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Perceptions of High School Counselors Involvement in the Provision of Postsecondary Transition Services to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

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Perceptions of High School Counselors Involvement in the Provision of Postsecondary
Transition Services to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of High School Counselors Involvement in the Provision of Postsecondary Transition Services to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

by

Diana Joy Hudson

This qualitative study examined high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Seven high school counselors in the Unnamed County Schools were interviewed to examine their perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Categories that involved school counselor's perceptions of the provision of postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities emerged from the data. These themes were as follows: 1) plan of study for postsecondary goals based on vocational assessments, 2) assistance provided to prepare for college or work, 3) duties of counselors and involvement in the transition process, and 4) the IEP team, postsecondary goals, and self-advocacy of accommodation needs. There was also an area of other findings that was noted but was not identified as a theme. This other findings involved a participant's postsecondary personal vocational experience.

Participants reported transition assessments that were administered to students with learning disabilities to determine career interests and strengths. Participants also discussed how transition services were included in the plan of study and career goals. Participants indicated that the School-to-Work program has helped students with learning disabilities work within the city and gain experiences in their area of interest.

Additionally, participants suggested that students with learning disabilities have attended

Career Technology Education (CTE) classes that provided a strong connection with the community and businesses. Participants spoke about their depth of knowledge on courses, scheduling, colleges' admission standards, and the employment process for all students. Participants also indicated that they have supplied information for the postsecondary transition service plans for students with disabilities at IEP meetings. Findings from this study may have encouraged high school counselors to expand their practice and perform at an enhanced level when helping students with special needs go to college, get a job, and succeed in life.

DEDICATION

I want to thank God for giving me the strength and endurance to achieve my goal. God has truly blessed me. Additionally, this dissertation is dedicated to the following special people in my life:

To my parents Walter (Sam) and Lillie Lovelady, I know both have left this earth but the memories will live on forever. My parents' love and support have brought me to this point in my life. My mother told me several times to get as much education as possible because it cannot be taken away from me. I truly miss my parents, and I still love them both very much.

To my husband Charles E. Hudson who supported me during this entire process, I am so blessed to have you in my life. Thanks so much for your love, encouragement, and prayers. I love you so much.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School counselors offer academic advisement, career development, and a variety of other services that support all students on a daily basis as a way to help students maximize their potential. Brolin and Gysbers (1989) indicated that school counselors have provided individual counseling services to students with disabilities. Additionally, Brolin and Gysbers reported that school counselors have been required to possess competencies to help students with disabilities in the following areas: administer career assessments, make referrals to community resources, advocate for students with special needs, help with development of individual education programs, consult with parents about students' careers, and assist with job opportunities. Dimmitt and Carey (2007) indicated that high school counselors have demanding jobs assisting students in decision making for postsecondary schools and career choices. School counselors have helped general education students transition from high school into the workforce or college as well as provided services to students with learning disabilities (Studer & Quigney, 2003). Tarver-Behring, Spagna, and Sullivan (1998) indicated that students with learning disabilities needed school counselor's help more than general education students because they have specific issues that require immediate attention. Transition services for students with specific learning disabilities have focused on a coordinated set of activities intended for an outcome-oriented process that emphasized postsecondary education, employment, and independent living skills (IDEA, 2004, Section 300). Castellanos and Septeowski (2004) indicated that high school counselors have assisted students who have disabilities, with self-exploration, because they often

have unattainable aspirations or erroneous perceptions about job duties and how to be prepared for employment. Castellanos and Septeowski (2004) indicated the importance for counselors to have the capacity to give realistic assessments of students' competencies, concerns, and future goals. School counselors have an obligation to help students with learning disabilities within their areas of limitations, assist them with awareness of self, and coach them to advocate for their needs.

School counselors were noted as professionals in counseling. In addition, school counselors have collaborated with special education teachers to help students with disabilities improve their awareness and be more knowledgeable of their disabilities (Milsom & Hartley, 2005).

