _____	• Aircraft Mechanics • Millwrights • Industrial Machinery Repairers • _____ • _____	• Bricklayers • Sheet-metal Workers • Plasterers • _____ • _____

Production Occupations	Armed Forces Occupations	Handlers, Equipment Cleaners, Helpers, and Laborers
• Assemblers • Tool and Die Makers • Lithographic and Photoengraving Workers • _____ • _____	• Army Enlisted Personnel • Navy Nurses • Air Force Officers • _____ • _____	• Construction Trades Helpers • Machine Feeders • Sorters • Hand Packers • _____ • _____

Educational Occupations	Health Care Occupations	Computer Technology Occupations
• Early Childhood Teachers • Primary Education Teachers • Secondary Education Teachers • Teaching Associates • _____ • _____	• Nurses • Doctors • Radiology Technicians • Researchers • _____ • _____	• Computer Programmers • Software Developers • Internet Information System Developers • _____ • _____

School to WORK

Activity Choose three positions listed above, and prepare a presentation on those jobs. Be sure to include in your report what a person in that position does on a daily basis; the qualifications, skills, and education needed for the position; the starting salary for the position; the future outlook for jobs in that field; and where jobs in that field can be found. Present your findings to the class, and be prepared to answer any questions from your classmates. ▼

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_2.pdf)

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), 2011-12 Edition

For hundreds of different types of jobs—such as <u>teacher</u>, <u>lawyer</u>, and <u>nurse</u>—the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* tells you:

    the training and education needed
    earnings
    expected job prospects
    what workers do on the job
    working conditions

In addition, the *Handbook* gives you <u>job search tips</u>, links to <u>information about the job market in each State</u>, and <u>more</u>.

Ways to use the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* site: (1) To find out about a specific occupation or topic, use the <u>Search box</u> that is on every page—enter your search term in the box. (2) To find out about many occupations, browse through listings using the Occupations links that are on the right side of each page. (3) For a listing of all occupations in alphabetical order, go to the <u>A-Z Index</u> and select a letter.

About the *Handbook*: *The Occupational Outlook Handbook* is a nationally recognized source of career information, designed to provide valuable assistance to individuals making decisions about their future work lives. The *Handbook* is revised every two years.

(Adapted from http://www.bls.gov/ooh/home.htm)

Work and Learn through an Apprenticeship

If you like to work with your hands and your mind, you might want to consider an apprenticeship after high school. More than 850 occupations can be learned on the job through an apprenticeship.

An apprenticeship prepares you for a career through a structured program of on-the-job learning with classroom instruction, while you work and earn a salary. The programs can last from one to six years and you can choose careers in areas such as telecommunications, health care, computing, business support and the arts. The most common apprenticeships are in construction and manufacturing.

Most apprenticeships are registered through the U.S. Department of Labor, ensuring the program meets government standards for fairness, safety and training. If you complete a registered program, you will receive a certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, which proves your qualifications for the career. In addition, classroom instruction often can be used to earn a license, certification or degree.

The following are the top 10 occupations offering apprenticeships that expect to have the most job openings for new workers (2000-2010):

- cook, restaurant and cafeteria
- automotive service technician, mechanic
- licensed practical and licensed vocational nurse
- carpenter
- police officer
- electrician
- hairdresser, cosmetologist
- maintenance and repair worker
- welder, cutter, solderer and brazer
- plumber, pipe fitter and steamfitter

For more information on apprenticeships, visit with your counselor. You also can call America's Workforce Network toll-free at (877) US2-JOBS. (872-5672) Operators can help you find career counselors and apprenticeship programs in your area.

(Adapted from http://actstudent.org/career/apprent.html)

Characteristics to Consider When Choosing a School

With thousands of schools to choose from, how do you decide which one is right for you? Probably the best place to begin is by looking inward rather than outward.

1.Establish Your Goals and Interests. What are your interests? What are your goals? What <u>careers</u> interest you the most? Write them down. What are you good at? In what kind of environment do you do your best? Write those down too. Write everything down that can help you understand what kind of person you are and who you want to become.

