Educational Leaders Preparing Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Endeavors in the Coastal Region of a South Atlantic State: A Case Study

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the three men in my life: my husband, Steve, and my two sons, Alex and Adam, who supported and believed in me from the beginning to the end of this long endeavor. I love you all to infinity and beyond!

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Abstract

Educational Leaders Preparing Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Endeavors in the Coastal Region of a South Atlantic State: A Case Study

Community integration and involvement is the overarching goal in planning for the transition from high school to adulthood for students with disabilities. The provision of a continuum of services, based on each student's individual needs is, the cornerstone of special education and transition services. The focus of this study was on how educational leaders in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state ensure that the transition requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) are implemented. The study included the identification of specific methods and practices used in that region. The researcher, driven by a desire to know more about the uniqueness of the case, interviewed educational leaders including school-based administrators, a division-based administrator, and a guidance counselor. Information was collected by surveying transition coordinators ($N = 64$) from the school divisions in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state with regard to career and vocational opportunities offered in the school divisions, transition planning practices within the school divisions, and the demographics of the participants. The researcher solicited the opinions of the participants concerning their knowledge base and their division transition practices. The researcher reviewed archival documents maintained at the state level pertaining to transition practices and transition outcomes for each school division included in the study. This was an intrinsic case study focusing on a specific group that is unique in geographic location, organization, and collaboration. The study was not intended to extend theory. The findings from the study identified (a) the proficiency of

educational leaders in regard to their knowledge of transition practices and service delivery in their respective schools or school divisions, (b) the perceived education and training needs for educational leaders with regard to the transition practices and service delivery in their respective schools or school divisions, and (c) the specific transition practices and service delivery models utilized by the region's school divisions when reporting on the state indicators. Additionally, the findings added to the current research addressing a variety of approaches to transition planning for students with disabilities.

Keywords: educational leadership, transition, transition practices, transition planning, school, special education leadership, special education administration, educational leaders, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, disabilities, students

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Chapter One

Introduction

This story began with the excitement of my high school graduation. My classmates and I were looking forward to the next chapter of our lives including college, employment, marriage, and independence. The majority of the class had been together since kindergarten, so we were a family. Our family included a young woman who would greet us by name each day with a huge smile. She was not in our classes, but she was a part of our school. It was natural that she was in our graduation picture in her cap and gown. We shared a last name, but that is where the similarities ended. I remember distinctly wondering what was going to happen to her, where she was going to live, or if she would work. I was ashamed that I did not know these answers. At that moment, I knew that I wanted to work with students with special needs. I wanted to foster their independence and help them prepare to navigate the adult world.

I was surprised that I was in the minority in college. Most of my classmates focused on the early years of education. I was the only one who specifically requested secondary student teaching assignments. I have been lucky to work with students with disabilities for the past 22 years. My passion for transition planning and services delivery has only increased during that time. Early in my teaching career, I was blessed with two sons. The youngest son was diagnosed with Autism when he was four years old. The quest for knowledge became even more personal for me. I needed to know how to plan for his future. This story continues to grow with each learning opportunity I am given.

One of the purposes behind this work was to gain knowledge and understanding of the methods and strategies that educational leaders use to ensure that the transition

needs of students with disabilities (SWD) are met. I am lucky to be a part of a Community of Practice that includes professionals from all of the school divisions in Region 2, who share the same passion. This study was formulated through my involvement with this group. The study was bound to the members of the Community of Practice, educational leaders in the divisions of Region 2, and the outcome data from those divisions. Through the use of a survey, interviews, observations, and an archive review of state outcome data, I was able to gather information to identify how educational leaders are ensuring that the mandates of IDEA are being met. This study allowed me to examine how the experience and knowledge of educational leaders impacts the transition services and practices in the school divisions.

The story unfolded with each revision of my document. The framework of distributive leadership allowed me to examine the dynamics of the case, the transition practices at the school and division level, while gaining insight into the knowledge and experience of the educational leaders involved in the study. I was pleased to see a collaborative approach to the delivery of transition services and development of transition planning in each school division. I was pleasantly surprised with the level of excitement and interest that the educational leaders exhibited, when talking about the postsecondary preparation for SWD in their respective divisions. Distributed leadership practices were evident in each division. Yet, every interview participant shared the need for more training in the area of special education.

Henry Ford, best known for developing the assembly line method in automobile manufacturing, stated, “Every advance begins in a small way and with the individual” as cited in Ford, 2009 (p. 171). Ford’s declaration is likewise applicable to planning for the

transition from school to postsecondary activities for SWD. Both relate to planning and both are relevant aspects of positive transition practices.

Transition is the process educators, students, and their families use to plan for students' lives after high school, to identify desired outcomes, and to plan community and school experiences to assure that the students acquire the knowledge and skills required to achieve their overall goals. Developing a course of study and a coordinated set of activities for secondary SWD fosters access to adult services, postsecondary education, and employment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the primary legislation that governs the education of SWD, includes transition components with the goal of preparing SWD to access the support and services they need to become as independent as possible (IDEA, 2004).

Statement of Problem

Educational leaders, who have limited working knowledge of special education laws and regulations, may make insufficient decisions regarding SWD. Educational leaders' knowledge of special education laws and the ways in which they ensure that the legal mandates are implemented impact the quality and outcome of service delivery, thereby directly influencing the transition outcomes of SWD. School divisions are expected to identify and collaborate with adult agencies to ensure smooth and successful transition from school to adulthood. Guidance in identifying specific activities, supports, and experiences to help promote transition services has been limited. The goals of this research study were (a) to examine how educational leaders ensure that the mandates of the IDEA are met, (b) to identify activities and experiences used to implement the IDEA transition requirements in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state, and (c) to gather

information about adult services and agencies available in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. The researcher utilized the case study methodology to gain knowledge about a specific group of school divisions and educators in the region under study. This methodology allowed the researcher to maintain focus and perspective related to the data and information collected from the group of participants in the study.

School leaders must divide their focus among compliance with federal mandates, student achievement, and student discipline. Educational leaders must be prepared to interpret the law as well as understand policy and special education mandates. The knowledge or lack of knowledge of special education law results in judicial consequences when decisions, practices, and services are not in compliance with federal mandates. This phenomenon makes it crucial for educational leaders to have a working knowledge of policy and special education legislation. Special education laws have expanded the number and scope of opportunities and services for people with disabilities. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975 was vital to the schooling of individuals with disabilities (EHA, 1975). As the first law to mandate a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for SWD, EHA required that SWD be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and be evaluated using a variety of assessments every 3 years (EHA, 1975). The EHA mandated services to SWD until they turned 22 years old (EHA, 1975). EHA led to recent policy emphasis on increased accountability in improving postsecondary outcomes (Kochlar-Bryant, Bassett, & Webb, 2009). Educational leaders now are required to facilitate skill development and provide opportunities needed for postsecondary employment, education, training and, when appropriate, independent living.

Other laws have fostered the importance of transition planning and collaboration. The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are federal laws that protect qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disabilities. Protection can be appropriate in employment, government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, telecommunications, and schools. These laws cover an individual with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having an impairment.

The EHA amendments of 1983 were the first to contain special education transition legislation. The amendments promoted the development of education, training, and services geared to assist people with disabilities to transition from school to work, independent living environments, or postsecondary education. The EHA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. The IDEA established the initial legal definition of transition as it applies to SWD:

> A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including supported and unsupported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004, [34 CFR 300.320 (b)])

Cooperative study programs prepared students with mild disabilities to enter the work force as early as the 1950s and 1960s (McMahan, 2005). These programs utilized

work experience in the community paired with academic, social, and vocational curricula to prepare SWD to be actively employed. The Career Education Implementation Incentive Act of 1977 focused on developing the student's self-awareness and employability skills by utilizing community-based instruction (McMahan, 2005). Despite the implementation of early career education and work experience programs, research has shown that SWD are employed less often than students without disabilities (Brook, Revell, & Wehman, 2009).

IDEA of 2004 mandates transition services and, when appropriate, a statement of interagency linkages for all SWD no later than age 16. Interagency planning refers to planning among special, vocational, and general educators in the schools. Interagency and multiagency collaboration are important elements in transition planning (Kohler & Field, 2003; Savage, 2005). Both types of collaboration include planning with postsecondary educational institutions, hospitals (for students with multiple disabilities), and correctional facilities, schools, and communities (Borgioli & Kennedy, 2003; Bullis & Unruh, 205; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

The National Commission on Educational Excellence (NCEE) released a report, "A Nation at Risk," in 1983. This report brought attention to the diversity of learners by emphasizing the necessity of addressing the specific needs of individual students (NCEE, 1997). The report emphasized the variety of student aspirations and abilities as well as the need for appropriate accessibility for students with diverse needs. The report stated,

> We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry. . . . Our recommendations are based on the beliefs that everyone can learn, that everyone comes with an urge to learn which can be nurtured, that a solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all, and

> that life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship. (NCEE, 1983, p. 21)

As the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the United States Department of Education during the 1980s and as the mother of a child with a disability who was preparing to enter the adult world, Madeleine Will had a vested interest in improving the development and facilitation of transition programming and services for SWD (Will, 1985). Will (1985) questioned the lack of collaboration between secondary schools and employment. She emphasized the need for bridges to promote the transition from school to the adult world for SWD (Will, 1985). Her work is one of the foundational models for the transition policies that followed.

Policies such as those articulated in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the School to Work Opportunity Act are directly related to the earlier work of Will and "A Nation at Risk." Goals 2000 provided a framework for state efforts to improve student academic achievement. The School to Work Opportunity Act was different from other education reform initiatives because it did not create a separate program with federal mandates (Paris, 1994). Rather, the intention of the School to Work Opportunity Act was to help states and localities utilize and advance existing programs and reforms by linking current program efforts with community workforce development. This goal promoted an integrated system of vocational experiences and training for youth (McMahan & Baer, 2001). The 1997 amendments to the IDEA changed the focus from linkages to curriculum access by requiring the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to include a statement of transition service needs related to the student's course of study by age 14 (McMahan, 2005). The age requirement was lowered to address the lack of access to

school-age vocational training programs and general curriculum, which led to SWD being unprepared for employment and postsecondary education (McMahan & Baer, 2001).

There has been an abundance of research related to transition planning, but no available research indicates the practical application of the transition mandates. The regulations are the cornerstones of all services for SWD. It is important to understand them to comprehend the intensity of the federal and state transition directives. The 2004 reauthorization of the IDEA refined the definition of transition to include a focus on academic and functional achievement (Schmitz, 2008). Four major criteria in the definition of transition services have remained constant since the reauthorization of the IDEA in 1990: determining student's needs, interests, and preferences; planning oriented toward outcomes; planning coordinated sets of activities; and promoting movement to postsecondary activities (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2001).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 promoted student participation by requiring that the student be invited to any meeting in which transition is discussed. If the student cannot attend, the school must take appropriate measures to ensure that the student's needs, interests, and preferences are included in the plan. The IDEIA of 2004 mandated that the student and the parents be notified in writing of the transfer of rights to the student upon his or her reaching the age of majority. The Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT) adopted Halpern's (1994) definition of secondary transition for youth with disabilities. His definition provided a basis for the language that appeared in the amendments to the IDEA in 1997 and 2004:

> Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult service agencies, and natural supports within the community. The foundations of transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Halpern, 1994, p. 116)

Kohler (1996) developed a similar classification of transition intervention services with the support of the Transition Research Institute. These research-based services identified five areas of focus for service delivery in secondary settings intended to enhance the transition of youth with disabilities to postsecondary environments: student-focused planning, student development, interagency and interdisciplinary planning, family involvement, and program structure. The works of Halpern and Kohler and amendments to the IDEA reinforce the importance of self-determination.

Wehmeyer and Schwartz's 1997 study on self-determination and positive adult outcomes brought focus to student involvement and participation in planning for students' postsecondary transition. Self-determination and self-advocacy are difficult skills for SWD to acquire. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009) pointed out several barriers that impede the attainment of self-determination skills for SWD, including (a) limited opportunities to learn necessary skills, (b) limited access to experiences that allow the practice of necessary skills, and (c) limited opportunities due to obstacles formed by society's attitudes that shape expectations and opinions in relation to SWD.

The importance of educational and vocational experiences in the development of a student's abilities is prominent in the literature (Kohler & Field, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Special education teachers play an essential role in the development of the abilities students need to achieve successful postsecondary outcomes. Teachers strengthen the student's abilities through transition-focused education and services. The services are provided through the use of assessments, identification and provision of accommodations, and design of the instruction. The effectiveness of the instruction and services is dependent on the teacher's knowledge and skills related to transition (Kochhar-Bryant et al., 2009). A study by Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) revealed that many teachers felt unprepared to plan and deliver transition services and that less than half of the universities studied offered courses in transition. The research showed a correlation between the teachers' feelings and the lack of preservice instruction and preparation in the area of transition (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

The IDEA provides clear mandates for transition planning, including coordinated sets of activities and experiences, which are essential to the student who is transitioning to the postsecondary world. The mandates and research do not provide specific methods to ensure that the students and their families are prepared for life after high school. There are several formal self-determination curricula and transition programs, but little information can be found to support the individual student or teacher who has limited knowledge and resources.

In a speech to the American Association for People with Disabilities, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated,

> In order to win the future, as President Obama has challenged us, we must enable every single American to reach their [*sic*] potential, and in my book, all means all.

> Every child, regardless of income, race, background, or disability can learn and must learn, and our system of education, spread across 50 states, 15,000 school districts, and 95,000 schools, must embrace this core belief every day in every way possible. (Duncan, 2011)

President Obama's fiscal year 2014 budget included investments and reforms in education and training to better prepare students for a competitive workforce (Office of Management and Budget, 2014). Part of this plan included the redesigning of secondary schools to focus on providing challenging and relevant learning experiences. The transition process included promoting and developing partnerships with colleges and employers. It requires improved instruction and preparation for students to continue their education or transition into skilled jobs. In addition, the budget proposes to strengthen and reform career and technical education to better align programs with the needs of employers and higher education to ensure that graduates are poised to succeed (Office of Management and Budget, 2014). It is important for educational administrators to be aware of and to plan how to address these expectations for all students, including identification of the individual needs of the student and ways to meet those needs. This task requires extensive knowledge of the student and the ability to identify and coordinate resources in the community.

I have over 22 years of experience as an educator of SWD, all of which have been at the secondary level. During that time, I was an educational leader responsible for transition planning and service delivery as a teacher, a school-based administrator, and a division-based administer. By participating in and providing training opportunities to other professionals with the same responsibilities, I developed a knowledge base and a set of skills that led me to support collaboration and distributive leadership in developing and implementing transition plans and services. For the past 14 years, I have participated in a

regional group called a community of practice, whose members have varying knowledge and skills but similar responsibilities for transition planning and service delivery. The questions and concerns consistently shared by this group led to the conceptualization of this study.

Significance of Study

The IDEA of 2004 requires transition planning for SWD prior to their exit from secondary school (IDEA, 2004). Research has revealed a prevalence of appropriate strategies and practices to ensure that the mandate is met. Researchers such as Kohler (1996) and Halpern (1994) identified best practices in the field of transition for SWD. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supports the need for continuous improvement in transition practices (United States Department of Education, 2005).

Preparing SWD for independence in the adult world is the foundation of transition services. Community integration and involvement is the overall goal. The provision of a continuum of services based on each student's individual needs is the cornerstone of special education. New developments and suggested methods continue to guide policies and practices. Transition coordinators and school administrators may not stay abreast of current research or may not utilize methods and resources that have not been identified by others. This study concentrated on how educational leaders ensure that the legal requirements for transition are met and identified the specific methods and practices used to implement the transition requirements of the IDEA in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. The results of the study provide a resource for leaders and practitioners in the specified region to use in transition planning and service delivery. The data from the study helped identify areas for further training and support of transition leaders at the

local and regional levels. The findings add to the current research addressing transition collaborative planning for SWD (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

Purpose and Research Questions

A report from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) suggested that school leaders need a working knowledge of the laws that impact them on a regular basis, including special education laws. Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahigrim-Delzell (2006) noted that consistent standards for preparing school leaders to have a working knowledge of special education laws is essential for the provision of appropriate practices and services for SWD. The literature review revealed best practices in transition planning and preparation for SWD. The literature also exposed the lack of preparation and involvement of educational leaders, resulting in insufficient knowledge at the administrative level, both of which are necessary to execute the requirements of the IDEA and implement best transition practices. Research related to regional transition practices and services, although scarce, is required to assist educational leaders and practitioners in the provision of transition services that are relevant to students' communities. The purpose of this study was to address the lack of information on regional practices and research relating to limited educational leader preparation for the execution of transition services. The following research question guided the study:

1. What is the story of those who ensure the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?

Conceptual Framework

This study was designed to examine and gain understanding of the knowledge and practices of educational leaders in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state with regard to the transition mandates of 2004. Elmore defined distributed leadership as "multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture" (Elmore, 2000, p. 15). Organizing diverse competencies requires understanding of the individuals' knowledge and skills that complement those of others and an understanding of when the knowledge within the organization is not sufficient to solve the problem (Elmore, 2000). The organization and vast knowledge required by educational leaders support the idea that the duties of educational leaders should be distributed among other professionals whose knowledge and skills are specific to the given task or expectation. The development of transition plans and the provision of transition services require the collaboration of many individuals. The process represents the culmination of the skills and knowledge of different members who contribute to plans and implant or provide the services. This study was framed and informed through the theoretical lens of distributed leadership. Educational leadership has evolved over time from a top-down management model of leadership toward a shared leadership model. Elmore proposed a definition of school leadership: "Leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement" (Elmore, 2000, p. 13). He further endorsed the notion of distributed leadership, whereby leadership responsibilities are widely shared among various groups in the organization while the groups work hard at "creating a common culture, or set of values, symbols, and rituals" (Elmore, 2000, p. 15). The definition of distributed leadership used in this study

is attributed to Jones and colleagues, "a form or shared leadership that is underpinned by a more collective and inclusive philosophy than traditional leadership theory that focus on skills, traits, and behaviors of individual leaders" (Jones, LeFoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012, p. 73). This working definition recognizes the teacher as a leader in the school and community (Jones, LeFoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012). Distributive leadership in the context of this study identifies the collaborative involvement of people based on their expertise.

Maxwell wrote that conceptual framework is a theory that functions to refine the goals of a study, develop appropriate research questions, choose appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats to the conclusions of a study (Maxwell, 2005). The conceptual framework for this study originated with the researcher's experiential knowledge and evolved as the data were collected. As information and data were collected from the participants there was fluidity in the framework as the conceptual view became more focused.

Epistemology and Control for Bias

The epistemological assumption of this study fell within the constructivist paradigm. Windschitl (2002), "constructivism in practice involves phenomena distributed across multiple contexts" (p. 132). Guba and Lincoln (2001) described three fundamental assumptions of constructivist. The ontological assumption is relativism, referring to the way in which people perceive, comprehend, and interpret the world around them (Guba & Lincoln, 2001, p. 1). The epistemological assumption of constructivism is "transactional subjectivism" or meaning is formed by the experiences of the individuals engaged in forming the assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 2001, p. 1). This

methodological assumption pays particular attention to context, takes account of different constructions of phenomena under study, and allows for the constructions to be understood, discussed, and subjected to critique. A significance of constructivist methodology is to capture or reveal the perspectives, and elucidate the context, of research participants, including the researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). The construction of reality based on the researchers interpretations of the data with the help of the participants, who provided the data in the study, is pivotal to constructivist methodology. It involves critical questioning that prompts interrogation of the researchers own beliefs, questions institutional routines, and seeks to better understand the influences of practices (Guba & Lincoln, 2001).

Creswell (1998) emphasized that phenomenological study "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). In addition, qualitative delving into a phenomenon depends upon the researcher's entering the natural environment to reveal the essence of a shared experience (Guba & Lincoln, 2001; Creswell, Qualitiative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions, 1998). To uphold the integrity of qualitative study and control for bias before to entering the natural setting, the researcher must share any background, experiences, and personal connections to the topic being researched that may possibly impact the study (Creswell, 1998, p. 74).

I developed an intense interest in planning and providing transition services for SWD as a secondary teacher of SWD for over 20 years. I served as a transition coordinator at the school level in two different school divisions and currently supervise the all of the transition programing for one division at the administrative level. I served

on many different committees focusing on transition practices at the state and local levels. As the mandates expanded and the state indicators were more specific, the researcher traveled to other divisions across the state providing training and support in an effort to educate teachers and educational leaders on special education law related to transition and implementation of transition services. I remain extremely self-motivated to support and develop educational leaders on the topic.

When initiating this study, I questioned the ability not to interject personal motivations, beliefs, and feelings concerning the transition process and knowledge of educational leaders related that process into the research efforts. Knowledge gained through experience motivated me, as the study evolved, while using caution to restrict my experiences when interpreting and analyzing the outcomes. Extensive note taking and memo writing, as recommended by Maxwell (2005), was utilized throughout the research to facilitate the investigative process. I documented body language, facial gestures, tone, and other notable actions or features during each interview. Personal reflection during the process led to the following questions: 1. What is the story of educational leaders ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?

The review of the literature concerning transition service delivery and planning and the responsibility of educational leaders to ensure that the mandates are followed strongly verified the need for this study.

Summary of Methodology

This study is an intrinsic case study, defined by Creswell (2011) as a study that focuses on a specific case because of the unique qualities of that case. For this study, the researcher used multiple sources of information including a survey, interviews, and archival document review to collect and study the educational leadership strategies and practices applied in ensuring that IDEA transition directives are met in school divisions in the coastal region of a specific South Atlantic state (Creswell, 2011).

Survey. I used a census survey, which includes open and closed response items (Appendix C) to survey the transition coordinators in the region ($N = 64$) at a regularly scheduled monthly meeting. This group, called a community of practice, was unique due to the similarities in the geographic opportunities, consistent membership, and participation. The survey prompted the participants to select from different options for the survey items but included open-ended items that allowed the participants to expand on their opinions. I used the survey to gather data on the career and technology courses available in the participating divisions, how the courses related to postsecondary transition, and the support that SWD received in those courses. The survey results provided data on the transition services available through special education as well as the opinions of the participants concerning the transition practices in each school division. Survey items also solicited demographic data, which were collected for sorting purposes.

Interviews. I interviewed 11 educational leaders in the region who were responsible for ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates were being met. The educational leaders included school-based administrators, a division-based administrator, and a guidance counselor. From the individuals recommended by the survey respondents, the researcher interviewed all of those who consented to participate in that

manner. I used a semistructured list of questions but allowed for follow-up or probing questions as necessary. The questions included items requesting information about the participants' leadership styles, a description of their respective schools' models for postsecondary transition, their knowledge and understanding of IDEA, and the involvement of community agencies in transition planning at their schools. I began with specific questions but allowed for a fluid discussion and deviation as warranted by the topic.

Archive review. I reviewed and compared the state indicator data for each school division in the region. All of the documents were in the public domain, as they were available through state and local websites. Data from three state indicators were used. Indicator 1 measured the percentage of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma. Indicator 13 measured the percentage of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP including appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that were updated annually. The goals were required to be based on an age-appropriate transition assessment. Additionally, Indicator 13 required that the IEP include transition services, including courses of study, to reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. Indicator 14 measured the percentage of youth who were no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were either (a) enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education or were competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, (c) enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program, or (d) competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

I reviewed archived data from 2011-2013 to help determine if the school divisions' outcomes of the transition planning and the provision of transition services met or exceeded those set by the state department of education, thus meeting the mandates of IDEA 2004.

Terms and Definitions

The stated terms and definitions were derived from a variety of sources, including federal and state statutes and regulations, the National Secondary Transition and Technical Assistance Center, the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, the regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC), and various state departments of education.

Accommodation refers to a service or support related to the student's disability that allows full access to a given subject matter and accurate demonstration of knowledge without requiring a fundamental alteration to the standard or expectation of the task.

Adult services are services needed for people when they reach adulthood, often including, but not limited to assistance in finding a job, assistance in the home, assistance at work, employment-related supports such as housing and transportation, and provision of various therapies or medications.

Age-appropriate transition assessments are ongoing processes of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future work, education, living, and personal and social environments.

Aging out is a term that applies to a student who is nearing the end of his or her school career based on chronological age. The federal mandate is age 22.