The school counselor's involvement with the transition service process has been vastly beneficial to students with specific learning disabilities. Milsom, Goodnough, and Akos (2007) reported that the Individual Education Program (IEP) team needed participation from school counselors because other team members could possibly overlook opportunities for students with disabilities to access systems of higher education. Milsom et al. (2007) indicated that even though transition service was one of the primary roles of school counselors in working with students with disabilities in practice this has not always been the case. Durodoye, Combes, and Bryant (2004) indicated school counselors have consulted students with disabilities on personal issues and social problems as well as academic advisement. These areas of concern were a vital part of the transition service plan process that has impacted the students' educational and future career choices. Additionally, in the transition process for students with specific learning disabilities, high school counselors have provided services in career

development competencies, assisted students with development of self-determination and advocacy skills, connected them with outside agencies, and helped students explore postsecondary opportunities. House and Martin (1998) indicated that school counselors were critical to a school system because they have an impact on academic placement and postsecondary opportunities of all students. These contributions to students with specific learning disabilities in the postsecondary transition process were beneficial, valuable, and instrumental. However, the lack of assistance from high school counselors hinders the transition process for students with specific learning disabilities. This study focused on the perceptions of high school counselors in schools in an Unnamed County system concerning postsecondary transition services for students with specific learning disabilities.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the study was to examine high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) indicated that federal legislation mandated that students with disabilities have postsecondary goals and outcomes indicated in their Individual Education Program (IEP) plans by age 14. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) were mandated by federal legislation from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476) to provide planned transition services. The transition service plan should have steps that were delineated in the students IEPs for postsecondary outcomes. This law also indicated that transition involved "...a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training and

integrated employment” (Savage, 2005, p. 43). School counselors have a depth of knowledge and understanding of postsecondary colleges and the employment process for all students. Additionally, school counselors have supplied an enormous amount of information and data into the transition service plans for students with disabilities, when they have participated in IEP meetings (West & Taymans, 1998). Educators and support staff have been encouraged to collaborate with the development of curriculum and instruction in self-determination and advocacy skills for all students. Self-determination skills were needed to help students with disabilities take responsibility for their own goals and self-regulation of their behavior (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). Additionally, self-advocacy skills allowed students with learning disabilities to self-advocate their needs, have knowledge of their strengths and limitations, and understanding of their disability and rights (Hadley, 2006).

Research Questions

The following research questions used in this qualitative study related directly to understanding high school counselors’ perceptions in the transition service planning process for students with specific learning disabilities:

1. What were the perceptions high school counselors provided on postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities?
2. What activities have school counselors reported being involved with to help students with specific learning disabilities go to college or obtain employment?

Significance of the Study

This study describes how seven high school counselors perceived their postsecondary transition services work for students with specific learning disabilities.

This research could assist high school counselors with gaining a better understanding of the importance of legislative implementation of postsecondary transition service plans for students with specific learning disabilities starting at age 14 but have to be addressed at 16. This study could help high school counselors' report their depth of knowledge and assistance they provide in helping students with learning disabilities go to college. This study also could identify needs of school counselors to work with outside agencies to help students get jobs after they have graduated from high school. The study could point out the need for students with learning disabilities to self-advocate and know their rights to help them to access postsecondary education.

Scope of Study

The research questions were examined using the qualitative method. High school counselors were interviewed to get their perceptions of postsecondary transition service process of students with specific learning disabilities. Seven high school counselors were selected to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used for the study, and data were collected via personal interviews with high school counselors.

Definition of Terms

The following broad terms were intentionally limited to focus on students with learning disabilities:

1. *Specific learning disability* - A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (IDEA, 2004, Code 20 U.S.C.). Additionally, Henderson (2001) found that students with specific learning disabilities (LD) have

represented the largest rising number of college students with disabilities (as cited by Foley, 2006).

2. *High school counselors* - High school counselors provided advisement to students with learning disabilities about postsecondary education, college admission requirements, entry exams, and financial aid. They also helped students prepare for career development and explore future opportunities for employment after high school (Milsom, 2005).

3. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – Federal legislation that included several transition plan changes in the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), helping students with disabilities transition from high school to adult life. Some changes incorporated a “coordinated set of activities,” transition age-appropriate interest assessments, improvements of achievement in instruction and functional skills services, and other areas (Schmitz, 2008).

4. *Transition* - IDEA (2004) indicated that transition services on the IEP included activities based on a student’s needs, “taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests” (Section 300.43). Additionally, transition was defined as “...a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training and integrated employment” (Savage, 2005, p. 43).

5. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* - In 2001, federal legislation reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that included students with disabilities. Students who have been identified as learning disabled were also held accountable to

high expectations for academics, as well as their peers in general education.

Additionally, students with disabilities gained access to general education instruction with appropriate accommodation (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

6. *Postsecondary education* - Opportunities for students to attend colleges, universities, and vocational technical schools after they have graduated from high school.

7. *Self-advocacy* - When students access higher education, they should self-advocate and communicate their needs and interests to teachers. Students with learning disabilities who self-advocate needs have an increased knowledge of their disability (Hadley, 2006).