2. Review School Characteristics. Look at the different characteristics schools can have. For example, consider the following:

 Trade School versus College
 Public versus Private
 Two-Year versus Four-Year Program
 Graduation and Retention Rates
 School and Class Size
 Location (urban, suburban, small town, or rural)
 Distance from Home
 Religious Affiliation
 Ethnic Composition
 Single Gender or Coed
 School setting (downtown or in the country)
 Areas of Study
 Course Offerings
 Facilities
 Campus Environment
 Housing
 Academic Rigor (How hard is it?)
 Social Activities and Clubs
 Faculty
 Admission Criteria
 Athletics

 Cost
 Financial Aid
 And more....

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Considerations.Asp)

3. *Choose the Characteristics that are Important to You.* Now that you have examined who you are and who you want to be, compare your notes to the different characteristics that can go in to choosing a school. Then decide which characteristics are most important to you. Maybe it is important to stay close to home, which will narrow your search? Maybe you have a very specific area of interest and you only want colleges that specialize in that field?

Perhaps you want a large school whose strength lies in its diversity?

The choice is yours. Pick the five to ten characteristics **you** consider very important in your search for a school, and then start gathering information about your options. You may want to start by checking out Other Internet Resources.

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Considerations.Asp)

Gathering Information

After you have looked at the types of schools available to you and you have examined the characteristics to consider when choosing a school, it is time to begin gathering information to find out which schools out there meet your personal goals and needs.

1. Get an Overview of Your Choices. First, try to get an overview of all of the different choices available to you. Then, narrow your focus by identifying schools that have most of the characteristics you selected as important when thinking about all of the characteristics to consider when selecting a school.

2. Develop a Short List of Schools. Your first list of schools may be pretty large, 20 - 30. But by gathering more information and deciding for yourself which school characteristics are most important, you can narrow the list even further to your top four to ten.

3. Find Out More about the Schools on Your Short List. Once you have your "short list" of schools, plan to do extra research. Write to their admission offices for applications, catalogs, admission requirements, costs of attendance, financial aid, housing, and any other information they may have. Plan to visit the schools on your short list, if you can, and ask to meet with an admission counselor. See also if you can talk to alumni from the school, and check out their graduation and placement rates. After you have completed your research, you will come up with two to four schools that you will probably want to apply.

The following activities will help you decide which school or schools are ultimately best for you:

Talk to Your High School Counselor - If you are a middle or high school student, start by talking to your high school counselor. He or she more than likely will have a wide variety of college guidebooks and literature on schools you can review to see which ones best meet your needs and the characteristics you are looking for in a school. Your counselor can also tell you about what kind of academic preparation and standardized tests you should start taking now to prepare yourself for college later.

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Gathering.Asp)

In addition, your counselor can provide you with some general information about <u>applying for college</u> and about <u>financial aid</u>.

Review the College Guidebooks - A number of different publishers put together guidebooks describing almost everything you wanted to know about virtually any college or university in the United States and the world. Many of these are available at your local public library, your school or college library, and in your counselor's office. A number of guidebooks are also available on CD-ROM. You may also want to check out <u>Other Internet Resources</u> available on the Web.

Attend the College Fairs - Many high schools, school districts, and colleges host college fairs where prospective students get more information about various schools and universities. Talk to your high school counselor or contact a local college admission office to find out if any college fairs are scheduled for your area.

Don't Forget Family and Friends - Find out what recommendations and experiences your parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, teachers, neighbors, and friends have had. If you have already begun to narrow down your list of school choices, see if you can find some alumni from the schools, you are most interested in attending. They can tell you about their experiences at these schools and give you valuable insight.

Contact the Admissions Office - After you have poured through the guidebooks and put together a short (or at least a shorter), list of schools, write to the admission offices of the schools on your list and ask for catalogs, applications, and any other information they have about attendance.

Visit the Schools - If possible, visit the schools on your short list. Call the admissions office to find out about college tours and arrange a convenient time to visit and talk with a school counselor or admission officer. When you do visit, make sure to go off the beaten path to see what the school is like beyond the guided tour. Talk to students on campus. Try to get a feel for the place. And see if you can visit the dorms while you are there as well. If possible, see if you can stay in a dorm room during your visit.

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Gathering.Asp)

Applying to School

Generally, most students apply to college in the spring before the fall semester in which they want to attend. Some colleges, however, offer early or other admission plans. Early admission can come with the stipulation that if you are accepted, you must agree not to apply to other schools. It is a limitation you should consider, especially if you are not sure about whether you really want to attend a particular school and if you need more information about costs and <u>financial aid</u>.