Community-based instruction refers to the integration of students into their community as part of their educational curriculum and instruction.

Community-based services are services provided in a community setting, preferably in the individual's home community.

Course of study refer to a multiyear description of coursework necessary to achieve the student's desired postsecondary goals, from the student's current to anticipated exit year.

Disability refers to a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual.

Distributive Leadership is a form of shared leadership that is underpinned by a collective and inclusive philosophy that focuses on skills, traits, and behaviors of individual leaders (Jones, LeFoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012).

Educational leaders are defined by the researcher for the purposes of this case study as people who are responsible for ensuring that the transition mandates in the IDEA are met for all appropriate SWD.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) comprises special education and related services that (a) are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the Secondary Education Act; (c) include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state involved; and (d) are provided in conformity with an individualized education program (IEP) that meets the requirements of §§ 300.320–324 (IDEA 2004 Part B Regulations, §300.17).

Functional life skills are skills required for participation in typical activities or practices of adults in society, including vocation, education, home, recreation, and community.

Functional vocational assessment refers to an evaluation to determine the student's strengths, abilities, and needs in an actual or simulated work setting or in real-work sample experiences; this process should occur over time with repeated measures using situational assessments.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) is the latest reauthorization of PL 94-142. It comprises the federal regulations that govern educational entitlement services for children with disabilities through age 22 or when they exit high school.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the IDEA regulations.

Independent living skills are skills or tasks that contribute to the successful independent functioning of an individual in adulthood and may address leisure recreation, home maintenance, personal care, and community participation.

Least restrictive environment refers to (a) the maximum extent appropriate to which children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (b) special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment that occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such

that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA 2004 Part B Regulations, §300.114).

Postsecondary outcomes are the measures of participation in postsecondary education training or competitive employment one year after exiting high school.

Postsecondary goals refer to the goals in the Individual Education Program that a child hopes to achieve after exiting secondary school. A postsecondary goal must have a related annual goal for a student 16 years of age or older, or younger if the state has determined it to be necessary (IDEA 2004 Part B Regulations, §300.320(b)).

Public Law 94-142 is the first federal education law to serve SWD in public schools. First signed in 1975, after several reauthorizations, it is now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is the federal act that ensures rehabilitation services to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to employment, education, and leisure activities.

School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 is a federal act that provides funding for systemic change; it includes work-based, school-based, and connecting activities to create quality opportunities for all students.

Self-advocacy is the understanding of one's disability, being aware of the strengths and weaknesses resulting from the limitations imposed by the disability, and being able to articulate reasonable need for accommodation(s).

Self-determination is a person's right and ability to direct his or her own life, as well as the responsibility to accept the consequences of his or her choices, and the

capacity to make decisions, choose preferences, practice self-advocacy, and manage his or her own affairs.

Special education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in classrooms, homes, hospitals, institutions, and other settings (IDEA 2004 Part B Regulations, §300.1(a)).

Transition is the period of time when adolescents are moving into adulthood and is often concerned with planning for postsecondary education or careers; it usually encompasses the ages 14-25 and involves moving from the school environment to the workforce or higher education environments.

Transition assessment is the ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, personal, and social environments. The data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form a basis for defining goals and services to be included in the Individualized Education Program.

Transition services comprise a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability, which are (a) designed to be within a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, or independent living or community participation; (b) based on the individual student's needs, taking into account strengths, preferences and interests; and, (c) are inclusive of instruction, related

services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives and, when appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (IDEA 2004, Pub. Law No. 108–446, 20 U.S.C. 1400, H.R. 1350).

Triangulation of data refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question to enhance confidence in the findings. It includes collection of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods. Data collected from various individuals or sources using a survey, interviews, and a review of archival data is included in this study (Maxwell, 2005).

Vocational or career assessments refer to a systematic collection of information about the student's vocational aptitudes, abilities, expressed interests, and occupational awareness used in planning the transition from secondary school to competitive employment or postsecondary education.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Program is a program to assist states in operating a comprehensive, coordinated, effective, efficient, and accountable program of vocational rehabilitation that is an integral part of a statewide workforce investment system designed to assess, plan, develop, and provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities, interests, and informed choices, so that the individuals may prepare for and engage in gainful employment (Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Title 1 Section 100(a)(2)).

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Creswell (2011) described the review of the literature in qualitative research as a vehicle through which to frame the study. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature related to postsecondary transition planning for students with disabilities (SWD) and the preparation or experiences of educational leaders that help them ensure that transition mandates are met. This researcher included an examination of the research surrounding the secondary SWD transition planning process and activities used in the implementation of those plans. Preparation and training for special education leaders were examined in the review. Services provided by adult agencies involved in the transition process of SWD were noted throughout the review. Finally, the differences in philosophies underpinning the laws serving secondary SWD in secondary settings were reviewed. The sources used in this review of the literature were obtained through the Athens Hub available to all students at The George Washington University. Specific databases included ProQuest, ArticlesPlus, and Academic Search. Specific keywords used to search these databases included the following: postsecondary transition, SWD and transition, special education and transition, educational leadership, educational administration, special education administration, special education leadership, postsecondary education, and postsecondary employment.

Secondary students with and without disabilities can improve their adult life through continued education and future employment. There is an established positive relationship between adult employment and a college degree (United States Department of Labor, 2014). Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Lueking, and Mack (2002) indicated that

approximately one third of secondary students with specific learning disabilities failed to graduate from high school and that the dropout rate of SWD was as high as 32%. Many secondary SWD exit high school without a clear understanding of their legal educational rights, much less the academic expectations or responsibilities required for postsecondary success (Stodden & Whelley, 2004).

The responsibility to attain the accommodations and services needed for success reverts to the students when the SWD graduate from high school or when they reach their 22nd birthday. Harris and Robertson (2001) suggested that SWD should be taught self-advocacy while in secondary school before they inherit those responsibilities. Unfortunately, many secondary SWD are not prepared for the workforce when they leave secondary school because they may not have been given or did not take advantage of opportunities to strengthen the needed advocacy skills (Harris & Robertson, 2001). Students should engage in the development of their individual education plans (IEPs) that specifically address the transition goals, services, and activities designed to help them become better self-advocates (Harris & Robertson, 2001). Secondary SWD should be able to explain their disabilities, do not exhibit coping skills to manage attitudinal barriers, and cannot communicate needed accommodations to support them in postsecondary educational settings (Harris & Robertson, 2001). Secondary SWD who are instructed and supported in the development of self-determination skills are more capable of making informed decisions regarding their educational and vocational outcomes (Johnson et al., 2002). Self-advocacy has a positive influence on educational perseverance and promotes the desire to acquire and advance knowledge. That skill set enables individuals with disabilities to understand what services and accommodations

they need to become productive and independent in the adult world, but training to develop that skill is not specifically mandated by legislation.

Legislation surrounding the education of SWD has not always addressed the transition needs of those students. The early focus of the legislation was on school-age students. Later, more attention was given to the needs of young adults with disabilities as the numbers of individuals with disabilities entering the adult world increased. Society began to incorporate aspects of Rawls's (1971) theory of social justice by promoting advocacy for students and adults with disabilities. The inclusion of transition mandates in legislation helped to further the transformation in the societal mindset.

Legislative efforts from 1964 to 1974 increased the legal and political provisions for the extension of federal oversight of the education of disabled children (Yell et al., 2006). Two significant cases that impacted political and legal attention were *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children (PARO) v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) (Yell et al., 2006). In each case, the court required equal access to schools and classes for SWD. In 1966, Congress expanded legislation with the creation of the Bureau of the Education of the Handicapped in the United States Office of Education (Yell et al., 2006). Education for the handicapped was considered a privilege, and educational opportunity for disabled students was limited because of their exclusion in the public school setting prior to this act.

The act credited with generating education for handicapped students was the Education Handicapped Act of 1975 (EHA). EHA is the direct predecessor of the IDEA. Not all states supported the legislation. Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York were

among the states that tested the constitutionality of the law governing specialized services and special education (Yell et al., 2006). Organizations seeking enforcement of the law were met with the denial of equal protection and refusals to provide mandated services and accommodations. These states and many others failed to establish state statutes for the provision of special education services for their students (Yell et al., 2006). These early efforts contradicted the ideas behind social equity and led to current legislation and practices. Three federal initiatives that make up the current structure for transition planning are the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

It is important to acknowledge the historical complexity of mandated services for people with disabilities, specifically secondary SWD. The need to help SWD prepare for their lives after leaving high school has emerged through the course of the legislation. The history of legally mandated transition services is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Legislative History of Transition Services*

Date	Organization/Entity/Advocacy	Policy/Initiative/Legislation
1973	Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Civil rights protections for persons with disabilities
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975	Improved educational services for individuals with exceptional needs
1977	Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - Amended	Mandated accessible jobs/programs for people with disabilities
1989	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services	Allocated funds to conduct the National Longitudinal Transition Study (1987–1993)
1990	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Included provision for transition services
1991	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services	Established systems change in transition and funding for transition activities
1992	School to Work Opportunities Act	Required involvement of all SWD in postsecondary work training
1992	The Rehabilitation Act - Amended	Used the same definition for transition as found in the IDEA
1997	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (reauthorization)	Included legal definition for transition services, required transition planning by the age of 16
1998	Workforce Investment Act	Emphasized employment services
2000	Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act	Promoted the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all sectors of society

These laws did not ensure adequacy or implementation of services but instead defined the function of the services. Funding and training make up an important

component when implementing new programs or services. The mandates attached to the legislation were not always accompanied by additional funds or training. Requirements delivered without instrumentation led to inadequate provision, as evident in the need for continued detailed revisions and reauthorizations of previous legislation. New mandates were developed as the changes or needs were recognized.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990, included medical services, access to special transportation, and other related transition services. Amendments made in 1997 and 2004 required transition services to begin at age 16, specifically targeting student participation in IEP meetings and adult agency linkages with the intention of lessening the gap in service delivery from school to adulthood. Federal mandates for annual state performance indicators measuring the effectiveness of transition planning have made schools accountable for postsecondary planning for students receiving special education services included when the IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 (National Post-School Outcomes Center and Pacer Center, 2006).

IDEA 2004 included specific changes related to the transition planning for SWD who had graduated with a nonterminating diploma. The IDEA 2004 prescribed specific programs of study, services, and supports for secondary SWD. The IDEA 2004 provisions included the following: purpose and definitions for special education, grant formulas for states, service provision, free appropriate public education (FAPE) procedural requirements, intervention services for infants 0 to 3 years of age, and national activities to improve education of children with disabilities (Yell et al., 2006). The major

focus of the IDEA is to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their parents, to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, training, and independent living. The IDEA 2004 defined transition as follows:

> A results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. It is based on the individual child's needs taking into account the child's strengths, preferences and interests; and includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation. (IDEA, 2004, p. 12)

The IDEA provides state grant formulas for services and procedural requirements, authorizes grants to provide program services for individuals beginning in early childhood, and designs national incentives to improve the education of children with disabilities. All of these components can support the provision of transition services (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008). The IDEA mandates that a secondary student become a collaborative participant in transition planning at age 16 or younger, as determined appropriate by the student's IEP team, and that the collaboration continue until the student earns a terminating diploma or turns 22 years old (IDEA, 2004). It also mandates that a statement of transition be incorporated into the IEPs for all secondary SWD, regardless of the need for specialized instruction or participation in the general education curriculum. These mandates are expected to remain in all subsequent versions or adaptations to the IDEA.

Transition and the IDEA. The IDEA requires that each IEP written for students 16 years old or older include a transition plan. Transition plans are needs-related services incorporating components critical for SWD to become ready for life after secondary school (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999). These components include the following: instruction and related services, community experiences, development of employment and other postsecondary living objectives, and provision of a daily living and functional vocational evaluation (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

The IEP must outline the services that SWD will require to successfully transition into the postsecondary environment. Transition services must be student focused and strategic; they must provide effective and meaningful experiences. Kohler (1996) defined the essential components of transition planning in her taxonomy for transition programming and stressed the importance of the collaboration of students, parents, teachers, agencies, and businesses in the development and implementation of the plan. The five points of her taxonomy are the following:

1. Inclusion of student-focused planning, including strategies, student participation, and IEP development.
2. Student development, including career and vocational curricula, structured work experience, and assessment.
3. Interagency collaboration, including schools, community agencies and organizations, and businesses.
4. Family involvement, including training and empowerment.
5. Program structure, including policy, philosophy, evaluation, resource allocation, and resource development. (Kohler, 1996, p. 3)

IDEA is the primary legislation regarding educational practices dealing with SWD. Other laws complement the IDEA while focusing on different aspects of transition. One of these laws is the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA); this is a civil rights law developed to prohibit discrimination on the basis of

disability in employment, public services, and accommodations. ADA is applicable to postsecondary settings; therefore, it is applicable to this research.

Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act

The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADA) assures the provision of services to people with disabilities and affirms their legal rights. This law is similar to other statutes that include race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion as protected classes. It aims to eliminate barriers to employment, education, training, and services for people with disabilities, such as transportation, public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications. This antidiscrimination provision covers all aspects of employment while protecting the employer from excessive hardship (Americans With Disabilities Amendments Act, 2008).

The ADA defines a person with a disability as an individual who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment (Americans With Disabilities Amendments Act, 2008, sec. 3 (1)(A)). This is a much broader definition than that of the IDEA. Under the ADA, a qualified employee or applicant with a disability is one who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job or program (Test, et al., 2009). ADA protects the person with a disability, the family of the person, and the person's employer or supervisor. Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to, ensuring that all existing facilities used by employees are readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities, restructuring or modifying the job or schedule, providing qualified readers or interpreters, and the modification of equipment used by the person with a disability

(ADA, 2008). Accommodations vary depending on the needs of the individual applicant or employee. Not all people with disabilities, or even all people with the same disability, require the same accommodations. The ADA mandates individualization just as the IDEA requires it.

Unlike a school division under the IDEA, an employer is not required under the ADA to provide a reasonable accommodation if it imposes an excessive hardship (ADA, 2008). The ADA defines undue hardship as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered with factors such as an employer's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of the operation. Likewise, an employer is not required to lower production standards to make an accommodation (Americans With Disabilities Amendments Act, 2008).

An employer or supervisor generally need not provide a reasonable accommodation unless an individual with a disability asks for one. This stipulation promotes the need for SWD to fully understand their disabilities and to advocate for themselves; advocacy is an integral component of successful transition planning. The federal government provides tax incentives to encourage the employment of people with disabilities and to promote the accessibility of public accommodations (Americans With Disabilities Amendments Act, 2008). These incentives provide support for employers and agencies that work with people with disabilities. Both the ADA and the IDEA ensure that the rights of individuals with disabilities are protected and that they have the same opportunities as individuals without disabilities. Thus the ADA and IDEA offer protection for students and individuals with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Another law impacting secondary SWD is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which offers similar protection. Section 504 provides a service system in which an individual with disabilities has access to resources for job placement, training, and evaluation regardless of his or her ability level. Many students in public schools are not eligible for services under the IDEA but are eligible for protection and services under the guidelines of Section 504. Under that section, SWD who meet all other prerequisites and are termed otherwise able to meet program or course requirements must be provided with reasonable accommodations to compensate for their disabilities (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). Determination of "otherwise qualified" relies on three factors: (a) the program or course requirements, (b) whether nonessential criteria can be accommodated without changing the essence of the course or program, and (c) the specific abilities and disabilities of the student (Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001). Secondary SWD, who are eligible for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, may not qualify for services under the IDEA, especially if their achievement and physical abilities are not significantly different from that of the average person. Secondary SWD should comprehend the different aspects of this law as well as the accommodations it allows prior to planning their postsecondary transition goals.

The Rehabilitation Act also governs the Vocational Rehabilitation programs and federal and state cooperative efforts, which provide employment services for people working and aging individuals with disabilities (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). These programs are the primary sources of employment for adults with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation programs and local education agencies collaborate in the provision of

services for youth with disabilities during their transition from secondary school to adulthood. Vocational Rehabilitation programs are allocated federal funds, which are matched by the state funding system. There are offices in all 50 states serving people with disabilities.

The purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation programs is to assist persons with disabilities in securing employment and developing independent living skills. The IDEA promotes the same. Yet, SWD often allow parents and adult mentors to make decisions for them at transition planning meetings (Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers, 2008). The student must self-advocate under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998 in postsecondary settings because the student is considered an adult and the parent has no legal standing. This can lead to problems if students do not understand their disabilities and are not able to voice their needs when they enter the adult world, because individuals with disabilities are responsible for identifying, documenting, and requesting accommodations they need. Institutions and employers only respond to an individual's request for assistance, thus highlighting the need for SWD to become self-advocates (Allen, Ciancio, & Rutkowski, 2008).

The IDEA, the ADA, and Section 504 each address needs of students and adults with disabilities in various environments. Each is aimed at decreasing discriminating practices and affording individuals with disabilities the same rights and opportunities as peers without disabilities. Accommodations and modifications are common components of each. Both the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act include eligibility criteria used to determine if the individual with a disability is eligible for protection. The IDEA specifies criteria used to determine if a student with a disability is entitled to

specialized instruction and services. The difference between "eligible" and "entitled" is another important distinction of which SWD must be made aware. Eligible indicates that one has been chosen or meets the criteria for a specific service. Entitled indicates that one has the right to a service mandated by law. Other legislation has been developed to help eliminate discrimination and to help foster more academic achievement for SWD.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It is the largest investment in public education instituted by the federal government to date. NCLB mandated that schools improve educational outcomes for all students. This mandate meant that SWD must receive the same consideration for options presented to their peers without disabilities. The purpose of NCLB is to require public schools to make a concerted effort to close the achievement gap between SWD and disadvantaged youth and their peers without disabilities. NCLB requires that students with cognitive disabilities be exposed to the state's core academic content standards and assessments through an alternate proficiency route. NCLB complements the intent of the IDEA; secondary SWD are not overlooked due to the intersection of requirements between the IDEA and NCLB (Brook, Revell, & Wehman, 2009). The legislation requires that the state assessment system be valid and accessible to all students under the protection of the IDEA or Section 504 (Brook, Revell, & Wehman, 2009).

Strategies to improve the academic performance of SWD are considered in a manner comparable to strategies for their peers without disabilities under NCLB. Educators and policymakers are prompted to identify methods to bridge the achievement

gaps between the subgroups as a result of these mandates. NCLB focuses on specific academic development, and the IDEA 2004 focuses on the academic and functional development needed for a successful transition experience. Any controversy ends with the recommendation of blending services. Transition activities should be blended with vocational education coursework within the context of the general curriculum (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). NCLB supporters believe that the more exposure there is to the general education content, the more competitive special needs students become in the world of work, thereby leading to better job acquisition and retention (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). Therefore, it has become a priority for educators to blend transition services with the general education curriculum and utilize assessment to guide planning for students with special needs (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The intentions of the legislation have been at the center of attention in recent years due to the inability of states to meet the achievement benchmarks of NCLB.

The National Council on Disability commissioned a study in 2008 to assess the impact of NCLB and the IDEA on schools. The study utilized interviews and surveys with researchers, practitioners, advocates, and state administrators from 10 of the largest states in the nation whose combined population of 137 million represented approximately one half of the overall population of the United States. Although the sample size was sufficient and large, it did not include one of the largest states due to an insufficient access to the intended audience. The results of the study were reported in four different sections. The first section provided a brief overview of the trend data. The second section included a description of the conversations with state administrators and representatives about the trends and issues surrounding NCLB and the IDEA. The third

section provided a description of similar conversations with advocates, federal officials, and other stakeholders. The fourth section presented recommendations for the National Council on Disability and vested members of the community.

The National Council on Disability (2008) study identified significant and positive changes in the attitudes of educators because NCLB improved the expectations for all students, including secondary SWD. It revealed that secondary SWD had more access to the general education curricula and highly qualified staff than they did under the previous mandates. The number of SWD graduating with diplomas increased from previous years, with most states recording a double-digit increase. The dropout rates of the participating states decreased almost as significantly. The researchers could not fully attribute this change to the mandates, but they stated, "It is more likely that the policies and practices need to evolve to better suit SWD" (National Council on Disability, 2008, p. 30). The study indicated that the division between SWD and their nondisabled peers continued to exist. The report recommended training to improve the capacity of teachers to differentiate instruction and teach more rigorous curricula. The researchers noted that both the IDEA 2004 and NCLB included higher expectations for students and higher accountability standards for the educators working with them (National Council on Disability, 2008).

All legislation involving the transition of SWD into the adult world impacts how the rights of disabled individuals are protected. The laws promote ways to improve the overall quality of life for individuals with disabilities while creating opportunities for them to secure the knowledge and skills required to become productive and engaged citizens in the community (Kochlar-Bryant et al., 2009).

Educational Leadership and Student Self-Advocacy

Teaching skills in isolation does not provide realistic opportunities for SWD to become self-advocates because they are not given the opportunity to develop those skills across all environments. Brown (2000) reported that this systemic denial leads to secondary SWD being unable to explain their disabilities or request necessary accommodations and services after leaving high school or home. Brown interviewed six parents or guardians of students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities from three school divisions. The study documented the postschool outcomes for the groups at 1 year and at 6 years in the postsecondary environment, focusing on employment, enrollment in postsecondary school or training, and independent living. The investigation examined the impact of federal transition mandates on student outcomes by documenting the link between secondary transition programs and postsecondary outcomes. The data reveal that secondary transition programs had become more community based, employment oriented, and age appropriate than they were previously (Brown, 2000). Emphasis increased on establishing linkages with adult service providers, since the new legislation had been in place. The results of this study revealed that postsecondary career and education outcomes were impacted when SWD were not encouraged or allowed to participate in transition planning activities (Brown, 2000).

Katsiyannis and Zhang (2001) asserted that administrators are an integral component in ensuring the success of SWD. These authors used their experience and research to provide several methods that special education administrators might use to encourage individualized planning and services. Among these methods was the suggestion to avoid regarding the input of secondary SWD and their parents as

unrealistic. The authors stated that educators ignored or discredited the input of parents and secondary SWD in lieu of their own, apparently more expert, ideas (Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001). To promote a successful transition to adult life, secondary SWD must be actively involved in the development of transition plans. The authors suggested that secondary SWD involved in setting their own goals are more likely to achieve their postsecondary goals (Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001). The theme of self-advocacy and self-determination has been the focus of other studies.

Eisenman and Tascione (2002) used a qualitative inquiry approach to explore students' experiences and perspectives regarding self-determination. Data were collected through multiple methods, including semistructured student interviews, brief weekly surveys or written responses, student work, and a teacher journal. The researchers chose this research method both to accommodate and to benefit from multiple perspectives. Of the 22 participants, 12 were female, 15 were Caucasian, and 7 were African American. The ages ranged from 17 to 19, with the average age being 18 (SD = .69). All of the participants received special education services under the category of specific learning disability. The students participated in classes where self-advocacy training was embedded into their daily curriculum using a direct instruction approach with repeated practice and within multiple learning environments.

Eisenman and Tascione (2002) identified limitations to their study. One limitation was the lack of parental involvement, which was addressed by using a peer reviewer for the final report summary. The researchers validated their findings through the use of multiple methods of data collection at multiple times from different perspectives. The length of the school year limited the researchers from further

validating their findings. Eisenman and Tascione suggested an approach to ensure access to multiple learning environments that provided frequent opportunities for engaging in self-determined behaviors paired with positive feedback. This strategy allowed the instructor the flexibility of integrating academic standards and other skills without abandoning state accountability requirements (Eisenman & Tascione, 2002). This approach appeared to encourage generalization to new settings. There have been several studies that focus on practices involving transition planning and service delivery. As an example, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 was conducted to address all aspects of transition and to provide a larger framework for practice.

Framework for Transition

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2), initiated in 2000 under the direction of the United States Department of Education, was an effort to provide a framework for transition planning for SWD. The original National Longitudinal Transition Study was conducted from 1985 to 1993. The NLTS-2, conducted from 2000 to 2009, began with 1,502 (N =1,502) school divisions nationwide. The data collection process was scheduled to take place over a 10-year period. Individual respondents included parents, SWD, and school district personnel. The study was intended to provide a national representation of the experiences and achievements of young adults as they transition into adulthood, specifically to (a) describe the characteristics of secondary school students in special education and their households; (b) describe secondary school experiences of students in special education, including their schools, school programs, related services, and extracurricular activities; (c) describe the experiences of students once they leave secondary schools, including adult programs and services, and social

activities; (d) measure the secondary school and postschool outcomes of students in the education, employment, social, and residential domains; and (e) identify factors in the students' secondary school and postschool experiences (Wagner et al., 2003).