8. *Self-determination* - Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) reported that self-determination was a combination of skills, information, and values that enabled students with disabilities to take responsibility for their own goals, and self-regulation of their behavior. These students have an understanding of their own strengths and limitations and a belief that they can be successful (as cited by Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). Ward (2005) indicated that without detailed teaching in self-determination and educators' belief of the value of providing lessons in it, then self-determination would probably "fall by the wayside" (p. 112).

9. *Collaboration* - This is the key to a successful transition process. School counselors worked with both postsecondary colleges and outside agencies within the community, to address issues and concerns on transition (Gil, 2007).

10. *American School Counselor Association (ASCA)* – The American School Counselor Association indicated that the school counselor's role in the transition process of disabled students consists of the following: 1) assisted with the identification of students with learning disabilities, 2) participated as an active member of the Individual Education

Program (IEP) team to provide information about available services, 3) offered counseling services commensurate with those for general education, 4) collaborated with teachers to discuss needs of students with disabilities, and 5) provided training for staff on meeting needs for all students (as cited by Deck, Scarborough, Sferrazza, & Estill, 1999).

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study was limited to high school counselors' perceptions of the transition service process of students with specific learning disabilities located in a small school system in east Tennessee. Another limitation of this study was that it involved one school system and seven high school counselors.

Summary

Chapter 1 includes an introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, scope, definitions, limitations of the study, and the summary. In addition, Chapter 1 includes research questions that focused on high school counselors' perceptions in the provision of transition services for students with learning disabilities.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provided a historical background of federal legislative acts pertaining to students with learning disabilities. Moreover, this chapter addressed the importance of postsecondary transition service planning for students with learning disabilities, as they transition from high school to the workplace or postsecondary education. Additionally, school counselors' involvement and their perceived perceptions in the postsecondary transition service planning process for students with learning disabilities were examined. Emphasis was also placed on the need for high school counselors to promote self-advocacy and self-determination skills for students with learning disabilities.

Federal Legislative Acts that Impacted Transition

Several laws have been passed that impacted how public schools facilitated postsecondary transition services and assisted students with learning disabilities. Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) reported that three laws impacted students with disabilities in the transition service process. These laws were the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) also placed emphasis on student academics and accountability. Additionally, other acts that were beneficial to students with disabilities were: Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act (1990) and School to Work Opportunities Act (1994).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In 1975 the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (formerly called P.L. 94-142) was passed as the first national special education law (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Consequently, public schools were mandated to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities from ages 3 to 21. Madaus and Shaw reported that in the 1990s the Education for all Handicapped Children Act was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On June 4, 1997, IDEA (P.L. 105-17) was reauthorized and signed into law by then President Clinton (U.S. Dept. of Ed., Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2003, para. 1). Levinson, Ferchalk, and Seifert (2004) indicated that the IDEA Amendments of 1990 defined transition as follows:

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promoted movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall take into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation – emphasis added; Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, Public Law 101-476, section 602a (p. 147).

DeStefano and Wermut and Wehman indicated that transition planning was emphasized in the IDEA 1997 amendments because transition policies and programs for

students with disabilities were needed to help students choose what they wanted to do after high school (as cited in Hasazi et al., 1999). Additionally, the 1990s amendment highlighted Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of students with disabilities and required a statement of postsecondary transition needs. These transition service needs were related to the student's course of study and started at age 14 but must be addressed at age 16 (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999). Hasazi et al. (1999) indicated that IDEA of 1997 emphasized the significance of including students with disabilities and parents as active IEP team members in the transition planning process, collaborating with outside agencies to assist with the development of outcome-oriented plans, and making decisions based on students' needs, preferences, and interests. Grigal, Test, Beattie, and Wood (1997) indicated that outcomes from transition planning should be determined by students' desires and not their disability category.

In 2004 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was again reauthorized and signed into law by President George W. Bush. In the reauthorization, the definition of transition services was changed to refer to a "child," rather than a "student," with a disability (Sec. 300.43). This Act indicated that the term transition services included a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability; it was designed to increase educational and postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. IDEA (2004) focused on the improvement of academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability; it emphasized the child's movement from school to postschool activities. The IDEA (2004) regulations included "postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation," as part

of transition (Sec. 300.43). Furthermore, IDEA (2004) indicated that transition services on the IEP included activities based on the child's needs, "taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests" to help them achieve their postsecondary goals (Sec. 300.43). IDEA (2004) also pointed out that transition service planning should include activities such as "instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation" (Sec. 300.43b (2v)).