The Application – You probably will need to complete and submit a different application for each school you are considering attending. Before you do that, check with the schools' admission offices to see if they accept <u>electronic applications</u>. Some schools use electronic application systems that allow you to submit a single application to multiple colleges and universities in print or electronic format. Check with the schools on your list for more information.

Most college applications will ask you for the following types of information:
- Personal data
- Family information
- Educational experience
- Test scores
- Academic experience
- Awards and honors
- Extracurricular activities (including school, religious, civic, and volunteer)
- Work experience
- Written essay
- Recommendations from teachers and counselor
- High school transcript

Some Tips – In addition, some schools may require a personal or telephone interview. Keep in mind the following when filling out your application:
- Read the application before you start writing answers down.
- Note any deadlines, and give yourself plenty of time to meet them.
- Answer ALL questions. Do not leave anything blank.

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Applying.Asp)

- Follow directions.
- Type or print your answers.
- Be neat. Presentation is important.
- Include supporting materials (letters of recommendation, outstanding examples of your work or interests)
- Make a copy, in case it gets misplaced.
- Sign it.
- Include a check for the processing fee, if required.
- Practice writing the essay before putting the final version on the application.
- Fine tune your essay. Do not ramble.
- Have someone else review your draft essay.
- Be yourself in your essay.
- Do not exaggerate your achievements or abilities.
- Proofread your application. Better yet, ask a parent or a friend to proofread it, too.

(Adapted from http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/GoingToCollege/Applying.Asp)

Conducting a Job Search and Job Hunting Techniques

Finding your first job can be both a rewarding and frustrating experience.

Many jobs require experience -- but how do you get experience when you are still looking for your first job?

You may already have some work experience through volunteer work. Assess your skills and interests to determine what kind of skills you have had. Even unpaid work experience is beneficial in your job search.

Also, consider internships and part-time work. Not only is it a great way to get experience which you can put on your resume or on a job application, it is also a great way to try out a career to see if it is really what you want to do.

Here are some tips you may want to follow in your job search:
- Involve friends and family. A support group, such as friends and family, will offer encouragement and assistance in your job search.
- Allow a reasonable amount of time. Do not expect to find a job within a few days or weeks.
- Devote time to your job search. A thorough job search is hard work. Expect to spend several hours a day looking for a job.
- Be organized. Keep a record of all the places you have applied, who you talked to, and what response you received.
- Meet with people in the field you are interested in pursuing.
- Check job listings in the newspaper classified advertising sections or with your state employment office. Your state employment office also may be able to offer some job search assistance.

(Adapted from http://business.clayton.edu/placement/accounting/finding_a_job_job_databases.htm)

Developing a Résumé

What is a résumé? A résumé is a written document that attempts to communicate your skills, experience, background, and education to a potential employer. A résumé informs the employer of your background and accomplishments and motivates the employer to meet you. The job search process is a highly competitive process. A résumé and cover letter are some of your most important tools in locating a job.

Note: Some innovative job seekers are using technology to obtain job interviews. They are videotaping their résumés or placing them on interactive CD-ROMs! Although a traditional résumé is still the safest and surest path to a job interview, creative and inventive job seekers looking for careers in the fields of art, design, technology, communications, or computer science may explore these exciting options for sparking a potential employer's interest.

To create an effective résumé, complete the following worksheets. Use additional sheets of paper if necessary.

Worksheet 1—Employment Information

Employer name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Dates of employment: _____

Hours worked per week: _____ Salary/pay: _____

Supervisor's name and title: _____

Duties: _____

_____

_____

Employer name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Dates of employment: _____

Hours worked per week: _____ Salary/pay: _____

Supervisor's name and title: _____

Duties: _____

_____

_____

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_4.pdf)

• •

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Activity (continued)

Worksheet 2—Volunteer Work Information

Organization name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Hours worked per week: _____

Dates of volunteer work: _____

Supervisor's name and title: _____

Duties: _____

Skills used: _____

Accomplishments: _____

_____

Worksheet 3—School Data

School name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Years attended: _____

Major studies: _____ GPA/class rank: _____

Honors: _____

Important courses: _____

_____

Worksheet 4—Activities Data

Club/activity: _____ Positions held: _____

Description of participation: _____

_____

Duties/responsibilities: _____

Club/activity: _____ Positions held: _____

Description of participation: _____

_____

Duties/responsibilities: _____

_____

Career objective: _____

References: _____

(Adapted from http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloads/pdf/stw_activity_4.pdf)

The Job Interview

A job interview can make even the most self-confident person nervous. Preparation is the key to getting over those pre-interview jitters.