NLTS-2 was funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Education Research in the Department of Education as a part of the National Assessment of the 1997 IDEA. The methods used to gather information included telephone interviews, school surveys, student assessments, and transcript reviews. Study topics included high school coursework, extracurricular activities, academic performance, postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community participation. School districts were randomly selected based on geographic region, size, and socioeconomic status. The participating districts were asked to provide information related to the SWD in their district including grade levels, dates of birth, and disability classifications. The total response rate was 89.8%. The information gained in the study continues to be an essential guide in determining the effectiveness of the transition planning activities used by school districts.

Findings from the NLTS-2 regarding family involvement revealed that such involvement promoted student success with no variation between students in general education and those involved with special education. Data regarding students in general education was taken from the 1999 National Household Education Survey. Students from wealthier families, with two educated parents and social supports, were more likely to have family involvement with their education. Conversely, students living in single-parent households with lower incomes had lower levels of family involvement and participated in extracurricular activities less often than their peers. Compared to their

nondisabled peers, youth with disabilities were found more often to have parents with lower family incomes and parents who did not attend postsecondary school programs (Wagner et al., 2003). Regardless, families of youth with disabilities expected them to succeed and become independent. Their definition of success included the student's receiving a regular high school diploma, getting a paid job, and becoming financially independent. The report revealed lower expectations for students from lower income households, who had been identified as having an intellectual disability, autism, multiple disabilities, or emotional disabilities (Wagner, et al., 2003).

The study outcomes provided information related to high school graduation among youth with disabilities. Two years after graduating from high school, enrollment of SWD in some form of postsecondary program was 39%, with community college enrollment being the most prevalent. Nearly half (46%) of the students were not employed one year after graduating, inclusive of the students enrolled in school. The minimum wage in 2009 was $7.25 (United States Department of Labor, 2014). Only 34% of those employed were likely to work full-time and make $7 an hour. In terms of independence, 2 years after graduation, 78% of the students were not living independently, and only 23% of those students had either a learner's permit or driver's license. Only 31% of the participants were active in the community, but 69% were registered to vote. The results of the study indicated a 72% increase in the graduation rate among youth with disabilities when compared to the graduation rate reported in the initial NLTS conducted between 1985 and 1993 (Newman, 2005).

NLTS-2 revealed that agency contacts were more likely to occur when the students were 16 or older which is consistent with IDEA 1997 and 2004. The NLTS-2

also showed that agency contact on behalf of the student was more likely to occur if the student's IEP contained specific rather than broad transition goals. Students who required significant behavioral interventions or had mental health issues were also more likely to have outside agencies contacted on their behalf when compared to students who required few interventions or supports (45% versus 8% and 75% versus 6%, respectively) (National Logitudinal Transition Study-2, 2005). School staff reported providing parents of SWD with a significant amount of information as the students prepared for transitioning into the adult world. Yet, only 75% of the students ages 17 or older said they had received information concerning postschool services (Newman & SRI International, 2006). NLTS-2 exposed issues regarding the acquisition of resources and continuity among agencies for transition planning. In response to these deficits, the United States Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET) and the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) in an effort to improve secondary education and transition services. The functions of these organizations were to provide consistency with reinforcement of policy and to support the successful postsecondary transition of SWD.

The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET)

NASET, established in 2003, includes more than 40 national organizations that create a voluntary partnership. The organization consists of representatives from general and special education, career and technical institutions, youth and workforce development organizations, and families. The purpose of this alliance is to identify the skills or services youth require to participate successfully in postsecondary education and

training. Their goal was to identify the skills young adults need to become meaningfully employed and be as independent as possible in their adult lives. The organization's primary task was to promote effective secondary educators and transition services through the provision of guiding standards for policy development and practices. NCSET supports the transition of SWD from a different perspective.

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)

NCSET is a national technical assistance and information center funded by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Programs. NCSET focuses on the reinforcement of state and local ability to improve secondary education as well as transition policies and practices for SWD and their families. NCSET standards and quality indicators emphasize cross-agency planning to improve transition services in secondary education at the state and local levels. NCSET's national standards and quality indicators address the following areas: support in academic instruction, youth development and leadership, career preparatory experiences, family involvement, and connecting activities. These indicators represent a guideline for best practices in transition planning. They serve as a framework for the technical support of education agencies in implementing the transition requirements of the IDEA 2004 (Wagner et al., 2006).

Empirical Research on Transition Practices

Through many studies, researchers have attempted to identify effective transition practices. A study was conducted by the members of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to assess the knowledge level and perspectives of school personnel affiliated with student transition service delivery (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, Secondary

special educators' transition involvement, 2009). Of 1000 (N = 1000) surveys distributed, 498 responses were returned, generating a 49.8% response rate. Of the returned 498 respondents, 443 completed surveys, but only 343 responses either represented secondary special education teachers, transition coordinators/specialists, or those with both roles. The researchers included these 343 responses in the data analysis for the study. The topics addressed in the survey included transition assessment, transition planning, instruction and curriculum, interagency collaboration, and job development. Results from the study indicated that special education teachers were involved in classroom activities such as developing appropriate curriculum content and developing transition goals for SWD (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The two lowest rated factors in this study were interagency collaboration and job development (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The data from this study sample revealed that special educators were less involved with conducting assessments and interpreting assessment results for transition planning purposes (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The results indicated that teachers did not take responsibility for job development, which included selecting appropriate vocational training locations and supervising students on the job. The researchers reported that some teachers did not believe they were responsible for this task, which could explain educators' lower levels of involvement in the areas associated with job development (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009).

Special education teachers in this study rated themselves as being highly involved in the transition process (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The transition coordinators in the study were identified as the most involved with all five aspects of a student's transition process. A review of prior transition outcomes determined that designating one

individual solely responsible for involvement in every component of a student's transition could become problematic in a large setting, thereby compromising service delivery (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). The researchers concluded that it would be more beneficial to students if the teachers were more involved in job development, sharing resources, and gathering support, and that a lack of teacher knowledge in transition planning would potentially hinder student success (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). IEP development involving transition planning provides an opening for involvement from different supporting agencies and individuals. Each annual revision is a learning opportunity for the student and teacher

Transition Planning and IEP Development

Generally, transition plans are developed and implemented during a student's high school tenure with little to no reassurance of how effective that plan is in aiding a student's success. To determine the effectiveness of the IEP components and postschool outcomes, Steele, Konrad, and Test (2005) conducted a qualitative study involving two schools. The researchers identified 28 ($N = 28$) students ages 17 to 20 with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities. Both schools were identified as having model transition programs. The researchers sought to determine what information was included in the transition component of participating students' IEPs; how clearly and specifically the students' transition goals and objectives were written in the areas of employment, independent living, education, and community participation for the same group of students; and the extent to which the student participants were satisfied with the outcomes (Steele et al., 2005). Each site used a different survey. The first site used a 20-question survey assessing the satisfaction level of the consumer in the areas of postschool

outcomes, experiences, and high school experiences. The second site used a 12-question survey seeking information about high school activity participation, postschool outcomes, and satisfaction with postschool experiences. Both sites surveyed the graduates by phone 12 to 15 months after high school graduation (Steele et al., 2005).

The data from the study indicated that the IEPs each contained a transition component although they varied in quality. The components of the transition plan assessment evaluated the quality of written transition goals and how the assignments of timelines and personnel were designated (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). The contents of the transition component of more than half of the plans contained information on employment, independent living, and community participation. Less than half of the IEPs included statements about postsecondary, vocational education, leisure, and recreation activities. In terms of IEP meeting attendance, only 57% of the students participated, yet 68% of the plans identified the student as the responsible party for completing a portion of the transition plan. It seems questionable to assign a singular individual to complete a task without that person's being present at the meeting. In comparing postschool outcomes to actual occurrences, employment seemed to be the most successful area among all the categories, with 87% of the students employed 12 to 15 months after high school graduation. The areas of postsecondary education and independent living were not as promising, with 75% and 64%, respectively, of the SWD not meeting their goal in those areas (Steele, Konrad, & Test, 2005).

The fact that a large majority of the participants were employed within the first year after their high school graduation was not common for this type of population (Steele, Konrad, & Test, 2005). There were limitations of this study. The small sample

size and the nonrandom selection of students limit the generalizability of the findings. The use of two different survey instruments limited the number of variables available for comparison between the two sites. The researchers had limited knowledge of the participants, including the types of diplomas or certificates they had earned (Steele, Konrad, & Test, 2005). The researchers examined the student IEPs but did not examine the actual school experiences, which may not have been fully documented. Another limitation was evident in the correlation between projected outcomes and actual outcomes in the area of independent living. The researchers concluded that strong transition services produce favorable student outcomes regardless of the quality of the transition goals. Planning for transition includes the identification of needed supports and services. Family involvement is an essential element in the process.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is an important component in the success of SWD transitioning into the adult world (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). The IDEA states that school districts should do everything possible to include parents in the transition planning and IEP development process, including the use of interpreters and telephone conferences and focusing on the fact that families are role models for their children, impacting how they perceive the world of work (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004). There are numerous benefits to parental involvement, which include increased student attendance, reduction in high school dropout rates, an overall improved level of student self-confidence and attitude toward school, and higher achievement on tests (Lindstrom, et al., 2007).

The results of a study conducted by Small, Pawson, and Raghavan (2013) revealed the importance of family in the lives of SWD. A total of 43 young people with intellectual disabilities who were approaching transition from secondary school to adulthood were recruited from various groups and locations to explore the differences in access, use of services, and experiences of transition based on ethnicity (Small et al., 2013). The participants were interviewed twice, a year apart. The researchers utilized *Talking Mats,* which is a suite of communication tools for children and adults with communication difficulties that uses symbols denoting significant individuals and places to help users participate more effectively in conversations and express themselves in a visual way. Each participant was asked to place the images around a picture of himself or herself, which was placed in the center of the mat. Using predetermined themes from the interviews, the researchers analyzed the content of the mats, adding themes that were not originally included in the analysis. This process enabled the researchers to capture changes in each participant's network over the course of a year. This study revealed that youth with intellectual disabilities had limited social networks and that school was the center of their social world (Small, Pawson, & Raghavan, 2013). The students who exited their secondary environment were left with few choices other than adult day centers. This research study revealed that youth with intellectual disabilities can articulate their desires for the future, including the need for supports and services. This skill becomes more valuable as the SWD and their families age (Small, Pawson, & Raghavan, 2013).

The transition from school into adulthood can be stressful for all families, even more so for families of youth with disabilities. The discrepancy between what parents

dream for their child's future versus the reality of what is possible can reduce or influence parental participation in the transition planning process (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, Postsecondary options for students with significant disabilities., 2002). Likewise, what the students perceive as attainable future goals is not always realistic within the constructs of today's society (Small, Pawson, & Raghavan, 2013).

Postsecondary Services for SWD

As an assurance of service provision for special needs students beyond high school graduation, the IDEA 2004 legislation requires the IEP team to focus on five major themes: agency contacts, student involvement, district obligations, individualization of the transition plan, and appropriateness of the transition plan. Etscheidt (2006) reported that many special education advocates believe that a results-oriented IEP will benefit the student in the transition process, despite procedural or technical errors, and will fulfill the intent of the IDEA mandate. To produce results-oriented outcomes, IEP team members must be familiar with adult agencies and local service options at the community or state level and must ensure student involvement in the planning process (Etscheidt, 2006). Based on the student's individual needs and functionality, an individualized, age-appropriate assessment related to training, education, employment, or independent living is necessary. The documented results should be utilized in formulating the transition plan, based on its findings. Above all, data collection is critical to support student progress throughout the transition planning process (Etscheidt, 2006).

The potential legal issues surrounding transition planning for SWD involve procedural and substantive components. For example, the law requires IEP teams to

involve adult-service agencies and solicit student input in transition planning. Students are required to participate in the transition planning process, which is governed by the student's individual needs, preferences, and interests. This requirement produces meaningful services beneficial to the student's transition outcome (Etscheidt, 2006). Soliciting student involvement requires creative measures, which may result in a nontraditional approach to plan development. Individual performance assessments should be utilized when developing the plan.

Finally, data collection regarding student progress toward transition outcomes must occur to provide information to the IEP teams. Failure to provide adequate transition services, a substantive requirement of IDEA 2004, have denied students FAPE and resulted in tuition reimbursement and compensatory education. Insufficient time to plan adequate transition services may also result in litigation alleging the denial of FAPE (Etscheidt, 2006).

In response to federal requirements for follow-up studies on youth with disabilities beyond high school, Williams-Diehm and Benz (2008) conducted a study in a southern state in the United States to determine students' activities after high school graduation with regard to employment, postsecondary education, independent living, and leisure activities. The study focused on the challenges local school districts encountered in gathering these data from their students. A stratified random sample of 152 general education students were selected to mirror and double the special education graduating population based upon gender and ethnicity. In May 2005, the members of the graduating class ($N = 228$) were asked to complete an exit survey for postsecondary outcome data on the school campus. The response rate for the initial study was 83%.

The initial data collection occurred prior to the students' graduation. Information solicited at that time addressed student preparation and postsecondary goals. The second survey occurred 6 months after graduation. The response rate for the postschool survey was 61.4%. Nonworking addresses, telephone numbers, and the lack of availability of the participants impacted the response rate. That postschool portion of the survey dealt with four areas: employment, postsecondary education, independent living, and leisure and recreation.

During the analysis of data, four variables (educational setting, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) were used to assess students' progress in the four domains following high school graduation. Results from this study revealed that the employment rate of general education students was 68%, compared to 50% for special needs students. Among the four variables, educational setting and socioeconomic status were related to employment. Socioeconomic status was more influential. Gender or ethnicity had an effect on the outcome. Educational setting and ethnicity were related to participation in postsecondary education, and gender and socioeconomic status were not related (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008). In postsecondary education, not including vocational education, special needs students enrolled at lower rates (46%) than their nondisabled peers (74%). The general education students attended 4-year institutions at four times the rate of special education students. White students attended 4-year institutions at a higher rate than did students of color. Approximately 50% of the Hispanic students did not attend postsecondary education. In the area of independent living, ethnicity produced differences in the results as well. Anglo students were more likely to live at home with family members or parents than were students of color. Hispanic students lived in

college dormitories and attended 4-year colleges at a lower rate than other groups; this finding coincided with previous reports of Hispanic students' low attendance rates at 4-year schools. The outcome for Hispanic students, however, could be attributed to lack of cultural support for students pursuing higher education. Recreation and leisure results revealed a 90% participation rate among all groups. Spending time with family members and friends was identified as a preferred activity. All groups indicated high levels of recreational/leisure activities with approximately 90% of each group reporting completing at least one social activity per week. In general, nondisabled peers were likely to engage in a wider range of activities (15 or more) than their disabled peers (63.4%). Only 23% of the disabled peers reported engaging in 15 or more activities (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008).

William-Diehm and Benz (2008) did not include the transition planning process in the study, but offered recommendations in response to the difficulty school districts face in collecting data on students after they leave school. The study collected data in two phases, prior to graduation and 6 months after graduation. Initiating the first data collection phase prior to graduation allowed the district to obtain the most recent contact information from students, thus increasing the likelihood of success in making future contact. The researchers recommended that the data collection occur multiple times after graduation to ensure an accurate picture of how well students transition into life after high school. The researchers specified that information obtained from the study could assist district administrators in developing various strategies to improve student transition outcomes in the future (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008).

Transition Planning and Services

Transition to postsecondary institutions and competitive employment appears to be on the rise for youth with disabilities. This phenomenon highlights the importance of postsecondary transition planning (Shaw, Dukes, & Madaus, 2012). The IDEA 2004 reauthorization regulations changed the requirements regarding the reevaluation process determining eligibility for continued support services. The reauthorization allowed IEP teams to determine eligibility without new diagnostic information, instead using functional data for eligibility determination. For this reason, individuals might not receive formalized evaluations prior to graduating or exiting high school. Secondary institutions and adult agencies required more formal documentation of student disability to better plan necessary supports, accommodations, and modifications. In response to this issue, the IDEA 2004 mandated the Summary of Performance (SOP), which requires public agencies to provide the student with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance, as well as recommendations to assist the student in meeting postsecondary goals (Shaw, Dukes, & Madaus, 2012).

After graduating with a standard diploma, individuals with disabilities are no longer eligible for special education support services under the IDEA. They may be eligible for support under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, for which the eligibility criteria are far less stringent than those found in IDEA. An SOP helps postsecondary institutions and employers determine how a person's disability impacts his or her performance and what, if any, accommodations or supports are required to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities for access as individuals without disabilities. As adults, individuals with disabilities are required to self-disclose

and provide documentation of disability to receive accommodations or support. Documentation could include a diagnosis of the disability and an explanation of how the disability affects major life activities and functional performance. The transition services and planning that occurs while the SWD is in secondary school help to facilitate this skill. Greene and Kochhar-Bryant (2003) provided insight into the required best practices for transition into the postsecondary world.

Best practices in transition refer to a number of specific recommendations derived from empirical and nonempirical resources for facilitating successful movement from school to adult life for youth with disabilities (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003, p. 155). Greene and Kochhar-Bryant reviewed literature on best-practice transition services for SWD and identified the most frequently cited. They categorized the variables into four groups: (a) student and family involvement, (b) functional and comprehensive instruction, (c) inclusive placements and experiences, and (d) interpersonnel and interagency collaboration (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003).

In an attempt to explore how these practices impact school districts, a study was conducted investigating South Carolina's school personnel and how they implemented these strategies to address the transition needs of their students (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Ivester, 2005). The researchers used a survey to gather data related to types of services, means of service delivery, division of responsibility, levels of participation, agency involvement, and self-evaluation. Participants in the study included 105 middle and high school special education teachers and 35 district-level transition personnel (n = 140). South Carolina's Project Sight designed the survey instrument. Survey questions, which were developed utilizing information from an extensive review of the literature, identified

best-practice strategies. The results of the survey yielded data in the areas of the service delivery process, services and experiences received by students, quality of school and district services, and the comparison of lead teacher and transition personnel ratings.

The study revealed that service delivery was the responsibility of transition personnel who developed and implemented employment experiences and facilitated student job placement, student assessment, and teacher training while supporting employment services. Special education teachers were responsible for facilitating IEP meetings. Parents, guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other agency representatives were typically present at IEP meetings. The most common work experiences provided to students were school based, followed by vocational and occupational courses, career information, job shadowing, and assistance from a job coach. The type of supports students received least often from school districts included internships and supported employment opportunities. The types of businesses in which students were more likely to be employed were grocery stores, fast food establishments, restaurants, and the service industry.

The vast majority of transition personnel, 92%, supported the idea that student information was used to formulate the transition plans. Most, 80%, of the students had family or parent participation in the transition process. Areas receiving the most attention in this study included employment, personal and self-management, and social and interpersonal relationships. Postsecondary education was addressed with only 19% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents perceived that their district met the requirements of the IDEA and transition planning by providing career education, a functional skills curriculum, and transition education. The researchers concluded that

more emphasis is needed on teaching students self-determination and self-directed transition planning (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Ivester, 2005).

Zhang, Katsiyannis, and Ivester (2005) found that transition coordinators conducted 43% of the transition-planning services. The coordinators were responsible for the establishment of work sites, student assessment, supported employment experiences, and teacher training. In this study the most active participants in IEP meetings were teachers, parents, guidance counselors, and students. The least active or the least involved in the study were staff from adult agencies, job coaches, and mental health professionals.

The researchers concluded that South Carolina schools predominantly provided students with functional, social, and independent living skills to prepare them for adult life. School-based experiences were consistent across the state. Students did not always participate in transition planning meetings, even though student participation is essential in student-centered planning. The researchers examined outcome to data to identify collaboration as a key component in effective transition programs. Even though the findings of this study represent a small number of lead teachers in the State of South Carolina, they provide information on how service delivery was perceived by some of South Carolina's educators (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). This study supports the concept of distributed leadership in planning for the postsecondary transition of SWD.

According to Lindstrom and his colleagues (2007), the influential role families have in career development among youth with disabilities has mixed results. Some of them believed that the higher the socioeconomic status, the more successful the student (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). That belief was mainly due to the fact that families with

financial stature and stability tend to have access to more human and material resources, higher expectations of achievement, and more networking opportunities that other students may not have available to them. Families of lower socioeconomic status typically encounter multiple stressors and lack the knowledge of or connection with community resources (Lindstrom et al., 2007).

In 2007, Lindstrom and his colleagues conducted a case study in an attempt to identify the key elements that contribute to a successful transition outcome for SWD. They interviewed 133 participants ($N = 133$): 33 SWD, 35 special education teachers, 28 parents, 22 community employers, and 15 vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors. Students eligible for special education that participated in a school-to-work transition program for at least 1 year and graduated from high school in 3 to 7 years were eligible to participate in the study. Initial findings reported that the majority of the participants were employed full time at the time of the study, and approximately 20% were enrolled in postsecondary education programs. Other key informants were solicited to participate on behalf of the students. They included family members, school personnel, employers, VR counselors, and advocates, at least two to six individuals for each student, equaling 100 nonstudent participants.

Four themes emerged among the responses of student participants; these were reported in the form of recommendations (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). The first recommendation was to ensure that upon graduation, students understood their disabilities, strengths, weaknesses, goals, and the supports they needed to be successful. This understanding would aid students in developing more realistic goals and postsecondary plans. The next recommendation focused on increasing or strengthening

self-motivation and determination skills to assist SWD in overcoming the various barriers encountered during the transition into adulthood. The participants realized upon reflection that hard work and determination contributed to their early successes. Students, special education staff, transition coordinators, and VR counselors supported the importance of participating in community-based work experiences while in high school, although it was not ranked as most important. Career exploration assists students in the reality of work expectations. Special needs students need opportunities to explore work sites so they can grasp the concept of work and its demands prior to high school graduation. The fourth recommendation related to family involvement. Participants believed more emphasis should be placed on students' and their families' becoming more aware of community resources and gaining a better understanding of all aspects of transition prior to graduation and that they should not rely solely on school districts to make the connections necessary (Lindstrom, et al., 2007).

With regard to recommendations for teachers and school staff, students believed staff should learn to listen earnestly to students' hopes and dreams and use that information to develop their transition plans. A variety of community-based experiences, career exploration, and career planning is also needed. The more exposed the students are, the more likely they will have access to a career more fitting for them. This study supports the practice of gathering as much information possible to assist students and their families with all available postschool training opportunities to help promote independence (Lindstrom et al., 2007). There are several transition programs in place nationwide to help these students develop self-determination and job skills to promote their independence.

Transition Programs

Formal transition programs may have the benefit of a broader support base than individual training. National programs may be research based and often have the support of the business world. Fortunately, the programs are often community based and outcome oriented. The research promotes the importance of building job skills and independence. Formal programs provide an avenue to ensure that participants are given opportunities to gain employability skills and independence, which is the cornerstone of social equity. Four specific programs, which provide positive examples of these opportunities, are the National Youth Transition Demonstration, Project SEARCH, the Transition Service Integration Project, and Youth Apprenticeship.

National Youth Transition Demonstration. The Social Security Administration (SSA) developed the National Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) project in 2003. The project was designed to provide services to individuals between the ages of 14 and 25 who receive Social Security Disability Insurance or Social Security Insurance. The goal of the program is to provide services and supports to individuals with disabilities to ensure that they make a successful transition into adulthood. With flexibility regarding service delivery, the YTD project must include seven components: individualized work-based experiences, youth empowerment, family supports, system linkages, social and health services, SSA work incentive waivers, and benefits counseling (Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009). Currently, the program is operating in 10 cities across the United States. The program has been under review from 2005 to 2014. According to Luecking and Wittenburg, three states had serviced more than 480 youth with disabilities during a 3-year period. Findings from this process will aid in developing empirical research

concerning the outcome of youth with disability transitioning into adulthood and will enhance transition services for all youth with disabilities. The SSA's vision is to provide a better coordinated and integrated service delivery system for youth with disabilities through the YTD (Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009). Another national program that provides similar services is Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH. In 1996, the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's Director of Emergency Services devised a program called Project SEARCH, a one-year transition program in which high school seniors with disabilities participate in various training components in preparation for transitioning into adulthood. In conjunction with classroom instruction, students learn employability and independent living skills and participate in various worksite rotations while getting immediate feedback from instructors and employers. The collaboration of local businesses, special needs organizations, and school divisions leads to the provision of at least three or four internships during the student's senior year of high school so that the student has opportunities to learn work and social skills needed for competitive employment. At the conclusion of the internship, if positions are available in the cooperating organizations, students can be hired.