Prepare!

1. Make sure you understand your own accomplishments. If you were asked to talk about yourself or what you've done, what would you say?

2. Find out about the company interviewing you. Many companies have a web site with valuable information. Why do you want to work there? You need to answer that question during the interview. Also, it gives you an opportunity to decide if the job is right for you. Does it fit with your career plan?

3. Think of some questions you may be asked in the interview and have some well-thought-out answers. With this in mind, be ready for some curve balls —an interviewer may ask you some unexpected questions.

4. Arrive on time. Don't schedule other appointments too close to your interview time. You don't want to be late, and you don't want to rush out of the interview to your next appointment.

5. Following the interview, immediately send a thank-you letter to the interviewer. This is an opportunity to thank them for their time, to remind them of your qualifications, and to affirm your desire for the position.

Some tips for handling the interview:
- Dress for Success!
- Bring extra copies of your résumé
- Treat everyone with courtesy.
- Don't be nervous about being nervous.
- Don't discuss money in the interview.
- Wait until you are offered the position.
- Be yourself.

(Adapted fromhttp://dev.mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/jobinterview.htm)

Dress for Success

The standard job interviewing attire for women is a conservative dark navy or gray-skirted wool blend suit. Job experts and employers seem split on the notion of pants suits, therefore, a skirted suit is a safer choice. Other conservative colors -- such as beige or brown -- are also acceptable. A blazer with blouse and skirt is a possible second choice to a suit. You should always wear a jacket. Skirt length should be a little below the knee and never shorter than above the knee no night club attire here. Avoid wearing a dress (unless accented with a jacket). Blouses should be cotton or silk and should be white, or some other light color. Shoes should be low-heeled. Make-up should be minimal, with lipstick and nail polish conservative tones. Pantyhose should be flawless (no runs) and conservative in color. Do not have excessive body odor or cologne. You should opt for a briefcase rather than a purse.

The standard job interviewing attire for men is a conservative dark navy or gray two-piece business suit (of natural fibers, such as wool, if possible), a white long-sleeved button-down dress shirt, a conservative silk tie (that matches the colors in your suit), and nicely polished dress shoes. If you do not own a suit, or the company is a bit more informal, then you should wear a conservative sports coat (no plaids or wild patterns and preferably a dark color), nicely pressed dress slacks, a white long-sleeved button-down shirt, a conservative silk tie, and nicely polished dress shoes. Your belt should always match your shoes. If you have a beard or mustache, your facial hair should be neatly trimmed. If you have any visible body parts pierced, most experts recommend removing all jewelry, including earrings. Do not have excessive body odor or cologne.

(Picture adapted from http://iheartthreadbared.wordpress.com/2010/04/20/so-you-want-to-look-like-a-professional/)

Join the Military

In the past; this was often a backup option for people. But these days, with the training, experience, and skills, the Military is a lot different than it once was. Qualities and skills you gain in the Military can stay with you for a lifetime, and give you a leg up on a successful career.

What It Is

Many of us think we know what Today's Military is all about, but if we had to explain it to someone who knew nothing, we'd probably sound rather clueless. The Military is more than wearing uniforms, surviving boot camp, or working together in a team.

The U.S. Military has seven major branches: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and their Reserve (part-time duty), the Air National Guard, and the Army National Guard. Though four years is common, your first active duty enlistment period can vary.

Today's Military is more computerized than ever, offering many more high-tech occupations than in the past. There are over 140 military occupations, enlisted and officer. To start to delve into all the U.S. Military offers, talk to a local recruiter or your high school counselor about how to contact a recruiter if you don't know.

What You Get

In Today's Military, you are constantly learning—as a student, an American, a team player, a friend, and as a human being. Few places can offer you such an education.

First off, you get a steady paycheck and a lot of extras such as free training in a job specialty, free medical and dental care, free gym and exercise facilities, free on-base housing (if available), and 30 days of vacation with pay. Then, after your tour of enlistment is over, you can collect up to $28,800 from the Montgomery GI Bill toward your education. There is also a range of other educational support programs.

Aside from all that, you are also playing an important role in something big and important in the world, something bigger than yourself. You will make friends for life, be a part of a community like no other community, and develop self-confidence and a strong sense of self. For most, the Military experience is something that sticks with you forever.

What It Can Cost

The cost is just a commitment of time. And you'll actually get paid while you do it. You actually make a decent salary in the Military when you remember that the Military helps pay for your major living expenses.

And it doesn't stop there. You can collect a bonus simply for joining, depending on the service you choose and your job specialty. Also, you should be able to save money during your tour of duty so that you have a nice financial cushion saved for yourself by the time you leave. And of course you get free job skill training. Military job training schools are usually top quality and many even offer college credits.

Advantages
If you want to participate on a team, learn job skills, earn money for education, and meet some challenges, the Military may be for you.

On occasion, you'll probably get more responsibility thrown your way than you thought was part of the bargain—such as driving a 40-ton tank, a 35-foot rescue boat, or a 1,000-foot aircraft carrier.

You'll become an incredible team player, something you can "sell" to employers in the civilian world. And you'll definitely gain confidence and skills along the way. There's also the chance to travel—in the USA and sometimes around the world.

Disadvantages
The military is not for everyone. If you have a problem with authority, the Military is probably not the choice for you. Not that people can't learn or change, but to be in the Military, you need to respect the authority of higher-ranking people, and trust that they are acting in your best interest. It is not something to take lightly.

There's also not a whole lot of wardrobe flexibility during the workday. You won't be able to wear jeans and a t-shirt on a Tuesday morning just because you happen to feel like it. But when you're off duty, you can slip back into your "civvies." If you don't like to travel, that is also something to consider. Military units in all services can go on deployment away from homeports, bases, or airfields at any time.

More Info
To learn more about specific branches of the services, visit their Web sites, or call:
• U.S. Army, 800.USA.ARMY
• U.S. Marine Corps, 800.MARINES
• U.S. Navy, 800.USA.NAVY
• U.S. Air Force, 800.423.USAF
• U.S. Coast Guard, 800.424.8883
• Army National Guard, 800.TO.GO.ANG
• Air National Guard, 800.GO.GUARD

Find a local recruiter:
• U.S. Army
• U.S. Marine Corps
• U.S. Navy
• U.S. Air Force
• U.S. Coast Guard
(Adapted from http://www.military.com/Recruiting/Content/0,13898,rec_step01 _mil_overview,, 00.html)

NICHCY Connections to Transition for Students with Specific Disabilities

Having a particular disability can affect transition planning. This section from NICHCY's *Transition Suite* is a collection of materials on transition planning with a specific disability in mind. If you're interested in a disability that isn't listed in the Table of Contents, we suggest you either:

- contact us for assistance by phone or email (1.800.695.0285, nichcy@aed.org),
- visit our Search for Info page and search for an organization focused on the disability in which you're interested, or
- consult the "organizations" listing on our fact sheets (should we offer one on the disability you're interested in).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

- *Visit CHADD.*www.help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk5
  CHADD is the Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Through CHADD's National Resource Center on AD/HD, you have access to several transition-related publications for those with AD/HD. The link above drops you into the fact sheet page, where you can find (in English and in Spanish): Succeeding in College (#13), Legal Rights: Higher Education and the Workplace (#14), Succeeding in the Workplace (#16), and Managing Money (#17).

- *Supports in college.*www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1415
  College students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders who participate in the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Education Model tend to stay in school and progress in their educational programs, according to a study conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports.

This brief describes the VCU Supported Education Model and results of the study.

Learning Disabilities

- *Options for your adolescent with LD.*
  www.transitioncoalition.org/~tcacs/new/files/adol_convert.pdf
  This helpful document provides families with information about how to plan for the transition from school to postsecondary settings and information about different postsecondary options for adolescents with disabilities.
- *Transition planning from secondary to postsecondary education.*
  www.ldonline.org/article/7756
  The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) is concerned that many students with learning disabilities do not consider postsecondary education options (2- and 4-year colleges and vocational schools) because they are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared to do so.
  - o In this report, the NJCLD addresses the rationale for the transition planning process as it applies to the education of students with learning disabilities, specifically the progression from secondary to postsecondary education. The roles and responsibilities of those involved are also outlined.