Project SEARCH was designed to provide individuals with severe disabilities the opportunity to be successful. Best-practice strategies were employed, as high school students who participate in community-based learning experiences are nine times more likely to become employed (Allen, Ciancio, & Rutkowski, 2008). Additionally, communities are enriched when youth with disabilities become productive, contributing members of the workforce and society (Allen, Ciancio, & Rutkowski, 2008). Project

SEARCH is an example of the collaboration among adult agencies, schools, and community businesses in the preparation for postsecondary employment of SWD. Collaboration is also evident in the Transition Services Integration Project in San Francisco, CA.

Transition Service Integration Project. The Transition Service Integration Project is an organization designed to link services for youth with disabilities in the areas of career, community living, recreation, and postsecondary education. Its purpose is to provide partnerships between school divisions and community agencies to allow for students to receive transition services prior to and after graduation from high school, while providing access to nonworking activities in the community. The organization is facilitated in a local community college, where students have access to community-based training and competitive, supported worksites. The Office of Special Education of the San Francisco School District and the California Department of Developmental Services and Department of Rehabilitation provide its funding. The target population is secondary SWD. This program unifies the primary systems responsible for transition: the public school system, the rehabilitation system, and the developmental disabilities system (Allen, Ciancio, & Rutkowski, 2008).

The students enter into a formal service agreement with a private nonprofit agency, which agrees to work with the student before and after high school graduation. The school district and the rehabilitation and developmental disabilities systems develop a comprehensive plan for each student in addition to the transition plan included in the student's IEP. Together they accept the responsibility of providing the necessary services outlined by their respective agencies. Teachers are assigned to work with the students

and the nonprofit agencies. Throughout the school year, meetings are held to review student progress and adjustments are made to promote student success. At the completion of the school year, the student is connected to the appropriate adult agency and all supports are put into place prior to high school graduation. Review of the 1998-1999 graduates ($N = 54$) revealed that 44 graduates (81%) experienced a seamless transition into adulthood, which resulted in 39 students (72%) being employed at the time of graduation (Allen et al., 2008). The collaborative agencies included the merging of nine school districts, eight departments of rehabilitation, and five regional centers, all of which produced nine hybrid agencies (Allen et al., 2008). Like the Transition Service Integration Project, Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship program provides job coaching and involvement with adult service agencies.

Youth Apprenticeship. The Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program was developed as part of the State of Wisconsin's school-to-work initiative. Youth Apprenticeship is a 2-year school-based work program, during which the students in their junior and senior years of high school are placed in paid entry-level positions and each is assigned an employee mentor on the worksite 10 to 15 hours per week. Additionally, students are enrolled in a technical course relating to their job placement 3 to 6 hours weekly. Students with and without disabilities participated in the YA program. The program began in 1992 and successfully graduated 17 apprentices in 1994. By the year 2000, the program had successfully graduated 545 apprentices in more than 21 occupational fields. Follow-up surveys revealed that students continued to do well and continued to enroll in postsecondary education at a higher rate than the national average

for SWD and that they earned comparatively higher income compared to national statistics reported for disabled adults (Mooney & Scholl, 2004).

Mooney and Scholl (2004) examined participants with and without disabilities to determine what factors influenced their success or lack of success. Qualitative semistructured interviews were conducted with student participants enrolled in the program between 1994 and 2000, including those who dropped out of YA. Interview questions addressed the reason for the student's enrollment in the program, the type of work placement to which the student was assigned, the student's ability to balance work and school, the challenges the student faced in the workplace and school, the types of modifications and supports the student received in both settings, and whether or not the student disclosed his or her disability. Benefits of the program revealed through these types of experiences included students' ability to clarify career goals, student acquisition of technical skills, differentiated instruction in all environments, and the acquisition of time-management and communication skills. Students increased their self-confidence and maturation with the development of skills needed for independence.

Factors impeding student success related to participants' not being aware of their disabilities or their inability to identify the supports needed to remain successful. Many of the student participants failed to disclose their disability, which in some cases produced frustration and failure (Mooney & Scholl, 2004); many of those with disabilities were unable to advocate on their own behalf. A major weakness identified in the study was the lack of collaboration and communication between stakeholders and school district personnel. The researchers asserted that the establishment of a communication system between the school and stakeholders could have preserved student

placements and reduced frustration on behalf of both parties (Mooney & Scholl, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1997; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Lousi, 2009).

Table 2 outlines the personal character traits identified by Mooney and Scholl that students must obtain to be successful once they transition into adulthood as well as the qualities programs must maintain to produce success among disabled participants, as identified by the participants of the study.

Table 2. *Character Traits and Program Qualities for Success*

Personal characteristics	Successful program qualities
Thorough understanding of one's disability and strengths	Effective networks – Communication networks between all stakeholder groups
Successful negotiation of work environments	Availability of supports and accommodations at the worksite and instructional settings
Autonomy combined with the ability to ask for help	The presence of knowledgeable, experienced, and supportive mentors at the worksite
Communication and problem-solving skills	Supportive adults who foster trust and confidence and advocate for youth

The Transitions Outcomes Project

Finn and Kohler (2010) examined the efficacy of the Transitions Outcome Project in Michigan. The purpose of the Transition Outcomes Project was to assist local schools in meeting the IDEA's transition service requirements. The project used a data-driven model to evaluate the effectiveness of providing and delivering transition services to students and families through the IEP process. The overall goal of the Transition Outcomes Project was to improve graduation rates and postschool outcomes of SWD. Participants ($N = 291$) were randomly chosen from the SWD who attended 13 school districts that volunteered to participate in the project. The Transitions Outcomes Project was a voluntary model that involved five steps: (a) training on the model, (b) reviewing the IEPs of participants, (c) identifying appropriate strategies or interventions and developing action plans with target goals to address problem areas, (d) implementing the strategies and interventions; and (e) evaluating the transition IEPs of SWD over time and

reporting on resulting changes and improvements (Finn & Kohler, 2010). The researchers reviewed IEPs developed prior to the initiation of the program to gather baseline data and set goals and objectives for the research. The researchers attempted to review the same IEPs approximately 2 years after the initial review. Of the initial sample, 166 participants (n = 166) remained active. A chi-square goodness of fit test indicated that the final sample did not differ significantly from the initial sample with regard to disability proportions. Results indicated an increase in IDEA compliance at the 2-year review. Overall, the mean percentage of positive remarks increased from 46.2% to 74.6% at the postreview. The type of disability did not impact the results of the study.

The limitations of the study included the need for further research related to the perceptions of various individuals involved with the model (Finn & Kohler, 2010). Comparisons of attitudes between the district's administration and teachers involved with the Transitions Outcomes Project could provide additional information as to the effectiveness of the model and better establish differentiation among rural and urban areas.

Educational Leaders in Special Education

The role of an educational leader has evolved with the inclusion of all SWD in the general education settings (Boscardin, 2007). Historically, the special education director has been the individual in charge of the educational programs for SWD, but the role of the special education director has shifted to one that promotes collaboration between school administrators and special education teachers and ensures access by SWD to all instructional programs (Boscardin, 2007). The job of the school administrator includes

effectively supporting all programs, including special education, that contribute to a school's overall measures of achievement.

NCLB holds school administrators accountable for the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of all students in their schools, including accountability for special education students. For this reason, it is critical that school administrators have an understanding of SWD and special education programs (Wakeman et al., 2006). Studies have identified a need for professional development for school administrators who have special education programs in their schools (Monteith, 2000; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Monteith (2000) examined a special education training program to focus on the gap between theory and practical approaches to knowledge (Monteith, 2000). The researcher surveyed two cohorts of participants ($N = 21$) of a special education training program. The response rate was 68%. Criteria for the participation in the study dictated that the potential participants have no special education background. The participants must have met the entrance requirements to the School of Graduate Studies at the South Carolina State University and must either be a practicing administrator or must have met the requirements for certification to be an educational administrator. In this study, the participants were asked to rate organizational and motivational components on the special education training program on a four-point scale. The participants, 40% ($n = 6$) of the first cohort and 13% ($n = 2$), indicated that had been assigned duties related to special education or had been promoted since starting the special education training program. Most ($n = 19$) of the participants had pursued admission programs to earn higher administrative degrees or endorsements. The results of the study revealed that 53% ($n = 8$) of the first cohort and 47% ($n = 7$) began serving on committees to plan policy for

SWD (Monteith, 2000). Participants from both cohorts indicated that they were more active in the development and monitoring of IEP's and evaluations. Participants who were currently serving in an administrative role shared that the special education training program was valuable and would be useful to all administrators (Monteith, 2000).

Valesky and Hirth (1992) surveyed state special education directors to determine the existing knowledge base of school administrators in special education and special education law. The researchers sent surveys to state directors of special education to all 50 states as well Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Virgin Islands, Saipan, Guam and, The Bureau of Indian Affairs. Fifty-two participants for a 91.2% response rate returned responses. The survey data revealed that very few of the states required administrators to complete a course that is devoted to special education. Twenty states (39%) indicated that knowledge of special education law is mandated by their state government for at least one endorsement area. The most common method of obtaining knowledge of special education law, according to 38% of the participants in this study, was through general education or introductory coursework (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Two state directors of special education revealed that the university is responsible for certifying the student's knowledge of special education law in order to earn an instructional supervisor endorsement. The data from the study revealed that every state offers at least one administrative endorsement, but only 33% of all regular administrative endorsement are required to have knowledge of special education law. When queried about professional development, 39 (68.4%) of the states indicated that training was provided by the state (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). The most common format of the training as indicated by this study was annual 2- or 3-day workshops. The results of this study

indicated that the majority of states do not address the need for educational administrator to have knowledge of special education law through certification and endorsement (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

Research has suggested that most school administrators do not have the course work and field experience required to develop learning environments with the focus on academic success for SWD (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). DiPaola and Tchannen-Morran (2003) conducted a study to examine the conditions and concerns of principals in a specific state. The researchers mailed a survey to 4,237 principals and assistant principals in the one state. The potential participants were identified though their respective professional organizations, the [State] Association of Secondary School Principals and the [State] Association of Elementary School Principals. The potential participants were given the option of completing a paper or electronic survey. A total of 1,666 usable surveys were returned. Responses that did not include a position title were not used (n = 83). The total number of surveys was 1,543 for a response rate of 38%. The sample population of this study was mixed between male (49%) and women (51%) (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The researchers used descriptive statistics to compare principals and assistant principals or between elementary, middle, high schools (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The results were reported in five general areas: preparation for the principalship, conditions of employment, problems or issues in the field, the changing role of the principal, and supply and demand. Most (78%) of the participants shared that they felt prepared for the position they currently held. Some (20%) indicated that they had not been adequately prepared. The majority of the principals (88.3%) saw value in graduate

school. Almost all of the principal participants (95%) had experience in the classroom prior to their administrative role and 86.5% rated that experience as one of the top two value of preparation or experience ratings. Experience as an assistant principal was rated as much or some value by 71.7 % of the respondents (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The participants in the study identified the most pervasive problems and issues they faced relating to the increased expectations as educational leaders. The most significant of these issues or problems faced by the participants in this study were increased study achievement on standardized tests (92.5%), faculty and staff professional development (91%), analyzing classroom practices, (91%), curriculum alignment with standards (90%), and improving staff morale (90%) (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). When directed to identify issues with organization management, special education law and implementation law was rated as a significant problem or issue (90%). Professional development in the special education law and implementation was rated as a high need for professional development by 31% of the participants and as a high or average need by 74% of the participants (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Participants in the study identified activities sponsored by the local school division, informal discussions with peers, and activities sponsored by state professional organizations as the three most useful sources of professional development (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Most (90%) of the principals in this study indicated that they needed more professional development in order to meet the changing expectations of their roles (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The researchers concluded that school based leaders should delegate some of the tasks while "maintaining responsibility for and

overseeing the total school program" (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 60). The idea of distributive leadership resonates in this study. A working knowledge requires an understanding of the laws that protect the educational rights of those students and the mandated services to which they are entitled. School administrators can manage special education programs effectively by sharing the responsibility with those of have specific strengths in and knowledge of IDEA (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Effective school administrators recognize their professional strengths and interests and know the talents and skills of their staff members (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Educational leaders know the value and need for professional development in areas of special education law and implementation (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Monteith, 2000; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Effective administrators can build support systems that facilitate lasting implementation by using the talents and skills of others while fostering their development (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The complexity of federal and state rules and regulations and limited special education experience has led to many school administrators' feeling unprepared for responsibilities dealing with special education. In a recent study, school administrators perceived their greatest need to be help and information about implementing successful special education programs (Di Paola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). It is difficult for inexperienced school administrators to understand and appreciate the diverse needs of SWD. Even those with prior school experience rarely have sufficient understanding of the planning, coordination, and delivery of services necessary to meet the needs of SWD. The Council for Exceptional Children has argued that the school administrator's role is crucial in the provision of educational and transition opportunities of SWD.

School administrators are responsible for the programs in their schools, including the special education programs. School administrators have difficulty supporting special education programs for various reasons. The primary reason administrators are not providing adequate support for special education programs is a lack of knowledge and experience in special education mandates and best practices (Wakeman S. , Browder, Flowers, & Ahigrim-Delzell, 2006; Monteith, 2000). Wakeman, Browder, Flowers and Aligrim-Delzell found that principals with sufficient knowledge of special education are more likely to be involved in special education programs at their school. Principal preparation programs offer courses in special education and enable administrators to be better prepared to oversee and support special education programs at school and district levels (Monteith, 2000). If more training is provided to administrators, they will be able to provide better support for special education programs, thereby allowing for greater program success and student achievement.

Some school administrators rely on special education staff when questions arise concerning the special education programs. Lasky and Karge (2006) conducted a study involving school administrators ($N = 205$) from one school division to examine the formal training and experience of school administrators. The researchers collected data using a survey. The data revealed that administrators called special education staff (23.3%) or the division special education office (46.2%) when a question arose regarding special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006). The results of the study indicated school administrators relied on their staff when presented with questions in the area of special education even though they received training during the preservice programs (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

To determine the knowledge base of secondary principals in the area of special education, Wakeman et al. (2006) asked principals to describe their training in special education and found that principals reported being informed in fundamental issues but lacking knowledge of specific current issues in special education. School administrators need professional development to learn how to use current research to make instructional improvements for special education programs (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Universally designed lesson plans are critical for SWD. School administrators recognize that professional development will assist them in gaining the knowledge necessary to effectively support the special education programs in their schools (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

School administrators must have knowledge of special education laws and legislation to support programs for SWD. A study on professional development for school administrators evaluated the Special Education Training Program (SETP) designed to strengthen the connection between theory and practical application of the knowledge needed to implement programs for SWD in the LRE (Monteith, 2000). The goal of SETP was to increase the number of administrators who could effectively lead special education programs. Monteith (2000) surveyed the participants ($N = 27$) to analyze the overall organization and structure of the program and its impact on the participants. The data from the survey revealed that the program enabled participants to feel prepared to administer special education programs. An earlier study utilized a survey to determine the required level of knowledge of special education laws for administrative credentialing programs (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). The researchers utilized the survey method to collect data from state directors of special education. Potential participants (*N*

= 57) were identified from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The researchers included all of the responses they received in their sample (*n* = 52). The data from the sample revealed that 20 states (39%) indicated that knowledge of special education law was mandated for at least one endorsement type (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Very few states required a course in the study of special education. The data indicated that the most common method for administrators to obtain knowledge of special education law was through general introductory coursework in special education. The researchers concluded that the majority of administrators attain their knowledge in special education to minimize potential lawsuits and to comply with federal requirements (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

It is unrealistic to assume that school leaders and teachers will know how to meet federal mandates without the relevant knowledge and training. K-12 education and higher education need to work together to build appropriate programming that will best prepare beginning special education teachers and new administrators to meet the expectations of prospective employment. Several studies have been developed in an attempt to better understand the transition planning and services needed for SWD. The National Longitudinal Transition Study and its successor, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, helped to provide a framework for transition that remains relevant in education today.

Sindelar, Daunic, and Rennells (2004) reviewed previous research studies to determine areas that were problematic for transition planning, thereby leading to ineffective specialized services. Each study considered the preparation of educational leaders in special education and their perspectives concerning the preparation. The

studies cited the importance of the responsibility of these educational leaders to assist their learners to reach AYP due to NCLB standards. Sindelar et al. conducted a comparative study of traditional teacher preparation, district-university collaborative, and add on approaches at the division level models. The focus of their study involved first-year public school teachers who graduated from Florida State University ($N = 46$). The researchers employed observation using the PRAXIS III criteria and a survey given to the teachers and principals to assess preparedness and efficacy. The observations revealed that all teachers met the minimum standards but that traditionally prepared teachers outperformed their counterparts on the PRAXIS criteria.

Most states do not require secondary specialized service teachers to pass exams or complete coursework related to the areas they teach. Nevertheless, some states are attempting to ensure that these teachers are highly qualified for their assigned jobs as they are held responsible for ensuring that their students reach AYP. Michigan is one state responding to this need by offering a set of model core teaching standards outlining what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure that every K-12 student reaches the goal of being ready to enter college or the workforce. School leaders must be knowledgeable of the standards that outline the common principles and foundations of teaching practice necessary to improve student achievement (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011). The standards promote the assumption that the performance of practicing teachers and the quality of a teacher's professional performance depend heavily on the scope, substance, and quality of the initial preparation (Sindelar, Daunic, & Rennells, 2004). There is an abundance of information concerning the transition process; however, very

little information regarding training opportunities is available to help prepare school leaders and teachers to provide these services.

Many current teachers have not received formal training in transition planning (Wandry, et al., 2008). The recent change in legislation continues to lack specific direction on how to effectively deliver transition services, and states are still interpreting various components of transition planning language written in the IDEA 2004. Teachers who serve SWD, especially at the secondary level, require knowledge of transition content, yet there is no research documenting the knowledge, skills, and competencies teachers acquire during their teacher preparation programs or the barriers they experience during their first year of teaching. This lack of research led Wandry and his colleagues to conduct a study to determine the following:

> . . . the extent to which transition related content was being taught in five college teacher education programs; the degree to which teacher candidates are able to perceive their competence to implement transition-related knowledge, skills and competencies; and to investigate the possible reasons for the lack of transition-related knowledge, skills and competencies during their first year of teaching. (Wandry et al., 2008, p. 115)

The participants involved in this study consisted of 196 (N = 196) teacher candidates (n = 67 graduates, n = 129 undergraduates) attending five universities; 58% were full-time students and 25% were engaged in current educational positions. Each institution required at least one year of transition coursework based on best practices in transition services. The timeframe of the study occurred between the summers of 2004 and 2005. Participants were asked to complete a four-part survey at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end of the semester. The response rate for the pretest was 75.5% (n = 148) and the response rate for the posttest was 53.4% (n = 113).

Results from the survey revealed that none of the participants had received formal training in the area of transition prior to the completion of the first round of surveys. The survey instrument consisted of four sections (Wandry, et al., 2008). The first section included items that were designed to collect demographic data of the participants. Section 2 questioned the respondents regarding their preparation and training in the provision of transition services. The participants were asked to rate the level of instruction they had received and their perceived level of competency in the area of transition (Wandry, et al., 2008). The third section asked the respondents to indicate the facilitators and barriers to effective practices in transition they encountered during their teaching and preparatory experiences. Professional perspectives on special education leadership were measured in Section 4 of the survey.

Participants reported training focused on family involvement and, to a lesser extent, on accountability and postschool outcomes (Wandry, et al., 2008). Transition was integrated into the overall education curriculum but was taught in isolation and only to special education majors. Regular education majors did not receive instruction in transition practices and planning, indicating that the focus of transition was solely the responsibility of the special education teachers. This system contradicts the IDEA law as it relates to students' having access to general education curriculum. The researchers identified other barriers from the survey data, including insufficient knowledge base of educators in general, a lack of staffing, and insufficient financial support among most school districts (Wandry, et al., 2008). As a result of the expanded role of special educators since the implementation of the IDEA 2004, school districts and educators need to improve in the identified areas so that they are able to meet the diverse transition

needs of the students they serve. This study led the researchers to subsequent inquiries regarding how teachers use their knowledge and skills to meet the mandates.

Washburn-Moses (2005) conducted a survey study with 378 special education teachers of students with learning disabilities throughout the State of Michigan. The response rate for the study was 50.5% (n = 191). The purpose of the study was to investigate how those teachers met the demands of new legislation and how they provided students with more rigorous instruction; the survey solicited their views on the effectiveness of the programming as well as recommendations for change. The survey also addressed the educational focus areas for SWD, including topics such as basic skills instruction, content area knowledge, vocational and prevocational skills, and transition planning.

The components of the survey were demographics, roles and responsibilities, program evaluation, and teacher preparation. In response to the questions on basic skill instruction, nearly half reported teaching writing on a daily basis and 61% reported teaching reading. Almost half, 48%, rated their reading and writing program as satisfactory, 20% said it was excellent, and 27% indicated the program needed improvement. Those who perceived their program to be satisfactory or excellent attributed the rating to administrative support. Those who thought the program needed improvement cited lack of uniformity, limited student course choices, and lack of training and support for the teachers as reasons for their ratings (Washburn-Moses, 2005). Most teachers, 76%, reported that content-area instruction took place in self-contained settings, and 14% reported coteaching with general education teachers. The majority of teachers, 58%, stated they were satisfied with the special education program offerings. In the area

of vocational and prevocational skills, 56% rarely taught functional skills and thought the vocational skills instruction lacked consistency. The range of responses regarding the frequency of vocational skills instruction covered the spectrum: daily, weekly, monthly, or rarely, with no clear majority. Overall, 40% of the teachers rated their vocational and prevocational programs as satisfactory, 34% indicated the programs needed improvement, and 22% rated their prevocational programs as excellent. Just over one third of the teachers, 37%, rated the transition programs as satisfactory. An almost equal number, 35%, indicated that transition planning needed improvement, and only 22% rated transition planning as excellent (Washburn-Moses, 2005). Barriers to special education and transition programming in schools are in part due to poor program coordination for SWD. A lack of knowledge, resources, and training available to educational leaders makes it difficult to carry out the mandated services for SWD moving toward transition out of public education (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). The researcher recommended that administrators listen to teachers and consider their views regarding programming for special education students in a secondary education setting, which supports the practice of distributive leadership. Distributive leadership in this context supports the collaboration between the instructional and administrative staff. Jones, Lefoe, Harvey and Ryland (2012) stated

> Distributed leadership will be most successful when supported by those in formal leadership roles and by the provision of resources, infrastructure and professional development in more collaborative approaches. (p. 68)

This is the operative definition of distributive leadership used by the researcher in this study.

Distributed Leadership

Educational leadership has evolved over time from a hierarchical model of leadership toward a distributed leadership model. Elmore (2000) endorsed the notion of distributed leadership, in which leadership responsibilities are shared among various groups in an organization. The Distributed Leadership Project is a collection of studies conducted over the past decade through Northwestern University to examine school leadership practice through a distributed perspective. Research efforts are ongoing to continue to shape the conceptual frame for leadership.

The Distributed Leadership Study (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective, 2001) was a longitudinal study of Chicago elementary schools that involved several phases and began with a 6-month pilot phase in the winter and spring of 1999. After the initial pilot phase, data were collected over a full year, beginning in September, 1999. The study included 15 schools. The Chicago schools were committed to a distributed leadership model employing multiple people in formal and informal roles. Spillane and colleagues purported that "school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, stretched over the school's social and situational contexts" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective, 2001, p. 23). The researchers cited leadership multiple leaders, physical artifacts and tools, and an exploration of relationships among leadership practices as key factors in the analysis of school leadership. They defined capital as acquired resources that accumulate and are valuable in specific situations. Data were collected through a series of observations and interviews from 84 teachers at eight Chicago public elementary schools. Spillane et al.

defined instructional leadership as having influence over teachers' instructional practices. The interviews included general and specific questions that focused on instructional practices that had been observed as well as reflections on general practices. The data analysis involved the development of coding categories were tied to the distributed leadership framework.