- *Supports in college.* www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1415
  College students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders who participate in the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Education Model tend to stay in school and progress in their educational programs, according to a study conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports.
  - o This brief describes the VCU Supported Education Model and results of the study.

- *Financial aid for college.*
  www.heath.gwu.edu/PDFs/Financial%20Aid%20for%20Individuals% 20with%20Learning%20Disabilities.pdf
  This brief from the HEATH Resource Center looks specifically at financial aid for students with learning disabilities.

Students with Disabilities: Making IDEA Transition Services Work

Mental Health Issues

- *Handling your psychiatric disability in work and school.*
  www.bipolarworld.net/job_school/js27.htm
    - If you have a psychiatric condition, you may wish to visit this interactive and informative web site that addresses issues and reasonable accommodations related to work and school.
    - This site claims to be "the only site designed exclusively to provide information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other employment and education issues for people with psychiatric disabilities."

- *Supported employment for individuals with mental illnesses.*
  www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/employment
    - o Supported Employment is a well-defined approach to helping people with mental illnesses find and keep competitive employment within their communities.
    - o Supported employment programs are staffed by employment specialists who have frequent meetings with treatment providers to integrate supported employment with mental health services.
    - o The National Mental Health Information Center offers in-depth guidance on supported employment for individuals with mental health issues.

- *And what about higher education?* www.heath.gwu.edu/PDFs/PamPsyc..pdfThis 11-page guide discusses academic adjustments needed to support students with psychiatric disabilities in postsecondary educational settings.

NICHCY Connections to Transition Resources for Students

The websites in this section are to help you focus on yourself.

You are a key member of the team that plans your transition to adult life, did you know that? It's true--and it's important.

➕ *You don't want others planning your whole life for you; you want a voice in shaping your future.*

➕ *So--what do you bring to the table? What do you want to say?*

➕ *What would you tell others about yourself? Ask for? Insist on? Wish you could do....?*

- *Youthhood.org.* www.youthhood.org - Childhood meets adulthood at Youthhood.org. This very interactive site for youth will help you start thinking about what you want to do with the rest of your life.

- *Relish is for more than hot dogs.* www.nichcy.org/stuguid.asp -That's the name of another NICHCY Student Guide, complete with audio program about young people with disabilities who followed their dreams and found their own sweet success. Their advice? Relish your dreams, delight in your talents, work to achieve who you are and who you will become.

- *More on the value of your dreams.* - www.infouse.com/openfutures/index.php Each month *Open Futures* will introduce you to three people with disabilities

- Who believed in themselves and followed their dreams. *Open Futures* will also lead you to resources that will help you open up your future.

- *Be your own advocate.* http://depts.washington.edu/~transctr/ETP.html Visit KASA (Kids as Self Advocates), a national, grassroots network of youth with disabilities and needs (and friends), speaking out.

- As KASA youth say, "We are leaders in our communities, and we help spread helpful, positive information among our peers to increase knowledge around various issues.
- Those issues include: living with disabilities, health care transition issues, school, work, and many more."

- *Yes! Know yourself, know what you need, and know how to get it.*
  www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.selfadvo.ld.johnson.htm
  More on self-advocacy.

- **Use your personal networks.www.communityinclusion.org/topic.php?topic_id=7**
  "Making Dreams a Reality: Using Personal Networks to Achieve Goals as You Prepare to Leave High School" tells the stories of students who used their personal networks to exercise self-determination and follow their goals, and includes worksheets for you to build and use your own networks.

- *Looking for a job? First, look inside yourself.*
  www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=54&type=topic&id=11
  "Starting with Me: A Guide to Person-Centered Planning for Job Seekers" is a career development guide to help you make satisfying job choices.
    - In person-centered career planning, your personal preferences, goals, and dreams are the focus.
    - A person-centered approach does not mean you have to tackle job exploration all on your own.
    - It *does* mean that anyone who helps you in your career search and the development of your career dreams respects your wishes and helps you to focus on your skills and abilities.
    - Finding satisfying work doesn't usually just happen by applying for a job in the newspaper.
    - The process involves several phases-- and it all begins with you.

- *What do you say about your disability?*
  www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/411.html
  This workbook will help you make an informed decision about whether or not to disclose your disability in several different post school settings. The workbook

contains eight units with classroom activities or activities that you may do independently. The units include Self-Determination, Rights and Responsibilities Under the Law, Accommodations, Post-Secondary Disclosure, Disclosure on the Job, and Disclosure in Social and Community Settings.

- *Just for fun.*www.nichcy.org/kids/index.htm
  Visit *Zigawhat!*--NICHCY's site just for young people.

This information is copyright free. Readers are encouraged to copy and share it, but please credit the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY).

Student Transition- Planning Process Evaluation

My Request to You,
The Students at
Michael J. Hawkins High School–

This student transition-planning process is a "work in progress." It is only a tool to help you the student increase your probability of success while you transition from high school to adulthood. Please complete the evaluation below and return it to me along with any suggestions you have for making this process even better.

1. The most useful part of this process is …

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. The least useful part of this process is …

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. What areas should I provide more information about?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4.   Please write down any additional comments …

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank You!
Rhonda L. Sutton

References

www.mapping-your-future.org/

www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/downloaddepot.phtml

www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm

www.actstudents.org/career/apprent.html

www.myfuture.com/beyond/jointhemilitary_all.html

www.nichcy.org/

Notes

Permission Letter to Conduct the Study

March 08, 2011

Mr. James Thompson, Principal
Michael J. Hawkins High School
1700 Park Boulevard
Camden, NJ 08104

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University and this gives me the opportunity to conduct action research on topics that are relevant and beneficial to our high school. I will be conducting a research project as part of my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. James Coaxum. The intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to ensure that when a child with a disability turns 16, there are transition services in place to assist the child in transitioning from high school to adulthood. Consequently, special education teachers are expected to teach academic skills as well as provide students with the life and career-planning skills necessary to transition from high school to adulthood. In reality, it is difficult to coordinate the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals with specific transition classroom activities and address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) at the same time.

The goal of this study is to develop and implement a "results-oriented" process that insures IDEA transition services mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their IEPs to the classrooms. As part of this action research study, I plan to examine the following five factors:

1) What are the perceptions of the high school special education teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors regarding the present process for implementing transition services to students with disabilities?

2) How confident do students with disabilities feel that they are prepared to transition from high school to adulthood?

3) What are the outcomes of the new "results-oriented" transition planning process?

4) How will my leadership facilitate the development and implementation of a "results-oriented transition planning process?

I request your permission to conduct my research study which includes administering questionnaires to our school administrators, guidance counselors, special education teachers and students with disabilities. At no time will these participants be noted in any research data. I will strictly focus on teaching methods, strategies, and components

necessary to develop and implement a "results-oriented" process that insures IDEA transition services mandates are achieved for students with disabilities from their IEPs to the classrooms. Participants' names will be anonymous to protect all parties. Participation is voluntary and participants need not respond to all questions. Attached are copies of the informed consent forms and questionnaires for your review. If you have any questions or problems concerning this study, please contact Rhonda Sutton at (856) 614-7646, or her Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum at Coaxum@rowan.edu.

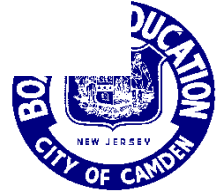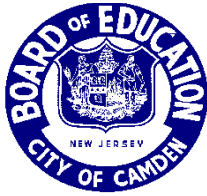Respectfully,

Rhonda L. Sutton

Approval to Conduct Research

MICHAEL J. HAWKINS HIGH SCHOOL
1 Avatar Place.
Camden, New Jersey 08103
Mr. James Thompson, Principal

Phone # (856) 966-5100•   Fax # (856) 966-4756

March 15, 2011

Rhonda L. Sutton
Rowan University
College of Education-Educational Leadership Department
Education Hall
Glassboro, New Jersey 08028

Dear Ms. Sutton:

I have reviewed your request to conduct an action research study at Michael J. Hawkins High School which includes administering questionnaires to our school administrators, guidance counselors, special education teachers and students with disabilities. I feel that this research will be beneficial to our school as well as the study's participants. You have my permission to conduct your study and to use Michael J. Hawkins High School special education teachers and students with disabilities as participants in your study.