Spillane and his colleagues (2001) reported that 83.3% of interview participants indicated the principal as the person who shaped their instructional practices, 28.6% mentioned the assistant principal, and 79.8% identified other teachers as significant. Based upon their examination of the various forms of capital, Spillane and colleagues reported the following:

> Followers construct leaders on the basis of valued forms of capital as enacted by leaders. Furthermore, our account illustrates how the construction of leadership is situated in different interactions, with teachers constructing different leaders according to the subject area; constructing school administrators as leaders largely on the basis of cultural capital; and constructing teachers as leaders on the basis of cultural, social, and human capital. (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective, 2001, p. 11)

The study by Spillane et al. (2001) is important in the distributed leadership literature as it builds upon the capital needed and the capacity to be developed in others for being employed into leadership roles.

Distributed leadership is still an emerging concept. Jones, Lafoe, Harvey, and Ryland (2012) presented a distributive leadership approach that places emphasis on collective collaboration rather than the skills and knowledge of the individual. Over a one and a half year period, the researchers used a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This model's flexibility allowed for the implementation of changes and research to occur simultaneously (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012). One finding

from the study was the importance of engaging academic, executive, and professional staff in the collaborative process to support effective distributed leadership (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012). The findings from the study led to the development of an Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) that could be used as a framework to assist institutions in the implementation of distributed leadership. The importance of collaboration between all educational leaders is the highlight of the ASERT. The use of this tool permits leaders at all levels to have input into the development of policy, to support flexibility, and to implement the concept of distributed leadership from the early stages of leadership development (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Ryland, 2012).

The works of Spillane et al. (2003) and Jones et. Al (2012) as well as other studies originating from the Distributed Leadership Project, have helped advance the conceptual frame of distributed leadership that was the lens for this study.

Summary

Transitioning to adulthood as a student with special needs can be a difficult process. The EHA and IDEA address such matters. The legislation governs how state agencies perform with regard to the services provided to individuals with disabilities transitioning into adulthood. The National Longitudinal Study 2 (NLST-2) was conducted to assess the experiences special needs youth encounter in the educational setting and beyond high school graduation. The results of the NLST-2 are used as a major source of information in developing programs, resources, and policies for youth with disabilities. Numerous empirical studies have been conducted utilizing suggested strategies defined by NLST-2 and recent legislative mandates pertaining to transition.

Educational leadership plays an important role in the provision of services for SWD (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahigrim-Delzell, 2006). Based on the survey and interview data collected in this study, school district personnel revealed that more training and resources are needed for district personnel to improve service delivery. Agency collaboration is another area identified as needing improvement (Small, Pawson, & Raghavan, 2013). Research has indicated that SWD and their families benefit when school divisions and community agencies work toward the common goal of successful transition (Yell et al., 2006). These findings led this researcher to consider how educational leaders are addressing the mandates of the transition components of the IDEA, including local resources, adult agency collaboration, and professional development for teachers and staff**.**

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how educational leaders in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state are ensuring implementation of the transition requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004. This researcher used the gathered descriptive data from 64 transition coordinators ($N = 64$), identified by the state department of education and local divisions. Salant and Dillman (1994) promoted the use of the survey method of inquiry to answer a specific research question. The literature review revealed best practices in transition planning and preparation for SWD and exposed a deficit in the educational leader preparation that is required to execute the mandates of the IDEA and the identified practices (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; Kohler, Taxonomy for transition programming: Linking research and practice, 1996; Lindstrom, et al., 2007; Boscardin, 2007; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). School leaders need to have knowledge of common practices to best provide transition services that are relevant to the students' communities. The scarcity of information related to the preparation of educational leaders and common practices with regard to the provision of transition services and planning led to the following research question:

1. What is the story of those who ensure the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?

Design

I conducted an intrinsic case study of the transition programming in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. Creswell defined a case study as "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The bounded system in this study included the community of practice, educational leaders who were representatives of school divisions in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state, and the archive state indicator data that were specific to those school divisions. This community of practice is the only such group in the state with the same membership, which meets on a regular basis, and is focused solely on improving and collaborating the transition practices in the region. This makes this group exemplary. Creswell defined an intrinsic case study as a study in which the focus is on a case that "because of its uniqueness requires study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 62). This study remained flexible, with the research questions remaining the pivotal points around which all of the parts revolved. Maxwell's (2012-2013) interactive model of research design provided the conceptual model for this case study. Figure 1 depicts the design model for this study.

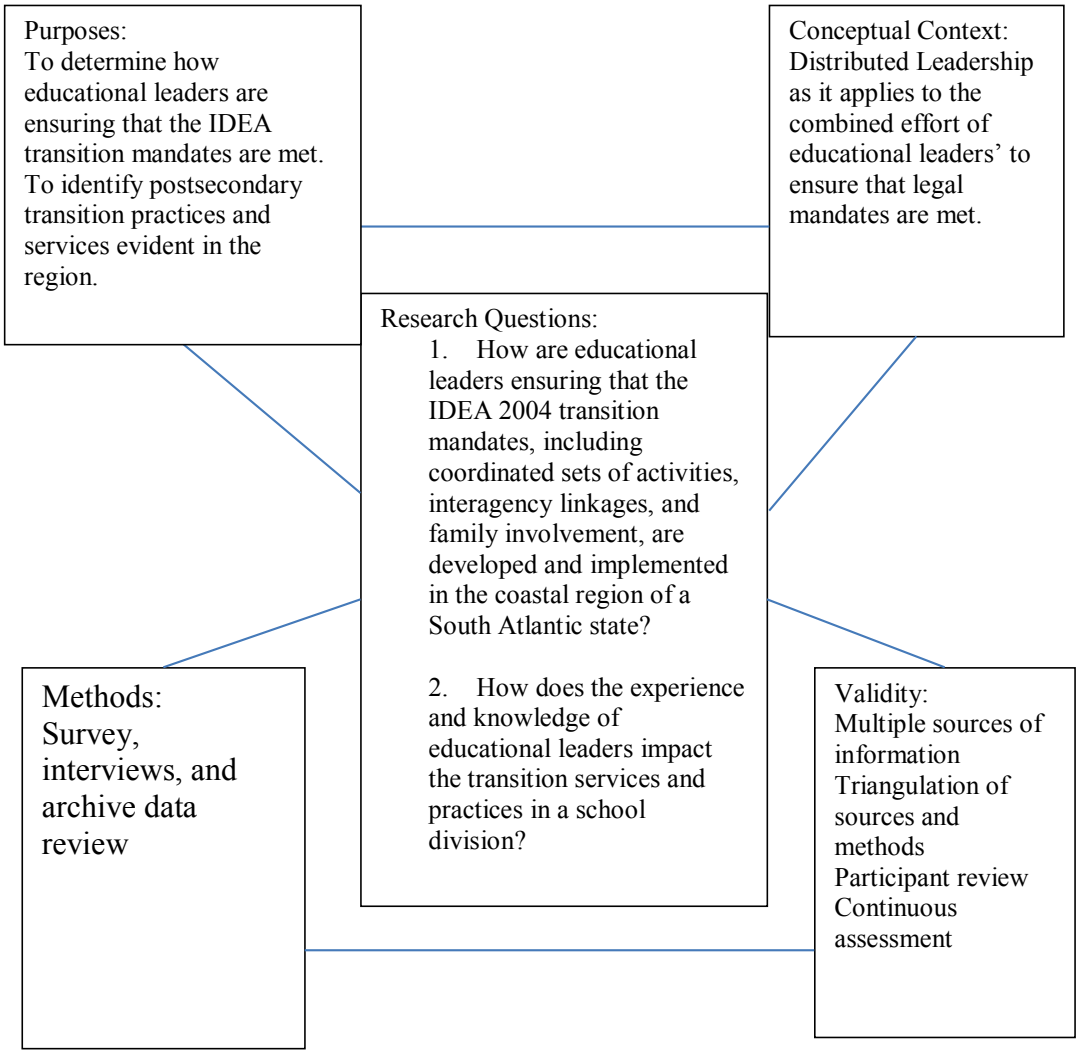

Figure 1. An interactive model of research design.
(Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 2013)

Initial data collection in this case study was accomplished through a survey analysis and archive reviews. The information gained through the survey and archive review directed the remainder of the study.

Survey

The survey instrument created for this study was based on a combination of the State Indicator 13 questions and the transition section of the state sample individual education plan. The survey consisted of 25 questions divided into three separate categories: Career and Vocational Education and Services, Transition to Adult Life, and Demographics. The questions in the first category provided information on the types of classes, experiences, and services that were available for students with disabilities (SWD) in each school division. The questions in the Transition to Adult Life section provided information on how the school divisions were developing coordinated sets of activities for individual students to meet their postsecondary goals. The third section provided demographic information, including the number of students in the division in Grades 7 through 12 who were receiving special education, the adult agency involvement during the transition planning process, and the experience of the transition coordinator.

The survey instrument was examined by five educational leaders, all of whom had extensive experience in transition planning with SWD. Two were administrators with advanced degrees in special education and three were transition coordinators with at least 5 years of experience. As a result of these reviews, additional information was added to the introductory letter explaining the purpose of the survey, and the format of the initial survey was changed from hard copy to a web-based format for distribution and ease of data collection of the responses from the participants. Two survey questions were added to assist in sorting and more precise analysis of the data.

Each question was treated individually. Questions A1, A4, B2, B4, B5, and B10 were dichotomous. The total number of *yes* responses was calculated to measure what

was asked in each question. Question A1 measured whether vocational education or applied academic classes were offered to SWD. Question A4 measured whether SWD were expected to keep up with other students in the class. B2 focused on whether specialized transition training was a regular part of the curriculum for SWD. B4 queried whether IEPs routinely contained a specific course of study, and B5 focused on progress monitoring. B10 measured whether information about adult services was provided to parent or guardians. The frequency for each response, *yes* or *no*, was calculated. Questions A2, A7, B3, B7, B9, B11, and C1 included multiple-response options. The frequency of each response was calculated. The open-ended responses were recorded in the researcher's notes. Question A2 measured the types of supports provided to vocational education teachers to meet the needs of SWD enrolled in their classes. Question A7 measured the disabilities represented in the high schools in the division. Participants were queried about the primary goals of the educational program for SWD in their division in Question B3. Question B7 identified the active participants who were most often involved in transition planning. B9 measured the types of agencies contacted by the school or school division regarding postsecondary programs or employment for SWD, and Question B11 provided an opportunity for the participants to identify the community services or programs accessible to SWD in a postsecondary environment. Question C1 provided the researcher with information regarding the roles of the participants with regard to their involvement with students. Responses to Questions A3, A5, B6, B8, C2, and C3 were scaled items. Question A3 gathered data about the transition-related experiences of SWD compared to those of other students in the following areas: curriculum or subject matter, instructional materials, class activities,

instructional groupings, grading standards, and testing and assessment measures. Question A5 measured the percentage of SWD participating in school-sponsored work experiences on and off campus. Participants were asked about the extent to which they believed the division's transition program prepared SWD to achieve their transition goals as noted in Question B6. Question B8 measured the role SWD played in their transition planning. Question C2 measured the extent to which the participants agreed or disagreed with the following: the division's expectations for academic and personal success of SWD, the division's support of transition planning for SWD, the provision of multiple transition activities and experiences for SWD, and the participant's preparation to work with SWD. Questions C4 and C5 gathered information used to sort data from the survey. Question C4 gathered data on the number of SWD between the ages of 14 and 22 in each division. I derived the spans using the data from the most recent Special Education Child Count that was available on the state department of education's website. I calculated each division's total number of SWD between 14 and 22. The data naturally sorted into four quartiles because of outliers in the upper and lower spans. The span choices were *more than 1000*, *500-999*, *300-499*, and *1-299*. The researcher used Question C6 as an open-ended response item in which the participants provided ideas for additional training that could help the transition coordinators address the transition needs of students in their school divisions.

The survey instrument can be found in Appendix C. Question distribution is presented in Appendix D. Table 3 provides an overview of how each research question was investigated.

Table 3. *Research Questions and Corresponding Survey Items*

Research question	Corresponding survey items		
How are educational leaders ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinating sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?	A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 A6	B1 B2 B3 B7 B9 B11	C1
How do the experience and knowledge of educational leaders impact the transition services and practices in a school division?	A7 B4 B5 B6	B8 B10 C2 C4	

Interviews

I interviewed 11 educational leaders in the region who were responsible for ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates were being met. Members of the community of practice, when asked to identify individuals who met those criteria, recommended the participants. The educational leaders with this responsibility included school-based administrators, division-based administrators, guidance counselors, and special education teachers. The majority of the participating school leaders were assistant principals as they received the greatest number of recommendations. I used a semistructured list of questions but allowed for follow-up or probing questions as necessary. The initial questions included the following:

1. Explain your path to your current leadership position.
2. Tell me about your leadership style.
3. Describe your school's (or school division's) model for postsecondary transition.

4. What steps do you take to ensure that the transition mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 are met?
5. Do you feel confident in your knowledge and understanding of the IDEA?
    a. If so, what has helped you gain the knowledge and understanding?
    b. If not, what would help you gain more knowledge and understanding?
6. Who are the key participants when planning for the postsecondary transition of SWD in your school or division?

    Is there one person or a group of people who have more of a leadership role in this process than others? Please explain.
7. How does your school involve community agencies in the planning or service delivery process for postsecondary transition of SWD?

The researcher began with these questions, allowing for a fluid discussion and deviation as warranted by the topic. The researcher asked for permission to digitally record the interviews. All interview participants granted permission for the recording. Each interviewee was asked to choose a pseudonym to protect his or her identity and guarantee anonymity. The participants were presented with a hard copy of the informed consent form and the contents were reviewed. Additional questions about the study were addressed. Participation in the study indicated that they provided informed consent. After asking demographic questions and pseudonyms were selected, the researcher invited the participants to share their paths to their current leadership positions. The researcher noted the gestures, mannerisms, and body language utilized by the participants as they spoke. Using the interview protocol as a guide, I reiterated or interjected questions to continue the dialogue or to clarify statements made by the participant. The

most enthusiastic responses were elicited when the participants were asked to describe their respective leadership styles.

Archive Review

The researcher reviewed and compared the state indicator data for each division in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. All of the documents were public domain, as they were available through state and local websites. Data from Indicators 1, 13, and 14 were reviewed. Indicator 1 measured the percentage of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma. Indicator 13 measured the percentage of youth, aged 16 or above, with an IEP including appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that were updated annually and based on age-appropriate transition assessment. Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals are based on an age-appropriate transition assessment and encompass the student's preferences, needs, and interests. Indicator 14 measured the percentage of youth no longer in secondary school who had IEPs in effect at the time they left school and were (a) enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, (c) enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program, or (d) competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

Procedures

Maxwell recommended purposeful selection when "particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). Transition coordinators from the coastal region of a South Atlantic state ($N = 64$) were surveyed to help determine (a) how

educational leaders were ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, were developed and implemented in this region, and (b) how the experience and knowledge of educational leaders impacted the transition services and practices in a school division. The community of practice was chosen because the focus of the group was on transition practices in that specific region.

In January 2014, I distributed the survey instrument to transition coordinators during a regularly scheduled meeting in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. Each of the potential participants received an introductory letter and a survey during a regularly scheduled regional community of practice meeting. Specific directions for completion were included in the letter and at the top of the survey. The researcher's contact information was included in the letter. Informed consent was obtained at the same time. Each participant was given a copy of the Informed Consent document and asked to read it. I asked if any of the participants had questions or concerns. None of the participants voiced concerns or questions. They were notified that their completion of the survey indicated their informed consent. All current members of the community of practice were in attendance and completed the survey at the regularly scheduled meeting. Additional waves of distribution were not necessary. I reviewed the Indicator 1, 13, and 14 data that were available through the state department of education and the local school divisions' websites. I kept field notes on each school division's data. The data influenced the interview questions.

I used the snowball sampling technique to gain access to potential interview participants who met the criteria for this study (Creswell, 2011). The identified interview

participants were educational leaders responsible for ensuring that transition mandates were met in their individual settings. The following steps were utilized to employ purposeful selection through the snowball technique:

1. Solicit the members of the community of practice for recommendations.
2. List recommended names and obtain e-mail addresses and phone numbers.
3. Send e-mail to recommended professionals to solicit responses to participate in the study.
4. Respond to individuals who agreed to participate in the study.
5. Phone the recommended individuals to set up appointments for interviews.
6. Keep record of responses and select the first 10 respondents.
7. If additional respondents indicate a willingness to participate, select up to 2 others.

Initial contact was made via e-mail, which contained the formal letter of invitation as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements of The George Washington University. Face-to-face interviews were attempted, but phone interviews were deemed acceptable if the individuals could not accommodate the schedule of the study. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview protocol with 11 interview participants, who met the criteria for inclusion and indicated a willingness to participate. I informed potential interview participants of the details of the study and obtained informed consent prior to the interview (Appendix G). I led the interviews but allowed for discussion, follow-up, and probing questions as warranted. Questions were interjected or repeated for clarification as necessary. Gestures, mannerism, and body language revealed engagement in the discussion as the each

interview progressed. Common threads began to emerge after the first few interviews. Information from the survey analysis and archive review yielded areas for further questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after completion. I wrote specific observations made during the interview on the transcripts. A completed transcript of each interview, without the researcher's notes, was sent to the participant to check for accuracy. Maxwell asserted that the respondent validation or member checking method of soliciting feedback from the participants

> is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed. (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111)

Respondent validation or member checking strengthens the validity and reliability of the study. The researcher communicated via e-mail to determine if changes or clarifications needed to be made. None of the respondents noted any changes or clarifications.

I analyzed and coded each individual interview, including observations made during the individual interviews. A specific coding process using color codes to cluster and identify common themes was used. After the common threads began to emerge, the researcher reread all of the transcripts highlighting key words or groups of words. This process was repeated with each transcript. The commonalities that I noted during the interview process emerged as the transcripts were reread. I created a spreadsheet that included the participant's name and the highlighted topics in order to continue the identification and refine the coding process. After several common topics were identified from the first few interviews, the researcher grouped the major topics to form themes. Each theme was assigned a color. This form of color coding was utilized for the

remaining interview transcripts. The color-coded themes were transferred to the spreadsheet to form a clear picture of the data.

Data Handling

The majority of the surveys were collected directly after completion during a regularly scheduled monthly community of practice meeting. The surveys did not include the participants' name or other personally identifying information. The completed surveys were contained in a locked filing cabinet until the completion of the research study. All surveys were accepted unless Question C4 or Question C5 was not answered. If either of those items was not addressed, the survey was not used in the data analysis. No surveys were excluded for this reason. Nonresponses to other survey items were reported as a *nonresponse*. Completed surveys with nonresponses to five or more items were not used for data analysis. No surveys were excluded for this reason. All field notes, recordings, and transcripts were for the time required by The George Washington University's International Review Board. Final copies of the completed research study were provided to anyone interested in the findings.

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics in this study. The data were collected from multiple sources. The survey analysis included a frequency distribution of the results of each survey item, reported as percentages (Trochim, 2006). The returned surveys were separated into four groups based on the number of SWD ages 14 through 22 receiving special education in each division. The data from open-response questions were recorded and examined for commonalities. The frequency of common responses was examined. Responses that were independent were also recorded. Scale items were reported using

the frequency of responses for each option. After each response was recorded and the frequency was calculated. The mode of individual scale items was calculated. I reviewed the archive data for Indicator 1, 13, and 14 for each school division in the study. The state target rates were used for comparison. The data was compiled on a spreadsheet for each of the years included in the study. Using the grouping based on the size of the school divisions, the data for each group was compared to the others in an effort to determine if the size of the school division impacted the transition service delivery and planning. I utilized field notes in the review of the archive data to record observations that emerged from the review. As the data analysis was completed, the image of educational leadership in the region included in the study became more focused.

Summary

I used multiple sources of information to answer the following research question:

1. What is the story of those who ensure the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?

Measures of central tendency and measures of variability were used to collate the data from the survey used in this study. I triangulated the data using multiple sources to focus on the implementation of the IDEA transition mandates and the methods used to ensure that those mandates were met with respect to the number of students age 14 or older in Grades 7 through 12 who were receiving transition services. The information gained from this study enhances transition service delivery and practices in school divisions in the region by providing a comprehensive body of potential resources, strategies, and

practices for educators to utilize. It supports the concept of distributive leadership though intensive collaboration to ensure that all of the needs of the SWD are addressed. The information from the study is a resource for educational leaders in the region and adds to the overall body of research addressing transition planning for SWD and understanding of the need for collaboration of all parties invested in the transition process (Yell et al., 2006).

Chapter Four

Results

The researcher used multiple sources of information to answer the following research question:

1. What is the story of those who ensure the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, are developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state?

I used descriptive statistics to organize the data from the survey utilized in the study and triangulated data from multiple sources and research method used in the study, focusing on the educational leaders' role in the implementation of the IDEA transition mandates and the methods the leaders used to ensure that those mandates were being met with respect to the number of students with disabilities (SWD) 14 years of age or older receiving transition services.

Maxwell's (2013) interactive model of research design provided direction for this study. The research goals examined how educational leaders ensure that IDEA 2004 transition mandates are developed and implemented and how the experience and knowledge of educational leaders impacts the transition services and practices in school divisions in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. The theoretical framework and methods relate to the research questions throughout the study.

According to Maxwell (2013), purposeful selection deliberately engages particular individuals who are able to supply information that may not be available from others. Thick, rich descriptions were gained from each interview participant detailing the

methods that they used to ensure that IDEA transition mandates were followed. Triangulation of sources, the use of an independent transcriber, and respondent validation, and coding procedures helped to reduce threats to validity. Similar organization was used in the interview process.

Organization of Interview Process

This study involved semistructured interviews using a semistructured interview protocol. The snowball sampling technique was used to generate potential participants. A total of 15 potential participants were contacted via e-mail and invited to participate in the study; 11 positive responses were received, indicating a willingness to participate. Dates, times, and locations for interviews were determined through follow-up phone calls or e-mails. Interviews took place in private offices or conference rooms to ensure confidentiality. Of the 11 interviews, 7 were conducted in the participants' private offices; the remaining 4 were conducted in conference rooms at the participants' work sites.

After introductions, each participant was given a copy of the informed consent for review. The participants were given the opportunity to ask additional questions, if needed. Continued participation in the interview indicated the participants' acknowledgement of the informed consent. A copy of the informed consent document was offered to each participant for future reference; 2 of the 11 participants accepted a copy of the document.

A folder was prepared with the interview protocol and typed field notes from each participant's interview. The verbatim transcript of the interview was added upon

completion. All documents were kept in a secure location according to The George Washington University IRB requirements.

Participant Demographics

Each interview participant has been identified throughout the study by the pseudonym he or she selected. Demographic questions were gathered with regard to levels of school taught, years of teaching, and years in a leadership position. The number of years of teaching experience varied among the participants. The number of years in a leadership position did not reveal as much variation in responses. Two participants had each been in a leadership position for 2 years. Two others had been in their respective leadership positions for 10 years. All participants indicated that they had worked in an employment field other than education.

Demographic information about the participants is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Demographic Information on Interview Participants*

Interview participant pseudonym	Level(s) of school taught	Current position	Number of years teaching	Number of years in a leadership position
John	Secondary	Assistant principal	25	15
Kareem	Secondary	Assistant principal	15	5
Shasta	Elementary	Assistant principal	14	2
Mike	Secondary	Assistant principal	20	14
Jimmie	Elementary, Secondary	Instructional specialist	21	12
Jordan	Elementary, Secondary	Lead teacher	18	10
Julie	Secondary	Guidance counselor	0	2
Beth	Secondary	Assistant principal	28	18
Phil	Secondary	Assistant principal	28	10
Alexis	Secondary	Assistant principal	21	8
Melissa	Secondary	Assistant principal	20	6

Interview Process

Each interview participant was informed before and after the interview that he or she would receive a written transcript of the interview for respondent validation or member checking. An outside individual, who was not involved otherwise with the study, transcribed the interviews. The interview participants were asked to verify their statements and to add any clarifications. That original transcript document for each participant was added to the participant's folder after participant validation or member

checking. All 11 participants reviewed the transcripts and responded by e-mail. There were no changes from any of the participants.