If you have any questions regarding this letter of approval, I will be glad to assist you in anyway. I look forward to reviewing the results of your study.

Sincerely,

James Thompson
Principal

Student Transition-Planning Process Evaluation

My request to you, _____

This transition-planning process is a "work in progress." It is only a tool to help you, the student increase your probability of success while you transition from high school to adulthood. Please complete the evaluation below and return it to me along with any suggestions you have for making this plan even better.

1. The most useful part of this process is …

_____
_____
_____

2. The least useful part of this process is …

_____
_____
_____

3. What areas should I provide more information about?

_____
_____
_____

4. Please write down any additional comments …

_____
_____
_____

Thank You!

Rhonda L. Sutton

Transition Planning Process Exit Slip

Transition Planning Process
DAY _____
<u>Exit Slip</u>

1. Tell me about at least two things you liked in the transition planning process today. Be specific about why you liked these things.

    a.

    b.

2. Tell me about at least two things you disliked in the transition planning process today. Be specific about why you disliked these things.

    a.

    b.

3. Complete the following sentence. Be sure to tell me how you felt about it. Today in transition planning process...

Transition Planning Evaluation Form

Transition Planning Evaluation

The following questions are part of an evaluation of the

transition planning session in which you have participated. The

information we obtain will help us to evaluate and continually

improve this process. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Session Name: _____
Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS

Please circle your response to the items. Rate aspects of the session on a 1 to 5 scale:

1 = "Strongly disagree," or the lowest, most negative impression

3 = "Neither agree or disagree"," or an adequate impression

5 = "Strongly agree," or the highest, most positive impression

THE OVERALL TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS

1. The transition planning session was very useful for the students:

5-Strongly Agree 4-Agree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

MRS. SUTTON LEADERSHIP EVALUATION

2. Mrs. Sutton's leadership skills were effective:

5-Strongly Agree 4-Agree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

3. Mrs. Sutton's has expert knowledge of the Transition Planning Process:

5-Strongly Agree 4-Agree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

WORKSHOP CONTENT

4. The content of the session was presented in an organized fashion:

5-Strongly Agree 4-Agree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

5. The student activities stimulated learning:

5-Strongly Agree4-Agree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 2-Disagree 1-Strongly Disagree

6. What did you like the most about the session? (Please explain)

7. What did you like the least about the session? (Please explain)

8. How could the sessions be improved? (Please Explain)

9. Are you interested in collaborating with Mrs. Sutton in future Transition Planning sessions?

Appendix Q

Statement of Transition Services: Coordinated Activities/Strategies

Michael J. Hawkins High School
Individualized Education Program
John Doe
2012-2013 School Year

STATEMENT OF TRANSITION SERVICES: COORDINATED ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Beginning with the IEP in place for the school year when the student will turn age 16 or younger, if appropriate, complete the following multiyear plan for promoting movement from school to the student's desired postschool goals. The student's needs, strengths, interests and preferences in each area (instruction, community experiences, etc.) must be considered and responsibilities should be shared among participants (student, parent, school staff, outside agencies, employers, etc.).

Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Postsecondary Education/Training	Expected Date of Implementation	Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services
Transitional-Planning Process Sessions	09/01/2012	Case Manager/School
Develop Goals and Priorities	09/01/2012	Case Manager/School
Discuss College as an Option	04/01/2013	Case Manager/School
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Daily Living Skills	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Dress for Success	03/01/2013	Case Manager/School
Budgeting Skills Assistance	02/01/2013	School/Home/Student
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Functional Vocational Evaluation	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Increase Career Awareness/Exploration	09/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Develop Career Plan	12/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Assess Interests and Skills	10/01/2012	Case Manager/School
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Employment	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Job Search & Job Hunting Techniques	02/01/2013	School/Home/Student
Military, Apprenticeship, and other options	05/01/2013	School/Home/Student
Resume Writing	01/01/2013	School/Home/Student
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Adult Living Objectives	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Self-Help and Basic Survival Skills	09/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Discuss Transition Assistance Resources	11/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Related Services	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Vocational Counseling	09/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Activities/Strategies Related to Measurable Postsecondary Goals in the Area of Community Experience	**Expected Date of Implementation**	**Agency Arranging and/or Providing Services**
Recreation Skills	09/01/2012	School/Home/Student
Banking Skills	10/01/2012	School/Home/Student