Coding and Analysis

The researcher began to recognize common threads after the second interview and began to note connections and commonalities after each interview and as the transcripts were received. Maxwell's (2012) procedures for noting observations in addition to what is read on the transcript helped facilitate analytic thinking. The researcher noted, "I am surprised how quickly connections form and how the language is similar among the participants. Even with different levels of expertise and experiences, the participants' responses are very similar in content." As the interviews progressed this observation did not change.

Creswell (2003) provided a systematic way to analyze textual data in the coding process. The questions below provided a method of organizing the data during the coding process. The guidelines used in this study included the following:

1. Read all of the transcriptions carefully noting ideas if they are evident.
2. Read one interview transcript asking, "What is this about?" Write thoughts in margins.
3. Continue this task with several transcripts, making a list of all of the topics. Cluster the similar topics.
4. Using this list, assign each topic a color and color code according to the appropriate text in the transcripts.
5. Group topics and find a descriptive word or phrase to define them as a category.

6. Gather the data material belonging to each category and perform a preliminary analysis.
7. Recode, if necessary. (Creswell, 2011)

This process allowed the researcher to analyze the information, leading to a clearer visual picture of the data.

A peer reviewer who was not associated with the study examined and verified the coding procedures. The peer reviewer was an experienced educator with more than 21 years of experience in the classroom and in leadership positions at the school and division levels. The coding process was explained and discussed prior to the peer reviewer's double checking the codes. Key identifying information in the transcripts was redacted to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview participants. The peer reviewer suggested combining two coding areas into one broader area. The change was agreed upon and made.

I compiled the data into a spreadsheet to help determine which themes provided the strongest evidence to answer the research questions associated with this study. Five themes evolved from the rich descriptions provided by the interview participants. Table 5 illustrates the frequency of themes.

Table 5. *Frequency of Themes*

	Consultation	Professional development	Collaboration	Flexibility	Collegiate coursework
John	18	12	9	5	3
Kareem	20	15	13	8	5
Shasta	9	12	10	7	2
Mike	15	14	11	8	6
Jimmie	13	18	12	5	1
Jordan	13	13	12	6	13
Julie	11	10	14	5	5
Beth	15	9	15	6	8
Phil	12	14	10	10	4
Alexis	10	12	13	9	3
Melissa	13	11	14	11	2
Total	149	140	133	80	52

Observations

I made several observations as I was traveling through the different communities on my way to the interviews. Several business and buildings were empty or no longer open in most of the communities. Some of the houses appeared to be in need of repair. In two communities there were people standing in groups on the street who took specific notice as I drove toward the school. The people in the groups did not appear to be of school age. I remember feelings of desolation as I imagined trying to plan for the transitions of SWD in such communities.

Most of the schools in which the interviews took place were older or in the process of being repaired or renovated. The main doors of one school were barred because of structural issues. The schools appeared to be safe environments once inside.

There were school resource officers, or police officers, in all of the schools. All of the schools had locked doors, where visitors were screened before entering. These observations left me wondering if postsecondary options for SWD would be limited due to the limited resources in the community. I was not surprised that this was a sentiment shared by the interview participants.

Consultation

The interview participant responses revealed many experiences and a variety of leadership styles. The strongest theme that emerged from the interviews was consultation. All of the interview participants indicated that they relied heavily on special education teachers and division administrators when working with SWD. Shasta said, "Even though I taught special education, I still ask because things change so often." Six of the participants associated leadership with consultation. Kareem stated,

> A good leader recognizes his weakness. A good leader will seek someone who has the knowledge and expertise [that] are needed. Unfortunately, my knowledge lacks in the area of special education. I am lucky to have a great group here to support me. That area is too big to know it all.

I further queried 9 of the 11 participants to gather information on whom they consulted about special education and transition. All 9 indicated that they consulted a special education teacher or a peer before contacting anyone at the division level. After the researcher probed for further information, 8 of the 9 said they would contact a transition coordinator for the division. Only 3 of the 9 said that they would consult the division administrator in charge of special education. Beth, Alexis, Mike, and Shasta were the only participants who indicated that they would consult anyone at the state level for assistance. Jimmie, an instructional specialist at the division level, was the only one

of the participants to refer to the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in [State]*

The interview participants were vague in their responses when asked specifically how they ensured that transition mandates were being met, even though all regularly participated in the IEP process. Most (n = 9, 81%) of the participants maintained some sort of system to ensure that timelines were met, but none spoke of monitoring the content of the IEPs or the provision of transition services. Kareem and Phil both indicated that their "online IEP database requires that all of the boxes are checked." They each explained that a student's IEP could not be finalized in their system unless the document contained all of the elements required, including transition goals and services. I queried each of these participants further to help determine if they had knowledge of the mandates regarding transition for SWD. Phil said that he did not; Kareem replied that he would seek information from his teachers if he did not understand or did not know something. Similar statements were made by each participant each indicating the need for more knowledge and the collaboration of the team. This is indicative of the distributive leadership concept applied to this study. I associated these statements with the next most prevalent theme, professional development.

Professional Development

Professional development was a major theme that emerged from the interview transcripts. Three topics prevalent in the transcripts were reduced to the theme of professional development: professional development, training, and conference or meeting attendance. Professional development encompasses all of these topics.

All of the participants described division-level professional development on special education issues. None of the interview participants could recall a specific training on the transition mandates. When asked about professional development or training on IDEA, Alexis stated, "We have a training every year, but it is usually about IEP development. I guess they just assume that we know about that stuff." John emphatically stated, "I wish we got more training. I feel like I should know a lot more than I do about transition and special education in general."

One participant's school division was currently in academic review by the state. This participant said,

> Being in academic review has required us all to be more on top of mandates and general instruction. I am trying to follow everything to the letter, but it is hard to do without the background knowledge. I value the expertise of people in our division who have provided guidance and training. Luckily we have strong families who advocate for their children. I have learned almost as much from them as I have in division workshops.

Jimmie explained that budgeting had impacted their ability to offer professional development. He stated,

> Our budget unfortunately has caused us to have to cut back on professional development. However, it has led us to be more aware of the community support we have in regards to transition. We used to rely solely on the Department of Rehabilitation. Now we don't hesitate to call other agencies for support.

When questioned further, he stated, "We use the CIL [Center for Independent Living] and our community services board regularly. We've even tapped into churches."

Professional development played a key role in each participant's knowledge growth. All 11 participants expressed a need for more detailed and more frequent training regarding special education mandates. I noted that it was interesting that only one participant mentioned the impact of the budget on professional development.

Professional development allowed time for collaboration, another major theme that emerged from the discussions.

Collaboration

Collaboration was a prominent theme in all of the discussions. The participants used the term in their rich descriptions of their use of consultation and their participation in professional development opportunities. I asked six of the interview participants for clarification regarding the difference between consultation and collaboration. Phil was precise in his answer: "Consultation is what you do when you need help or guidance. Collaboration is what you do to learn and solve problems."

Mike and Melissa said that transition planning "is supposed to be collaborative." Melissa noted that the special education teachers in her building were very good about collaborating with families and agencies to plan for transition. She also said, "My knowledge of IDEA has increased dramatically by attending meetings where multiple people collaborated to plan for the student. I love those meetings." She further stated, "I have so many bookmarked web sites that I refer to on a regular basis." Mike commented, "Collaboration is the key to getting a working plan." Mike also mentioned resources on the internet that he refers to on a regular basis.

Kareem explained:

> Collaboration is the key in the IEP and transition plan. The school isn't always going to be here for them. It is important to get the correct people on the bus. It is a group responsibility that requires groupthink. One kid had three different representatives from different agencies at his meeting. He has a job with benefits now. I don't think we could have done that alone.

Jordan, a lead teacher for the special education department at a high school, was optimistic when she said,

> One day we will all work together rather than doing it piecemeal. Right now the adult agencies don't play well with schools. They say they are available but aren't there when you call. It can be frustrating at times, but in the end, I guess it can work. It's just not the best or most efficient method to an end.

Collaboration was a common thread in all of the discussions. Most of the participants readily spoke of the collaboration within their schools and division. Some spoke of collaborative experiences they had with adult agencies, specifically the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Few other adult agencies were identified. The participants' shared experiences indicated that collaboration was evident and led to positive outcomes. Most participants referred to the availability of resources on the internet and through online databases as regularly used resources. The importance of being flexible was highlighted. Flexibility was a strong theme that initiated from the discussions regarding leadership styles.

Flexibility

Flexibility was a common characteristic in the participants' descriptions of their leadership styles. Every participant said that flexibility was essential to being a good leader. Their descriptions of how they ensured that the transition mandates were being met included rich, thick descriptions of how flexibility played a large role in their practices.

The interview participants expounded on the need for flexibility in dealing with special education. Julie stated, "Flexibility is what allows us to plan for the individual student. That's what special education is all about." Shasta said, "I have a system to help me organize the information, due dates and components of testing, but flexibility is key to ensuring that everything we do is meaningful and focused on outcomes. With transition, it's all about the outcomes."

Alexis described the school division's transition program as flexible when she stated, "We are flexible in how they get services, not necessarily what the services are, but how they get them." When asked for clarification, she said, "All of our students get transition services. Those services may not all look the same because we are flexible. We meet the kids where they are." Jimmie described her division's transition service delivery model as "ever developing and changing because it changes when the student[s] change." All of the participants seemed very proud of their division's flexibility in the delivery of transition services and the transition programs, overall. This pride was evident in the excitement in their voices and animation in their body language when describing the programs.

Jordan noted several incidences where flexibility led to positive results:

> We had this kid who didn't fit the profile of the students who normally participate in our community-based program, but he needed that experience and training. After some juggling of classes to find time for him to participate, he was allowed to take part. After about 5 months, he got a real job at the location where he had received our training. He still works there. If we hadn't planned outside of our box, he wouldn't have gotten a job and would be sitting at home on the couch watching TV all day.

Jordan explained that the student whom she described was working toward a standard diploma. Most of the students in their community-based programs were working toward a special diploma.

Other participants shared similar descriptions. John opined, "I wish school was flexible in all situations. If they could see how these kids grow and learn, we would be building an individualized program for every student." Beth said, "I am flexible in all aspects of my job, but especially when working with my teachers to plan for SWD. There is no way not to be."

Flexibility was a prominent theme. The participants shared a common description of the importance of that trait when working with special education. The discussions of the need for flexibility included the need for flexibility in collegiate coursework, which emerged as another theme.

Collegiate Coursework

Collegiate coursework is designed to help an individual meet the responsibilities of an occupation. All of the interview participants had earned the certification required for school leadership. Of the 11 participants, 10 reported feeling unprepared to address issues involving special education. Jimmie and Shasta were the only participants who felt prepared. Shasta exclaimed, "I was a special education teacher in a high school before this. I got this!"

John was adamant about the need for reform in collegiate principal preparation programs when he stated,

> Colleges need to get on board with the rest of the world. They need to realize that we need more of the application rather than the theory. I can read a book or document. I need to know how that applies to what I am doing. I was a physical education teacher and was frustrated when I was expected to know everything about special education when I became an administrator.

John's idea was common among the participants. Mike felt lucky to "have a wife who was a special education teacher." Phil was currently enrolled in a collegiate course focusing on special education law. He noted, "I had to take this class. There is too much to know." He further explained that he had very little experience or preparation for supervising special education. He soon realized that because it was a large part of his job he needed further training. Shasta said,

> I don't know how a history teacher would do this job without a lot of support. I rely on my training and teacher experience all of the time. What do assistant principals do when they don't have that to fall back on?

The participants shared their concerns about the responsibilities placed on administrators. Kareem reflected on his collegiate coursework when he said, "If I would have known what I needed to know, things would have been very different. They need to have seasoned administrators plan the course of study."

Survey

Transition coordinators from the coastal region of a South Atlantic state were surveyed to determine (a) how educational leaders were ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates, including coordinated sets of activities, interagency linkages, and family involvement, were developed and implemented in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state, and (b) how the experience and knowledge of educational leaders impacted the transition services and practices in a school division. The original group consisted of 65 members, but one potential participant retired. Her position was not to be filled. The total number of participants was 64 ($N = 64$)

The researcher distributed paper copies of the survey instrument to transition coordinators in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state during a regularly scheduled meeting. Each survey participant was given a written copy of the informed consent form, and its content was reviewed with a group. All questions were addressed prior to the distribution of the survey. The participants were allowed to keep a copy of the consent if they wished to do so. Their completion of the survey indicated their informed consent. The survey and a pencil or pen were distributed to each participant and were collected at

the conclusion of the regularly scheduled meeting. The survey consisted of 23 questions in 3 different categories.

The first category was career and vocational education and services. The participants were asked whether vocational education or applied academic classes were regular course offerings for SWD. All (N = 64) of the participants responded that there were regular course offerings for SWD. Nearly all (n = 60, 93.7%) of the responses indicated that special equipment or materials were provided as supports to the vocational education teachers to help meet the needs of SWD assigned to their classes. About a third (n = 22, 34.38%) checked that inservice training was offered as a support to the vocational teachers. More than half (n = 34, 53.12%) noted that coteaching, team teaching, or the provision of a teacher's aide or a student's aide was utilized to meet the diverse needs of the students. All (N = 64) of the participants reported that consultation services by special education staff or other staff were provided to support the vocational education teachers in meeting the needs of SWD enrolled in their classes.

Transition-related experiences of SWD were compared to those of other students in the areas of instructional groupings, grading standards, and testing and assessment methods. Table 6 shows how the transition-related experiences of SWD compared to those of other students.

Table 6. *Transition-Related Experiences of SWD Compared to Other Students*

	Same	Somewhat different	Different	Very different
Curriculum or subject matter	12 (18.7%)	52 (81.25%)		
Instructional materials	14 (21.88%)	50 (78.13%)		
Class activities	2 (3.13%)	40 (62.50%)	22 (34.38%)	
Instructional groupings	10 (15.63%)	50 (78.13%)	4 (6.25%)	
Grading standards	61 (95.31%)	3 (4.69%)		
Testing and assessments methods	3 (4.69%)	10 (15.63%)	51 (79.69%)	

The data in Table 6 reveal that a large majority of participants reported the curriculum or subject matter was somewhat different from the curriculum or subject matter used with other students. Three fourths of the participants reported that the instructional materials and instructional groupings were somewhat different from those used with other students. More than three fourths of the participants reported that the testing and assessment methods were different from those utilized with other students. An overwhelming 95.3% (n = 61) reported that the grading standards were the same for all students. One participant commented that the SWD were expected to master the same material as other students but that they were provided accommodations or modifications to compensate for their disabilities. When asked whether SWD were expected to work at the same pace as other students, 100% of the respondents indicated that the SWD were expected to keep up with the other students in the class with the provision of accommodations or modifications.

Work experience was addressed in the survey. Table 7 depicts the response rates when participants were asked about the locations of school-sponsored work experience activities for SWD in each division.

Table 7. *Participation in School-Sponsored Work Experience Activities for SWD*

	None	1-24%	25-49%	50-74%	75-100%
On campus only		64 (100%)			
Off campus only	6 (9.4%)	58 (90.6%)			
On and off campus	11 (17.19%)	53 (82.81%)			

All ($N = 64$) of the survey participants reported that 1 to 24% of SWD participated in school-sponsored work experiences on the school campus. Nearly all (90.6%) of the participants reported that 1-24% of SWD participated in school-sponsored work experiences only in an off-campus location. The next most common response (82.8%) was that the school-sponsored work experiences for 1 to 24% of the students took place in both on- and off-campus locations. Although all of the respondents indicated that 1-24% of the SWD participated in on-campus work experiences, an overwhelming majority of SWD apparently did not receive any type of school-sponsored work experience.

The survey participants were asked to identify classes or services provided from or through the school system for SWD. Table 8 shows the responses from the survey participants regarding the classes or services provided for SWD through the school systems.

Table 8 *Classes or Services Provided for SWD*

Classes or Services	Total
Formal assessment of career skills or interests	62 (96.88%)
Career counseling	64 (100%)
Specific job skills training	12 (18.75%)
Job readiness or prevocational training	64 (100%)
Referrals to potential employers, other job placements	1 (1.56%)
Instruction in seeking employment	51 (79.69%)
Job coach	38 (59.38%)
Internship or apprenticeship	8 (12.50%)
Tech-prep program	18 (28.13%)

All (100%) of the participants reported that career counseling and job readiness or prevocational training was offered to SWD in their respective divisions. The other most prominent classes or services provided to SWD by the school divisions were formal assessments of career skills or interests, career counseling, and instruction in seeking employment. The least common classes or services provided to SWD by the school divisions were specific job skills training and internships or apprenticeships. One of the participants cited referrals to potential employers, other job placements, internships, apprenticeships, or entrepreneurship programs as services available in their school divisions.

The participants were asked to identify the categories of special educational services that were evident in their divisions, based upon 13 state disability categories. Table 9 shows the categories of service that were represented in the school divisions included in this study.

Table 9. *Represented Categories of Service*

Disability category	Response rate
Autism	64 (100%)
Deafness	1 (1.56%)
Deafness-Blindness	2 (3.13%)
Emotional disability	64 (100%)
Hearing impairment	8 (12.50%)
Intellectual disability	64 (100%)
Multiple disability	64 (100%)
Other health impairment	64 (100%)
Orthopedic impairment	59 (92.19%)
Specific learning disability	64 (100%)
Speech or language impairment	64 (100%)
Traumatic brain injury	48 (75%)
Visual impairment including blindness	29 (45.31%)

All ($N = 64$) of the survey participants indicated that SWD in their divisions were served under the following categories: autism, emotional disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, specific learning disability, and speech or language impairment. Other common categories of service indicated by the responses of the participants were orthopedic impairment and traumatic brain injury. The least common categories of service indicated by the responses of the participants were hearing impairment, deafness-blindness, and deafness.

The next section of the survey asked questions about transition activities and planning that occurred within the high schools for students in the divisions. A large majority ($n = 54$, 84.38%) of the participants responded that their divisions implemented transition planning for SWD at age 14, and 15.63% ($n = 10$) reported implementation of transition planning for SWD at age 16. Most, 96.88% ($n = 62$) of the responses, indicated that the transition planning for SWD started in the ninth grade. The remaining 3.13% ($n = 2$) implemented the planning in the 11th grade.

Planning for transition includes outcome goals. All ($N = 64$) of the survey participants indicated that the IEPs in their respective divisions specifically stated the courses of study or the kinds of courses the students should pursue to meet their postsecondary transition goals. Nearly all ($n = 61$, 95.31%) indicated that they reported progress toward transition goals as often as they reported progress toward academic goals. Table 10 includes the responses received when survey participants were asked to name the primary goal of the educational program for SWD in their respective divisions.

Table 10. *Primary Goal for Educational Program for SWD*

Goal	Response rate
Attend a 2- or 4-year college	4 (6.25%)
Attend a postsecondary vocational training program	2 (3.13%)
Obtain competitive employment	41 (64.06%)
Obtain sheltered employment	0 (0%)
Obtain supported employment	0 (0%)
Live independently	3 (4.69%)
Maximize functional independence	13 (20.31%)
Enhance social or interpersonal relationships and satisfaction	0 (0%)

Participants were given an opportunity to identify goals that were not listed on the survey. They indicated that the primary goal of the educational program for all students in their divisions was to prepare them to become contributing citizens in the community and to gain full independence.

The survey asked the respondents to identify the IEP members who were most active in transition planning. Table 11 depicts the responses of the participants regarding IEP members who participated in transition planning. There was no indication of the level of activity among the participants.

Table 11. *Active Participants in Transition Planning*

Participant	Response rate
General education academic subject teacher(s)	64 (100%)
General education vocational teacher(s) or work study coordinator	42 (64.63%)
Special education teacher(s)	64 (100%)
School administrators	64 (100%)
School counselor or psychologist	20 (31.25%)
Related services personnel	51 (79.69%)
Parent or Guardian	64 (100%)
Student	64 (100%)
Vocational rehabilitation agency counselor	43 (67.19%)
Staff of Social Security Administration	0 (0%)
Staff of other outside service agency or outside consultant	32 (50%)
Employer	0 (0%)
Representative of postsecondary education institution	0 (0%)
Advocate	4 (6.25%)

All of the participants ($N = 64$) listed general education academic subject teachers, special education teachers, school administrators, parents and guardians, and students as the participants, who were most often active participants in transition planning. A substantial majority of the respondents indicated that general education vocational teachers or work study coordinators, related service personnel, including speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists, and vocational rehabilitation agency counselors were active participants in transition planning. Half ($n = 32$) of the responses indicated that staff members of other outside agencies or outside consultants were active participants. Advocates were reportedly less active, with only 6.25% of respondents indicating advocates' active participation in transition planning. It is important to note that none of the survey participants indicated participation from

employers or representatives of postsecondary education institutions; no other people were noted as being involved in transition planning.

Adult services can play an active role when a student with disabilities is transitioning to postsecondary life. All of the participants indicated that their school divisions shared information with parents and guardians. The participants were asked to identify the community services or programs that were accessible to SWD after high school. All of the participants ($N = 64$) responded that supported living arrangements, mental health services, and transportation assistance were accessible. Almost all ($n = 62$, 96.88%) revealed that vocational training, placement, and support were accessible to SWD in postsecondary settings. About half ($n = 33$, 51.56%) noted that social work services were accessible, but only about a third (34.38%) indicated that mobility training was an accessible service in postsecondary environments for SWD. Other services were much less accessible. About a fourth ($n = 18$, 28.13%) of the respondents reported that educational accommodations were an accessible service to SWD in postsecondary settings. Occupational and physical therapy were endorsed as accessible services or programs by only 3.13% ($n = 2$) of the survey respondents. The least accessible service or program accessible to SWD in postsecondary environments was speech or communication therapy or services; only one survey participant noted that such therapies were available, at the expense of the student, after exiting high school.

Demographic information was collected in the final section of the survey; the information referred to the survey participants' roles in their specific school divisions as well as the demographics of the school divisions. All of the participants indicated that they provided consultation services to teachers and supervised assistants or para-

educators, who were assigned to work with SWD. A substantial majority (*n* = 52, 81.25%) of the respondents identified themselves as educational leaders who attended the meeting during which the survey was conducted as transition coordinators for their respective divisions. More than three fourths (*n* = 49, 76.56%) of the participants reported that they provided instruction directly to SWD, and 43.75% (*n* = 28) indicated that they provided case management to SWD.

The survey participants were asked to specify the extent to which they agreed with statements regarding the involvement of division leadership in the transition programming in their school divisions. Table 12 presents the responses to those items.

Table 12. *Division Leadership*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The division leadership has high expectations for standards for academic and personal success of SWD.			60 (93.75%)	4 (6.25%)
The division supports transition planning for SWD.				64 (100%)
The division provides multiple transition activities and experiences for SWD.		1 (3.13%)	61 (95.31%)	2 (3.13%)
I feel well prepared to work with SWD in transition planning.			64 (100%)	

All of the participants indicated that the school division had high expectations and standards for the academic and personal success of SWD with disabilities and that they felt prepared to work with SWD in transition planning. The majority of the participants

reported that their division provided multiple transition activities and experiences for SWD.

The participants were asked to identify the cumulative number of years they had been in the role of transition coordinator. Their responses are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. *Cumulative Years as a Transition Coordinator*

Number of years	Response rate
More than 10	2 (3.13%)
7-9	4 (6.25%)
3-6	56 (87.5%)
0-2	2 (3.13%)

A large majority (87.5%) of the survey participants had been in the role of transition coordinator for 3 to 6 years. Two participants had served as transition coordinators for 2 or fewer years and another two had each served in the position for more than 10 years.

The survey participants were asked to list additional training that might help them address the needs of SWD in their divisions. The responses were varied but specific. Three participants indicated that additional training on how to maximize or utilize resources would be helpful. Two other respondents endorsed training on how to involve adult agencies. How to collaborate with other divisions to maximize service delivery was a suggested training topic from another participant. Two participants endorsed programs offered by local colleges or universities that trained individuals to be more confident and competent in the area of transition of SWD.

Archive Review

I reviewed and compared the archive data for state indicators related to transition for each school division included in the study. All of the documents were in the public domain, as they were available through state and local websites. The researcher used the data from three state indicators for the past two reporting periods, 2010 to 2011 and 2011 to 2012. Earlier data were not available for the three indicators. The Indicator 1 data measured the percentage of youth with an IEP who were graduated from high school with a regular diploma. Indicator 13 measured the percentage of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP including appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that were updated annually. Other requirements that fell under Indicator 13 were the inclusion of goals based on an age-appropriate transition assessment and the inclusion of transition services and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. Documentation that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting at which transition services were to be discussed and that an invitation was sent to the representative of any appropriate participating agency must be evident. The parent or the student, if of the age of majority, must have been provided with prior consent for an outside agency's participation in the meeting. The data from Indicator 14 measured the percentage of youth who were no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were (a) enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, (c) enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program, or (d) competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

I sorted the data by the number of SWD over the age of 16 receiving special education services in the division. This information was collected from the survey participants as part of the survey. Table 14 shows the most recent special education child count that was publically available for each school division included in the study.

Table 14. *Special Education Child Count*

School division code	Child count
A1	84
A2	91
A3	91
A4	154
A5	210
A6	285
B1	409
B2	483
C1	695
C2	699
D1	1116
D2	1216
D3	1329
D4	1623
D5	3323

The data were sorted using the number of SWD reported to the state in the most recent publically available report. The data revealed an obvious distinction in grouping. The researcher grouped the divisions reporting similar numbers of SWD. Four obvious groups were evident in the data. I coded each of the schools with a letter and a number. The letter indicates the group size and the numbers differentiate each school. The largest group comprised five school divisions, each of which had more than 1000 SWD. The two middle groups comprised two school divisions each.

Regular diplomas included in this calculation for State Indicator 1 consisted of the state's standard, advanced studies, or International Baccalaureate diplomas. Table 15 indicates the state target for each indicator.

Table 15. *State Benchmarks Percentages for Archive Indicator Data Review*

School year	Indicator 1	Indicator 13	Indicator 14 a; b; c
2010-2011	52.76	100	32; 55; 64
2011-2012	49.96	100	55; 55; 56
2012-2013	>= 53.57	100	64; 64; 65

The data reported for the 2010-2011 school year by school divisions having the largest numbers of SWD over the age 14 indicated that none of the divisions met the state target for the first indicator. The reported percentages ranged between 31% and 45.4%, which fell short of the state target for each division. The second largest group's data revealed lesser results, with 29.17 % and 40.82% of the SWD graduating with a regular diploma for that reporting period. Both of the school divisions reporting the third largest number of SWD over the age of 14 met the target for Indicator 1, but none of the school divisions reporting the least number of SWD over the age of 14 met their state target for graduation during the 2010-2011 school year.

The overall state target for graduation during the 2011-2012 school year rose to 49.96% for all school divisions in the state. Unfortunately, no school division in the groups reporting the largest and second largest numbers of students over the age of 14 receiving special education services met that target. One school division reported to have between 300 and 499 SWD over the age of 14 met the target, with 50% of their youth

with IEPs graduating with a regular diploma. The two school divisions reported to have between 1 and 299 SWD over the age of 14 met the state target for graduation, with one school division reporting 53.3% of their youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma, and the other reporting 50% with the same outcome.

Statewide data from both years varied slightly when compared to the school divisions in the region included in the study. In the 2010-2011 school year, the overall state data for Indicator 1 revealed that 52.76% of the overall number of students with IEPs was graduated from high school with a regular diploma. The state target rate for Indicator 1 for that school year was 44.4%. Data for the 2011-2012 year indicated that slightly fewer (48.41%) of the students achieved that goal than anticipated in the state target of 49.96% for Indicator 1.

The second set of archived data reviewed was related to State Indicator 13. This indicator measured the percentage of youth over the age of 16 with an IEP that included appropriate measurable postsecondary goals, which were updated annually. The goals had to be based on age-appropriate transition assessment and services that would reasonably enable the student to meet those goals. The archived documents reviewed for this study identified if the schools met or failed to meet the state targets. The overall state-reported performance on this indicator was more positive than that of Indicator 1. In the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, only one school division in the group with the largest number of students over the age of 14 receiving special education failed to meet the 100% state target rate. That school division reported that 98.7% of their students included in the criteria stated for Indicator 13 met the state target for the 2010-2011 school year. All of the other school divisions included in this study reported

meeting the state criterion of 100% compliance regarding Indicator 13. The overall state data mirrored that of most of the data reported by the school divisions included in this study.

Table 16 shows the archival data for the 2010-2011 school year for state Indicators 1, 13, and 14.

Table 16. *Archive Data Review: Percentages for the 2010-2011 School Year*

School division code	Indicator 1	Indicator 13	Indicator 14 a; b; c
A1	**27.78**	100	**4.80**; **33.3**; **42.9**
A2	**31.32**	100	**0.00**; **42.9**; **57.1**
A3	**50**	**28**	**16.7**; **66.7**; 75.0
A4	**15.56**	100	42.9; 66.7; 76.2
A5	**30.19**	100	**16.7**; **38.9**; **44.4**
A6	54.55	**98**	**22.0**; 70.7; 78.0
B1	**39.89**	100	40.0; 74.3; 82.9
B2	**6.25**	100	42.3; 69.2; 76.9
C1	**29.17**	100	34.0; **47.9**; 58.5
C2	**40.82**	100	**20.4**; **57.0**; 66.7
D1	**38.11**	100	**26.7**; **49.5**; **61.4**
D2	**38.07**	100	36.4; 60.5; 70.9
D3	**35.31**	100	**29.8**; 57.4; 67.0
D4	**27.12**	100	**23.8**; **43.8**; **53.1**
D5	**37.17**	100	**35.7**; 58.8; 71.3

Note: Data in bold indicate that the state benchmark was not met.

Only one school division met the state benchmark for Indicator 1. Two school divisions failed to meet the state benchmark of 100% for Indicator 2. Indicator 14 data revealed varied outcomes. Five school divisions failed to meet the benchmark for all three sections of Indicator 14. Four school divisions reportedly met the state benchmarks for all three sections. Three of the remaining school divisions each failed to meet the benchmark for only one section of Indicator 14.

Table 17 shows the data from the 2011-2012 school year for state Indicators 1, 13, and 14.

Table 17. *Archive State Indicator Data Review for 2011-2012*

School division code	Indicator 1	Indicator 13	Indicator 14 a; b; c
A1	50	100	**30.4**; 69.6; 69.6
A2	**23.1**	100	50.0; 50.0; **62.5**
A3	53.3	**98.7**	46.2; 92.3; 92.3
A4	**15.56**	100	42.9; 66.7; 76.2
A5	**22.5**	100	**17.7**; **47.1**; **52.9**
A6	52.3	100	**20.6**; 58.8; 64.7
B1	50	100	**30.4**; 56.5; 69.6
B2	51.9	100	**23.9**; 67.4; 78.3
C1	**36.5**	100	**27.7**; **50.5**; 66.3
C2	**43.7**	100	**31.6**; **50.0**; **57.9**
D1	**42**	100	**26.4**; **50.9**; **63.2**
D2	**44.7**	100	**41.5**; **62.3**; 70.0
D3	**45**	100	**22.6**; 61.3; 64.5
D4	**31**	**98**	**30.0**; **53.3**; 67.7
D5	**45.4**	100	34.6; 62.6; 72.0

Note: Data in bold indicate that the state benchmark was not met.

Improvement was evident in the outcomes from Indicator 1 for this school year. Ten of the school divisions reportedly failed to meet the 49.96% benchmark set by the state department of education. Of those 10 divisions who failed to meet the benchmark set by the state, the reported percentages were within 5% of benchmark. Two school divisions failed to meet the benchmark for State Indicator 13, one of them for the second year in a row. Improvement also was noted in the data for Indicator 14. Only three school divisions failed to meet expectations for all three sections of Indicator 14 during the 2011-2012 school year. The first section of Indicator 14 continued to be problematic for the school divisions; 11 of the school divisions failed to meet the state's benchmark for that section. Conversely, 11 school divisions met the criteria for the third section of

Indicator 14. Four school divisions met the benchmarks for all three sections of that indicator.

Table 18 shows the results of the archive indicator data review for the 2012-2013 school year.

Table 18. *Archive State Indicator Data Review for 2012-2013*

School division code	Indicator 1	Indicator 13	Indicator 14 a; b; c
A1	**20**	100	**18.2**; **63.6**; 81.8
A2	**10**	**91.7**	<10.0; <10.0; <10.0
A3	73.7	100	**33.3**; 73.3; 80.0
A4	**25.7**	100	**30.0**; 70.0; 80.0
A5	**33.3**	100	**26.6**; **42.9**; **57.1**
A6	56.4	**98**	**29.6**; 66.7; 74.1
B1	53.7	**91.4**	**22.7**; 65.9; 77.3
B2	**48.1**	100	**18.4**; **53.1**; 81.6
C1	**30.1**	100	**27.8**; **46.7**; 66.7
C2	**31**	100	**22.1**; **51.0**; **58.7**
D1	**40.9**	100	**24.5**; **47.9**; **58.5**
D2	**42.3**	100	**37.1**; 65.9; 76.5
D3	**45**	100	**33.3**; 67.7; 75.0
D4	**32.6**	**72**	**13.8; 30.2**; **58.6**
D5	**45.2**	100	**36.8**; **61.6**; 72.6

Note: Data results in bold indicate that the state benchmark was not met. Data is reported in percentages.

Indicator 1 continued to be an issue for the school divisions included in this study. Only three school divisions met the state's benchmarks for the percentage of SWD graduating from high school with a regular diploma. Four school divisions failed to meet the benchmarks set by the state department of education for Indicator 13. This was an increase from the previous two school years. Indicator 14 data show that the number of SWD enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school continued to fall short of the stated benchmark. Six of the school divisions met the criteria for the

second section on Indicator 14. Ten school divisions met the benchmark for the third section of Indicator 14; this statistic was higher than both of the previous school years.

Observations

The discussions after the surveys were completed and returned provided additional insight into the transition practices in the school divisions. The survey participants surprised me when they unanimously agreed that additional services or classes should be offered. One particular statement that stood out was, "They try to make all kids fit into a little box. That has never worked." Equally surprising was this response to that statement, "But it is working. Look at the data." Several of the participants nodded or verbally affirmed this remark.

All of the transition coordinators shared that they were not equipped with the time or expertise to meet the many transition needs of the SWD in their schools without the support of others. They shared it was their responsibility to identify who and what support was needed. This topic led to statements of frustration concerning the lack of input from administrators and the lack of participation from community agencies. I observed the discussions without comment, but noted that the facial expressions and the tones of voice changed as the topics changed. The group spoke with pride about their specific programs and frustration when speaking about overall support. It appeared to be cathartic, as they were speaking collectively with a common audience.

Summary of Results

The major themes of consultation, professional development, collaboration, flexibility, and collegiate coursework emerged from the interview results in this qualitative study to answer the research questions. Participants were willing to share

their descriptions of their leadership styles and how they applied them to the transition practices in their schools and at the division level. The interview participants willingly described the steps they took to ensure that the transition mandates of the IDEA of 2004 were met. The interview data results indicate that the participants relied heavily on others for guidance or direction when working with SWD. The interview participants did not view transition as a distinct component of the IEP. Distributive leadership practices were utilized to ensure that the transition mandates outlined in IDEA 2004 were addressed.

The survey data revealed varied outcomes. The survey participants readily completed the survey instrument and suggested ideas for further training. Specific notations referenced the need for additional collegiate programs or training to be offered by local colleges and universities. The lack of collaboration among the school division, community agencies, and adult agencies was evident in the data results. The survey results indicated that the participants were satisfied with the transition services provided in their respective divisions.

The outcome data reviewed in the archived state indicator data were varied. Indicator 1 data revealed that the majority of the school divisions included in this study did not meet the state target rate for graduation in any of the three school years examined. Most of the school divisions met the criteria for Indicator 13 during the school years included in this study. Indicator 14 data yielded comparable outcomes. Further meaning is given to these results as they are interpreted through the contextual framework of distributed leadership in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This story began at a high school graduation in a rural area. It has continued through college and advanced study. The story grew as I taught and planned with SWD to enter the adult world. The story's plot thickened when I learned that my own son was diagnosed with Autism. This study provided an opportunity to delve into the inner workings of the transition process from the perspectives of various educational leaders.

Educational leadership has evolved to meet the changing culture of education. Distributed leadership provides opportunities for individuals or groups to utilize their skills and knowledge for the benefit of students. School leadership is built around the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situations with regard to leadership tasks. The framework of distributed or shared leadership is the lens through which the results of this study are analyzed and interpreted.

I incorporated purposeful selection and a snowball sampling technique to identify potential participants who met the criteria for this study. Themes emerging from the responses of the interview participants provided insight into the practices, techniques, and strategies applied in working with SWD and planning for postsecondary transition. The study responses helped the researcher develop the concept of distributed leadership to meet the directives of IDEA. The study results assist in understanding how educational leaders develop and use the strengths of others when working with issues involving SWD, specifically transition planning and service delivery.

Interpretations

I initiated this research by exploring how educational leaders ensured that the transition mandates of the IDEA of 2004 were being met and determining if the experience and knowledge of school leaders impacted the transition services and practices in their school divisions. The strongest theme to emerge from the data was consultation. The research surrounding the concept of distributive leadership supports this practice as a way of recognizing and utilizing the strengths of others. The survey participants comprised all of the participating members of a community of practice. This group functioned as a means of consulting with peers concerning transition practices and planning. It is exemplary because of the group's membership, the regular meetings, consistent attendance, and specific focus of the group. This type of group with these attributes does not exist in any other areas in the state. All of the interview participants readily named people with whom they regularly consulted when faced with issues involving special education. The participants identified a peer group, a teacher knowledgeable on the subject, or a division administrator with whom they could consult should they require guidance. Shasta, who had been a special education teacher before becoming an assistant principal, said,

> It would not be wise to make a decision without consulting an administrator or someone who is an expert. There is so much to know and one person cannot get it all. Even with me, being a special education teacher at heart, I have a list of people to contact when we are in the middle of something that I haven't dealt with in a while. Transition is one of those areas. Community agencies can come and go. I know the basics but can't stay abreast on all of the changes.

Professional development and the need for more training was a common theme appearing in the data. This component of distributive leadership supports the growth and development of team members. The survey participants listed areas in which additional

training opportunities would be of benefit. The outcome data found in the archive indicator reports revealed that most school divisions were competent in writing goals about transition services in IEPs that met the minimum requirements set by the state. Yet, the postsecondary outcomes evident in the Indicator 14 data were not as positive as might be expected. The indicator data suggest that more training, and perhaps collaboration with adult agencies, would improve postsecondary outcomes of SWD. Professional development and training would increase the knowledge and skills of educational leaders. Jimmie, who previously taught high school SWD and was at the time of the study a division-level instructional specialist, shared the following:

> It is very difficult to leave the classroom for an administrative position. They expect you to know everything immediately. Our assistant principals are scapegoats. Many of them had one, maybe two, special education classes. That barely scratches the surface. Professional development that goes beyond the basics is what we need. We are good at timelines, you know. It's the more intense training that is tied to the regulations that would be the most beneficial.

The researcher noted that Jimmie and Shasta were the only two interview participants who mentioned the regulations and were the only two participants who had taught SWD before becoming school or division leaders. This finding could be attributed to the participant's prior experience in special education in relation to the collegial group without such experience, but the comments were valuable and relevant to the overall results. It is relevant to note that this participant stressed the need for more specialized professional development rather than more classes at the preservice level.

The other three themes, collaboration, flexibility, and collegiate courses, evolved from the discussions surrounding consultation and professional development.

The data from this study indicate that the state and individual school divisions in the region included in this study had high expectations and standards for academics for

SWD. The survey and interview participants agreed that their divisions provided multiple transition activities and experiences. The data from the archive review of Indicator 13 support this finding. The study data indicate that all students had the same access to vocational or career education courses and that accommodations and modifications were available to SWD taking vocational or career educational classes. All of the school divisions in the region included in this study offered career and job readiness training. Formal assessment of career skills, instruction in job seeking, job coaching, and technology preparatory classes also were offered. This finding supports the revelation that 95.31% of the survey participants chose competitive employment as the main goal for SWD in the respective school divisions. Other goals included maximizing functional independence and helping the students to become contributing members of their communities.

The survey data revealed that collaboration was an important component in transition planning and that related services personnel, teachers of vocational education, and representatives of outside agencies, including vocational rehabilitation, were included in IEP meetings during which transition planning was to be discussed. Even though interagency linkages are an included mandate in IDEA, the data from the study revealed that involving adult service agencies in the planning process was not as prevalent as the involvement of school- or division-based personnel (IDEA, 2004). The data related to the accessibility of services and therapies as adults were similar. A review of the archive data helped to triangulate the survey and interview data to help answer the research questions.

The archive review revealed that none of the school divisions had met the state targets for all three indicators in any of the three school years in which data were reviewed for this study. Indicator 1 data revealed that 18.18% (n = 2) of the school divisions included in this study met the state target in the 2010-2011 school year, 27.27% of those divisions met the target for the 2011-2012 school year, and 20% of those school divisions met the state target in 2012-2012. The data for Indicator 13, which measures the compliance of the individual education plan, was the most positive of the three indicators for both school years. Only one school division failed to meet the state target of 100% compliance in the 2010-2011 school year; all of the other divisions met the state target for that year.

Conclusion

The researcher used multiple sources of evidence to address the research questions posed in this study. The data triangulation provided multiple sources of evidence to produce more accurate and convincing outcomes (Yin, 2014). Interview responses and survey data collected in the study revealed that some school leaders lacked knowledge of the transition mandates, thereby making it difficult for them to ensure compliance. The school leaders employed distributive leadership practices to overcome this deficit. They relied of the strengths of their teachers and staff to bridge the gap of knowledge or experience. The participants with experience in the special education field had the most knowledge in the area of transition and were more confident in their knowledge of the mandates, but they still tended to seek advice or guidance to confirm what was required or needed in specific situations. All of the data suggest that school leaders were competent in basic compliance, such as timelines and required components

in IEPs. The data suggest that educational leadership includes the distribution of roles in planning for the postsecondary transition of SWD. Distributed leadership, the conceptual framework for this study, was evident in the interview and survey data. The educational leaders who were interviewed readily relied on other staff member with specialized knowledge when planning for the transition of SWD. The survey and interview data revealed a collaborative approach for the delivery of transition services and the development of transition plans.

The most prominent finding from this study was the need for more specific professional development and training. The data from Indicator 1, which measures the graduation rate for SWD, and Indicator 14, which encompasses the postsecondary outcome data for SWD, suggest that the transition services provided by the school divisions (Indicator 13) were not sufficient to produce the anticipated output measured by Indicators 1 and 14. The data from the study revealed that the school divisions were flexible in their service delivery and provided multiple experiences and opportunities for transition services and planning. Interagency linkages represented the weakest point in the transition continuum.

The efforts of state and local leaders will be required to further bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary environments. The responsibility for successful transition cannot rely on one entity. State outcome data support the need for collaboration between adult service agencies and school divisions. The results of this study support the need for further education and training to empower school leaders with the knowledge of what is needed to promote a successful transition for SWD.

Recommendations

The findings of this study led the researcher to develop the following recommendations:

1. School leaders, who are tasked with ensuring that all components of mandates, such as those of the IDEA of 2004, are met, should be given intensive training regarding all of the components for which they are responsible so they can fully understand the expectations. This recommendation mirrors that of Monteith (2000) and Valesky and Hirth (1992). This training will allow for better collaboration with other team members, who have extensive knowledge in special education and transition and use the distributive leadership model.
2. A greater coordination of efforts between school divisions and adult/community agencies should occur to address the needs of all students who will, with the proper services, be contributing members of the community. This is supported by the work of Zhang, Katsiyannis, and Ivestor (2005), whose research findings revealed that job coaches, adult agencies, and mental health agencies are the least involved in transition planning. More involvement from these groups can be fostered through a community of practice similar to the one utilized by the survey participants in this study.
3. Local governments in the region included in this study should work with adult agencies to stress the importance of the coordination of efforts prior to a student with disability's exit from secondary school. This coordination of efforts would eliminate a gap in services and would lead to students' being

acclimated to the adult world faster and easier than they are presently. Interagency involvement and job development benefits the SWD, if it is addressed while the student is still in the secondary setting (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009).

4. Further study should be conducted regarding how budgeting impacts the ability to provide meaningful professional development and transition opportunities at the local level. This recommendation is based on my initial observations of the communities, the response from an interview participant, and the discussions of the survey participants. Budget impacts were not within the scope of this specific study.

Limitations

This study was limited to the school divisions ($N = 11$) in the coastal region of a South Atlantic state. The information gained is specific to that region and cannot be generalized to the broader population. The researcher is a member of the community of practice and has associated with many of the other members for several years. A collegial and collaborative relationship is shared among the group. The researcher did not participate in the survey and did not include identifying information on the documents, as they were collected to avoid bias. The participants were advised that their information was confidential and would not be identifiable in any documentation resulting from the study. These precautions support the dependability of the data.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study are evidence of the current state of transition services for SWD. The implications for state educational leaders were apparent as themes emerged.

The importance and need for relevant and intensive training were revealed in the results from interviews and surveys and strengthened by an analysis of state outcome data measuring the graduation rate and postsecondary outcomes for SWD. The state and federal departments of education are shifting the emphasis from compliance to progress and outcomes. The United States Department of Education previously focused on "procedural requirements such as timelines for student evaluations, due process hearings and transitioning children into preschool services" (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). The new accountability model is based on results and includes the participation of SWD to ensure they are prepared for further education, employment, and productive lives (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). The change in focus is supported by the data collected in this study. The need for continued support in the development and identification of resources, collaboration with adult agencies, and postsecondary employment and education facilities remains on the agenda for postsecondary planning and service delivery.

The implications surrounding the benefits of distributive leadership in the field of special education emerged from the study. Distributive leadership allows for more collaboration among all team members. Another benefit to distributive leadership is that all staff members do not require specialized knowledge of special education service delivery or transition mandates. Distributive leadership allows for a broader definition of educational leadership where each member of the team contributes a specific skill set to the process.

Summary

This story will continue to develop and grow as new practices are implemented and as additional skills and needs are identified. School leaders play an important role in the development of this journey. The importance of consultation and collaboration when working through the transition process includes consultation and collaboration with adult and community agencies. The school leaders identified flexibility as paramount in planning or providing services and opportunities. All of these are elements that support the success of the main characters, SWD.

Educational leaders must utilize available resources, including the skills and knowledge of others, to meet the mandates of the many legislative mandates and expectations (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). According to the results of this study, school leaders in the divisions were resourceful, and at times, ingenious. They recognized the need for more consultation, collaboration, and training. Beth, an interview participant with 18 years of experience as a school administrator, summarized the study perfectly when she stated, "It takes a village to raise a child."

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Appendix A

Introductory Letter to Participants

Dear Educator:

Coordinating transition services in a school division can be difficult with regard to identifying and planning for the individual transition needs of students with disabilities. Marianne Moore, the Transition Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Education, has identified you as the transition coordinator for your school district. I am conducting a study as part of the requirements of the doctoral program in educational administration and policy studies at The George Washington University. This research is designed to identify and compare the coordinated sets of activities divisions are using to meet the transition requirements mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. As do the state indicators, the survey will address specific questions to collect information on local practices in hopes of gaining a deeper knowledge of what is being done in our region to meet the stringent requirements of the law. Even more importantly, I hope to add to the related knowledge base so that we can better plan for the transition of our youth with disabilities. The final document will be available as a resource for all transition coordinators in your state.

Your participation is vitally important. The entire survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be completely confidential, and no information will be reported that identifies you or your division.

If you have questions about the study, survey, or research, please call me at 757-898-0459 or e-mail me at akmeade@gwu.edu. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Angela Meade, Ed.S.
Instructional Specialist/ Transition Coordinator

Appendix B

Second Letter to Participants

Dear Educator:

Last month you received an e-mail request for you to participate in a survey. The information obtained from this survey will be available as a resource for all transition coordinators in Virginia. This research is designed to identify and compare the coordinated sets of activities divisions are using to meet the transition requirements mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. As do the state indicators, the survey addresses specific questions to collect information on local practices in hopes of gaining a deeper knowledge of what is being done in our region to meet the stringent requirements of the law. Even more importantly, I hope to add to the related knowledge base so that we can better plan for the transition of our youth with disabilities. The final document will be available as a resource for all transition coordinators in your state.

Your participation is extremely important. Please take 15 minutes to complete and submit this survey. Your answers will be completely confidential, and no information will be reported that identifies you or your division.

If you have questions about the study, survey, or research, please call me at 757-898-0459 or e-mail me at ameade@ycsd.york.va.us. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,
Angela Meade, Ed.S.
Instructional Specialist/Transition Coordinator

Appendix C

Survey on Transition Practices

A. CAREER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND SERVICES

This section refers to the vocational or career education offered to students with disabilities in your school division. Vocational education may be part of another class or program, such as special education.

A1. Is/Are vocational education and/or applied academic classes a regular course offering for students with disabilities (e.g., career planning, prevocational, occupational skills, business, computer technology, industrial arts, some home economics classes)?

1. ☐Yes 2. ☐No

A2. Which of the following supports, if any, are provided to vocational education teachers to meet the needs of students with special needs? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.*

1. ☐Special equipment or materials to use with the student
2. ☐Inservice training on the needs of this student
3. ☐Coteaching/team teaching with special education and general education teachers
4. ☐Consultation services by special education or other staff
5. ☐Teacher aide or aide for this student
6. ☐Smaller student load or class size
7. ☐Information on the student's abilities or needs
8. ☐None of the above provided
9. ☐None of these needed

10. ☐Other:

A3. For each factor listed below, how do the transition-related experiences of students with disabilities compare with those of other students? *PLEASE CHECK ONE.*

1. Curriculum/Subject matter

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

2. Instructional materials used (e.g., text books, computers, tools)

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

3. Class activities (e.g., hands-on work, projects, field trips)

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

4. Instructional groupings (e.g., small group, partners, individual)

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

5. Grading standards

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

6. Testing and assessment methods

   ☐Same ☐Somewhat different ☐ ☐Very Different

Comments: ☐

A4. Are students with disabilities expected to keep up with the other students in this class (with any modifications or accommodations)?

1. ☐Yes 2. ☐No

A5. What percentage of students with special needs participate in the activities below (please do not include after-school employment)? *PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE.*

1. School-sponsored work experience on the school campus only

☐None ☐1-24% ☐25-49% ☐50-74% ☐75-100%

2. School-sponsored work experience off school campus only

☐None ☐1-24% ☐25-49% ☐50-74% ☐75-100%

3. Both school-sponsored work experience on and off school campus

☐None ☐1-24% ☐25-49% ☐50-74% ☐75-100%

A6. Which of the following classes or services are provided from or through the school system for students with disabilities? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.*

1. ☐A formal assessment of career skills or interests
2. ☐Career counseling
3. ☐Specific job skills training
4. ☐Job readiness or prevocational training
5. ☐Referrals to potential employers, other job placement support
6. ☐Instruction in looking for jobs
7. ☐Job shadowing, work exploration
8. ☐Job coach (e.g., staff who work with employer to modify jobs and monitor performance on the job)
9. ☐Internship, apprenticeship
10. ☐Tech-prep program
11. ☐Entrepreneurship program
12. ☐Other work experience (paid or unpaid)
13. ☐None of these

A7. Which disabilities are represented in the high school population of your school division? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY*

1. ☐ Autism
2. ☐ Deafness
3. ☐ Deafness-Blindness
4. ☐ Emotional disability
5. ☐ Hearing impairment
6. ☐ Intellectual disability
7. ☐ Multiple disabilities
8. ☐ Other health impairment
9. ☐ Orthopedic impairment
10. ☐ Specific learning disability
11. ☐ Speech--language impairment
12. ☐ Traumatic brain injury
13. ☐ Visual impairment including blindness

B. TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE

This section refers to the transition activities and planning that occur within the high schools for students in your division.

B1. At what age or grade level is transition planning *typically* first implemented for students with disabilities in your division?

☐ Age OR ☐ Grade level

B2. Is specialized transition training a regular part of the curriculum of students with disabilities (e.g., a specialized curriculum designed to help students assess options

and develop strategies for leaving secondary school and transitioning to adult life)?

1. ☐Yes 2. ☐No

B3. For the period following high school, the primary goal of the educational program of my division's students' with disabilities is to prepare them to: *PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE.*

1. ☐Attend a 2- or 4-year college
2. ☐Attend a postsecondary vocational training program
3. ☐Obtain competitive employment (includes military)
4. ☐Obtain sheltered employment (where most employees have disabilities)
5. ☐Obtain supported employment (paid employment in a community setting for those individuals needing continuous support services and for whom competitive employment is unlikely)
6. ☐Live independently
7. ☐Maximize functional independence
8. ☐Enhance social/interpersonal relationships and satisfaction
9. ☐Other (please describe):

B4. Do the IEPs of high school students with disabilities specifically state what course of study or kinds of classes the students should pursue to meet their postsecondary transition goals? 1. ☐Yes 2. ☐No

B5. Is progress toward transition goals reported as often as progress toward academic goals? 1. ☐Yes 2. ☐No

B6. How well do you believe your division's transition program prepares students with disabilities to achieve their transition goals? *PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE*

1. ☐ Not at all; the transition program does not prepare students to achieve transition goals.
2. ☐ Somewhat; the transition program provides a little preparation for achieving transition goals.
3. ☐ Fairly well; the transition program prepares students fairly well to achieve transition goals.
4. ☐ Very well; the transition program provides very good preparation for achieving transition goals.

Comments: ☐

B7. Who are most often active participants in transition planning (e.g., involved in discussions concerning services or goals)? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.*

1. ☐ General education academic subject teacher(s)

2. ☐ General education vocational teacher(s) or work study coordinator

3. ☐ Special education teacher(s)

4. ☐ School administrators (e.g., principal, special education director)

5. ☐ School counselor or psychologist

6. ☐ Related services personnel (e.g., speech pathologist, occupational therapist)

7. ☐ Parent/Guardian

8. ☐ Student

9. ☐ Vocational Rehabilitation Agency counselor

10. ☐ Staff of the Social Security Administration

11. ☐ Staff of other outside service agency or outside consultant (e.g., employment service, mental health service; please specify):

12. ☐ Employer

13. ☐ Representative of postsecondary education institution

14. ☐ Advocate

15. ☐ Other:

B8. Which of the following best describes the role of the students in your division in their own transition planning? *PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE.*

1. ☐ Students do not typically attend planning meetings or participate in the transition planning process.
2. ☐ Students are typically present in discussions of transition planning but participate very little or not at all.
3. ☐ Students provide some input into transition planning as moderately active participants.
4. ☐ Students typically take a leadership role in the transition planning process, helping set the direction of discussions, goals, and programs or service needs identified.

B9. Which of the following have been contacted by the school or school system regarding programs or employment for students with disabilities when they leave high school? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.*

1. ☐ Colleges (2 or 4 year)
2. ☐ Postsecondary vocational schools
3. ☐ State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

4. ☐ Other vocational training programs

5. ☐ U.S. military

6. ☐ Potential employers

7. ☐ Job placement programs or agencies

8. ☐ Supported employment programs

9. ☐ Sheltered workshops

10. ☐ Mental health agencies

11. ☐ Social Security Administration

12. ☐ Supervised residential support agencies

13. ☐ Adult day programs

14. ☐ Other social service agencies

15. ☐ Congregate care facilities or institutions

16. ☐ Other agencies: ☐

B10. Is information about adult services available typically provided to parents/guardians from or through the school system?

1. ☐ Yes 2. ☐ No

B11. What community services or programs are accessible to students with disabilities after high school as part of a transition plan? *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.*

1. ☐ Speech or communication therapy or services

2. ☐ Educational accommodations

3. ☐ Audiology

4. ☐ Supported living arrangement

5. ☐ Behavioral intervention
6. ☐ Transportation assistance
7. ☐ Mental health services
8. ☐ Vision services
9. ☐ Mobility training
10. ☐ Nursing or other medical services
11. ☐ Vocational training, placement, or support
12. ☐ Occupational therapy
13. ☐ Physical therapy
14. ☐ Social work services
15. ☐ Other:
16. ☐ None of these

C. Demographics

This section refers to your role in your specific school division and division demographics.

C1. In what capacity are you involved with students?

PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

1. ☐ Provide instruction directly to students with disabilities
2. ☐ Provide consultation services to teacher(s)
3. ☐ Provide case management (e.g., program monitoring) for students with disabilities
4. ☐ Program administrator/supervisor

5. ☐ Supervise assistants/para educators assigned to work with students with disabilities
6. ☐ Other:

C22. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. *PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE.*

1. The division leadership has high expectations and standards for academic and personal success of students with disabilities.

   ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

2. The division supports transition planning for students with disabilities.

   ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

3. This division provides multiple transition activities and experiences for students with disabilities.

   ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

4. I feel well prepared to work with students with disabilities in transition planning.

   ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

C4. How many students with disabilities in Grades 7 through 12 receive special education services in your division?

1. ☐ More than a 1000 in Grades 7 through 12
2. ☐ 500 to 999 in Grades 7 through 12
3. ☐ 300 to 499 in Grades 7 through 12
4. ☐ 1 to 299 in Grades 7 through 12

C5. How many cumulative years have you served as a transition coordinator?

1. ☐ More than 10
2. ☐ 7- 9
3. ☐ 3-6
4. ☐ 0-2

C6. Please list any additional training that you need to help address the transition needs of students in your division.

1.

2.

THANK YOU AGAIN! Please be assured that your information will be kept confidential. Please submit your survey within one week. If you have any questions, please send them to ameade@ycsd.york.va.us or call 757-898-0459

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

The researcher will interview at least 10 educational administrators in the region included in this study who are responsible for ensuring that the IDEA 2004 transition mandates are met. The researcher will begin with the following questions allowing for a fluid discussion and deviation as warranted by the topic. The questions will include the following:

1. Explain your path to your current leadership position.
2. Tell me about your leadership style.
3. Describe your school's (or school division's) model for postsecondary transition.
4. What steps do you take to ensure that the transition mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 are met?
5. Do you feel confident in your knowledge and understanding of the IDEA?
    a. If so, what has helped you gain the knowledge and understanding?
    b. If not, what would help you gain more knowledge and understanding?
6. Who are the key participants in planning for the postsecondary transition of students with disabilities in your school or division?
    a. Is there one person or a group of people who have more of a leadership role in this process than others? Please explain.
    b. How does your school involve community agencies in the planning or service? Please explain.

Appendix E

Question Distribution

Career and Vocational Education

- Is/are vocational education and/or applied academic classes a regular course offering for students with disabilities (e.g., career planning, prevocational, occupational skills, business, computer technology, industrial arts, some home economics classes)?
- Which of the following supports, if any, are provided to vocational education teachers to meet the needs of students with special needs?
- For each factor listed below, how do the transition-related experiences of students with disabilities compare with those of other students?
- Are students with disabilities expected to keep up with the other students in this class (with any modifications or accommodations)?
- What percentage of students with special needs participate in the activities below (please do not include after-school employment)?
- Which of the following classes or services are provided from or through the school system for students with disabilities?
- Which disabilities are represented in the high school population of your school division?

Transition to Adult Life

- At what age or grade level is transition planning *typically* first implemented for students with disabilities in your division?
- Is specialized transition training a regular part of the curriculum of students with disabilities (e.g., a specialized curriculum designed to help students assess options and develop strategies for leaving secondary school and transitioning to adult life)?
- For the period following high school, the primary goal of the educational program for my division's students' with disabilities is to prepare them to… *PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY*
  - ☐ Attend a 2- or 4-year college
  - ☐ Attend a postsecondary vocational training program
  - ☐ Obtain competitive employment (includes military)
  - ☐ Get into sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities)
  - ☐ Get supported employment (paid work in a community setting for those needing continuous support services and for whom competitive employment is unlikely)
  - ☐ Live independently
  - ☐ Maximize functional independence
  - ☐ Enhance social/interpersonal relationships and satisfaction
  - ☐ Other (please describe):

- Do the IEPs of high school students with disabilities specifically state what course of study or kinds of classes the students should pursue to meet their postsecondary transition goals?
- Is progress toward transition goals reported as often as progress toward academic goals?
- How well do you believe your division's transition program prepares students with disabilities achieve his or her transition goals?
- Who most often are active participants in transition planning (e.g., involved in discussions on choosing services or goals)?
- Which of the following best describes the students in your division's role in their transition planning?
- Which of the following have been contacted by the school or school system regarding programs or employment for students with disabilities when they leave high school?
- Is information about adult services available typically provided to parents/guardians from or through the school system?
- What community services or programs are accessible to students with disabilities after high school as a part of a transition plan?

Demographics

- In what capacity are you involved with students?
- Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
- The division leadership has high expectations and standards for academic and personal success of students with disabilities.
  ☐Strongly disagree ☐ ☐Agree ☐Strongly agree
- The division supports transition planning for students with disabilities.
  ☐Strongly disagree ☐ ☐Agree ☐Strongly agree
- This division provides multiple transition activities and experiences for students with disabilities.
  ☐Strongly disagree ☐ ☐Agree ☐Strongly agree
- I feel well prepared to work with students with disabilities in transition planning.
  ☐Strongly disagree ☐ ☐Agree ☐Strongly agree
- How many students with disabilities in Grades 7 through 12 receive special education services in your division?
- How many cumulative years have you served as a transition coordinator?
- Please list any additional training that you need to help address the transition needs of students in your division.

Appendix F

Indicator 13 Checklist Questions

Percentage of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age-appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority.

1. Is there evidence that the student was invited to attend the IEP Team meeting

   a. if the student has reached the age of majority? ___yes ___no ___n/a

   b. if a purpose of the meeting is the consideration of postsecondary goals and transition services? ___yes ___no

2. If a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting, is there evidence that the LEA obtained prior written consent of the parent/guardian or student who has reached the age of majority?
   ___yes ___no ___n/a

3. Are there measurable postsecondary goals relating to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills that are annually updated? ___yes ___no

   Note: Check YES only when:
   - goals are measureable,
   - goals are written to be met after secondary school,
   - goals are appropriate for the student based on transition assessment, information found in the Present Level of Performance (PLoP) and other components of the IEP, and
   - goals are related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate independent living.

4. Are the postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessment related to training, (Is the numbering correct here?)
5. education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills?
   ___yes ___no

Note: Check YES only when:
-there is documentation of age-appropriate transition assessment,
-the assessment relates to training, education, employment and where appropriate independent living, and
-the postsecondary goals have some relationship to the age appropriate transition assessment.

6. Are appropriate measurable postsecondary goals updated at least annually?

___yes ___no

Note: Check YES only when there is evidence that the IEP is reviewed/updated annually and as part of the IEP, postsecondary goals are reviewed/updated annually.

7. Does the IEP include annual goals related to the student's transition service needs?

___yes ___no

Note: Check YES only when you can determine that the annual goals and activities relate to the student's transition services needs and promote movement toward postsecondary goals.

8. Are the transition services, including the courses of study, focused on improving the academic achievement and functional performance of the student to facilitate movement from school to postschool activities?

___yes ___no

NOTE: Check YES when you can determine that the services, including courses of study, are likely to improve achievement and performance moving the student toward postschool activities.

Appendix G

Indicator 14 Survey Questions

Demographic Information
Each of the following fields is required.

1. Student's PRIMARY special education disability category in school records:

Autism
Child with a disability
Deafness/blindness
Emotional disability
Hearing impairment
Intellectual disability
Multiple disabilities
Orthopedic impairment
Other health impairment
Specific learning disability
Speech or language impairment
Traumatic brain injury
Visual impairment

2. Gender in school records:

Female
Male

3. Ethnicity in school records:

American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian
Black or African American
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Hispanic/Latino
White (not Hispanic)
Two or more races
Unspecified

4. Is the student identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) in school records?

Yes
No
Information is not available / Don't know

5. Manner in which student exited school:

Graduated with an advanced studies diploma
Graduated with a standard diploma
Graduated with a modified standard diploma
Graduated with a special diploma
General Education Development (GED)
Certificate of Program Completion
Exceeded the age of eligibility
Dropped out
General Achievement Diploma (GAD)
Diploma authorized by Local School Board

6. During high school, was the student referred to any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

VA Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)
VA Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)
VA Department of Social Services (DSS)
Centers for Independent Living (CILS, ILC, RIL)
Community Services Board (CSB)
Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)
PERT (Postsecondary Education Rehab Transition) Program
Social Security Administration (SSA)
Virginia Workforce Center
Not referred to any agency
Other (please specify):
Don't know

Please choose from one of the following three options:

1. If any of the following statements is true regarding this student, please click the radio button next to that statement and then click the **close (student's name) file** button below:

Student is deceased
Student is incarcerated
Student declined to be interviewed
Family member declined to be interviewed
Unable to reach student and family after 4 attempts
Contact information is incorrect

If you would like to proceed to the Indicator #14 survey for (student's name), please press the following button:

Proceed to Indicator #14 Survey | Proceed to Indicator #14 Survey

If you would like to return to the main menu to enter another student's information or perform another task, please press the following button:

> **Indicator #14:** Percentage of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were
> A. Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school.
> B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school.
> C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.
> (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B))

2. Whom did you interview for the survey?

Former student
Parent or guardian
Relative
Teacher or school staff
(Adult) service provider

Completed by all Respondents

1. Which classes did you take in high school that you found to be most helpful? (Check all that apply.)

   Math
   Science
   English
   Foreign language
   Vocational/technical classes
   Computer classes
   Education for employment
   History
   Other:

2. Which classes in high school do you wish you had taken that would be helpful to you now? (Check all that apply.)

   Math
   Science
   English
   Foreign language
   Vocational/technical classes

Computer classes
Education for employment
History
Other:

3. Since leaving high school have you received services, or are you currently receiving services, from any of the following agencies? (Check all that apply.)

VA Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)
VA Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)
VA Department of Social Services (DSS)
Centers for Independent Living (CILS, ILC, RIL)
Community Services Boards (CSB)
Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)
PERT (Postsecondary Education Rehab Transition) Program
Social Security Administration (SSA)
Virginia Workforce Center
Other:
Have not received and am not currently receiving any services
Don't know
Declined to answer

4. How satisfied with your life are you at the present time?

Not satisfied at all
Somewhat unsatisfied
Neutral
Somewhat satisfied
Very satisfied
Don't know

Higher Education or Postsecondary Education or Training Programs

5. Since leaving high school, have you ever been enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college?

NOTE: Higher education is defined as a 2- or 4-year degree program provided by a community or technical college (2 year) and/or college/university (4- or more-year program).

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

6. Did you finish an entire semester?

Note: Enrollment should be continuous for one complete term, including semester, quarter, summer, between semester "inter-terms," online course, or credit bearing independent study.

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

7. Are you or were you enrolled?

Full time (12 credit hours or more)
Part time (11 credits hours or fewer)
Remedial Classes
Noncredit classes
Don't know
Declined to answer

8. Since leaving high school, have you ever been enrolled in any of the following postsecondary education or training programs?

Adult/Continuing education
High school completion document or certificate (Adult Basic Education, GED)
Employer-based sponsored training (apprentice)
Short-term education or employment training program (WIA, Job Corps, WWRC, etc.)
Vocational technical school—less than a 2-year program
Peace Corps, VISTA or AmeriCorps
Day support/Prevocational program
Compensatory education programs
No participation in any postsecondary education or training program
Don't know
Declined to answer

9. Did you finish an entire semester?

NOTE: Enrollment should be continuous for one complete term, including semester, quarter, summer, between semester "inter-terms," online course, or credit bearing independent study. In addition, completion of a semester of an "other postsecondary education or training" can include short-term education and training programs (e.g., 10-week welding class, months-long resume writing). Any formal program that contains a formal application/approval process that is at least in part skill building and experience building qualifies as "other postsecondary or training".

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

10. Are you or were you enrolled full time or part time?

Full time
Part time
Don't know
Declined to answer

Employment

1. Since leaving high school have you been employed in:

One job with the same employer?
Multiple jobs (one or more different employers)?
Not employed since leaving high school?

2. Have you worked at least a total of 90 days (3 months) in the job or jobs that you have held?

Note: The 90 days do not need to be in a row, but the total days at one or more jobs are 90.

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

3. In the job or jobs that you worked, did you **typically work 20 hours or more per week?**

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

Note: An individual working 20 hours or more a week is defined as (a) working at least 20 hours a week for 90 cumulative days, (b) 20 hours **or** more a week for 90 cumulative days, or (c) **an average** of 20 hours a week for 90 cumulative days.

4. In the job or jobs that you worked, were you paid at least minimum wage ($7.25) or above?

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

5. Did the job or jobs provide you with benefits (for example, health insurance, vacation, or sick leave)?

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

6. Describe the type of employment setting where you currently work or worked.

in a business or company
in the military
in sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities)
in supported employment

Define this term:
self-employed
family business (e.g., farm, store, fishing, ranching, catering)
Don't know
Declined to answer

7. Who helped you the most in finding your job or jobs?

Division of Rehabilitative Services counselor
Friend
Parent/Relative
School personnel (teacher, transition coordinator, job coach)
Community program/agency (Virginia Employment Commission, Workforce Development Center, Job Corps)
Found job on your own
Don't know
Declined to answer

Questions for respondents who have never been employed and who have never been enrolled in postsecondary education, or training programs.

8. If you have never been employed, do you want to work?

Yes
No

Don't know
Declined to answer

9. Have you attempted to find a job since leaving high school?

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

10. If you have never been employed, what do you think makes it difficult for you to get a job? (Check all that apply.)

No transportation available
Lack of jobs in my area
No one to help me find a job
Lack of training programs
Don't want to lose Social Security benefits
Not able to work because of health
Lack of support services (personal assistance services, assistive technology)
Lack of affordable child care
Waiting list for services too long

11. If you have never been in postsecondary education or other training programs, do you want to be enrolled?

Yes
No
Don't know
Declined to answer

14. If you answered *no* to question 21 above, please indicate why:

Never interested in pursuing postsecondary education
Changed my mind since leaving high school

15. If you have never been in postsecondary education or other training programs, what makes it difficult for you to participate in these programs? (Check all that apply.)

Lack of financial support
No transportation available
Lack of programs in my geographic area
Not able to attend because of health
Lack of support services (personal assistance services, academic support services, assistive technology)

Lack of affordable childcare

16. Are you a full-time homemaker?

Yes
No

Appendix H

Informed Consent

Educational Leaders Preparing Student with Disabilities for Postsecondary Endeavors in the Coastal Region of a South Atlantic State: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Linda Lemasters, The George Washington University
Subinvestigator: Angela Meade, Phone 757-899-0459

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Angela Meade under the direction of Dr. Linda Lemasters. You are being asked if you want to take part in this study because you have met the following criteria: (a) identified as an educational leader in your school or school division, (b) are employed by a secondary school in the region, and (c) are responsible for the supervision and/or delivery of special educational services for students with disabilities. Please read this form and ask any questions that will help you decide if you want to be in the study.

- Taking part is completely voluntary and even if you decide to participant, you can stop at any time.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine how educational leaders are ensuring that the IDEA transition mandates are met and to identify postsecondary transition practices and services evident in the region.

PROCEDURES: The total amount of time you will spend in this study is approximately 30-45 minutes either in a one-on-one interview or completing a survey either in electronic or paper format. The interviews will be audio taped. All interview participants will be given a written transcript of the interview responses to check for accuracy and add any details (approximately 15-30 minutes duration).

RISKS AND CONFIDENTIALITY: There is minimal risk involved in your participation in this study. You are free to disclose only information that you wish. You are free to skip any questions that may be posed that make you uncomfortable. There is a slight chance that someone not involved in this research study could find out that you took part in the study or somehow connect your name with the information we collect about you; however, the following steps are being taken to reduce that risk: Data will be locked and protected at all times throughout the process.

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any published articles or presentations, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.
- Your records for the study may be reviewed by departments of The George Washington University responsible for overseeing research safety and compliance.

BENEFITS: Taking part in this research may help you better understand the transition mandates of IDEA, give you a better idea of how those mandates are being met in the region, provide ideas of how to enhance the services in your school or school division.

QUESTIONS: Contact the researcher if you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think you have been harmed. You can contact the principal investigator listed on the front of this form at 252-333-6393. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in human research, call the GWU Office of Human Research at 202-994-2715.

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT: If you agree to take part in this study, please sign below:

_____

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Participant Signature **Date**

After you sign this consent form, the researcher will provide you with a copy. Please keep it in case you want to read it again or call someone about the study.