Levinson, Ferchalk, and Seifert (2004) suggested that the coordinated set of activities should have linked services with community agencies and schools. The postsecondary transition service plan included roles and responsibilities of people or agencies needed for service delivery. In the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA the law stated for public schools to begin "transition service planning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 years of age, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter" (Sec. 300.43). Additionally, IDEA (2004) required that the IEP included the following:

Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills; the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and the LEA must invite a child with a disability to attend the child's IEP Team meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child

and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals (Sec. 300.43).

Levinson et al. (2004) also ascertained that transition was a life-long process. This process included long-term and short-term goals.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Americans with Disabilities Act

Other legislative acts such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 promoted transition with the provision of protecting individuals with disabilities from discrimination. Section 504 was a federal act that prevented organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services (U. S. Dept. Health, 2006). Eligibility for Section 504 accommodations in high school and college involved students who have “physical or mental impairments that substantially limits one or more major life functions” (Madaus & Shaw, 2004, p. 82). The ADA made sure that equal opportunity was granted for individuals with disabilities and accommodations were provided in public facilities for the disabled. Additionally, these two acts indicated students with learning disabilities could not be denied employment, transportation, or state and local government services (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

Students with learning disabilities who have planned to attend college need to understand the differences between IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Hamblet (2009) indicated that after students with disabilities graduated from high school they were no longer covered under IDEA. Therefore, Section 504 should be adopted in colleges. However, postsecondary schools were not compelled to follow

students with disabilities' Section 504 plans. The Section 504 plans that were developed in high schools do not apply after students have graduated. Hamblet (2009) reported that Section 504 and the ADA have required postsecondary schools to offer students with disabilities accommodations and access to programs but not a specialized plan for instruction.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law in 2002 (NCLB, P.L. 107-110). Bowen and Rude (2006) reported this act focused on increasing academic achievement of students in public schools. The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (n.d.) reported that NCLB focused on accountability and made sure that all students participated in state group achievement tests. In addition, IDEA of 1997 required students with learning disabilities to participate in district and state tests. According to Bowen and Rude the alignment of NCLB and IDEA was important because “the partnership of NCLB and IDEIA provide the opportunity for successful academic achievement for student with disabilities by implementing the systemic changes mandated by NCLB through the individual lens of the IEP as regulated by IDEIA” (p. 24). Students who were identified as learning disabled were held accountable to high expectations for academics and gained access to general education instruction with appropriate accommodations, as reported by Bowen and Rude (2006).

Stodden, Galloway, and Stodden (2003) reported “supporting and teaching students with disabilities to learn rigorous, standards-based curriculum in secondary school is a complex and difficult issue for educators” (p. 9). In a study by Collins,

Hawkins, and Keramidas (2005) special education directors in rural districts were interviewed about transition and the impact of NCLB on rural students with disabilities. It was indicated that NCLB required all students to meet the same high standards, but due to some students' disabilities, this was unachievable for several students. However, these students were still expected to make some progress toward these NCLB standards. One director interviewed in the study indicated that NCLB allowed students with learning disabilities to receive services in the general education classroom. As a result, students with disabilities became frustrated and experienced more academic pressure, and several students dropped out of school. A director from a rural county indicated that the implementation of NCLB standards influenced less time allotted for work based learning experiences within the community. Consequently, this made it difficult for students to transition to jobs within the community after graduation.

School-to-Work (STW) Opportunities Act

The School-to-Work (STW) Opportunities Act of 1994 also focused on transition services for students with learning disabilities. The STW program functioned through a joint venture between two federal department, the Department of Education and the Department of Labor. Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, and Lattin (1999) concluded that the STW act was “compatible with IDEA because it supports individual planning and coordinated education/work experiences by 16 years of age or younger to prepare students for positive postschool outcomes, particularly employment” (p. 2). The act emphasized that the STW program provided opportunities for students with learning disabilities to be involved in work-based learning in the community and to help improve their educational training for employment. The federal government indicated that the

school-to-work program was set up to provide an opportunity for all students to participate in the programs. School-to-work programs were expected to support the following core components: 1) joint endeavor of work-based learning and school-based learning, 2) progression of integrated academic and vocational instruction, 3) rigorous academic standards that involved secondary education and postsecondary instruction, 4) provided students with a planned program of work linked to school, and 5) connected the activities that ensured integration of work with school-based learning components by involving employers (Peer Project, 1999).

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), students with disabilities were given rights to participate in the STW program and to receive supported services and accommodations. These two laws do not state exactly how to provide the support and modifications needed for students with learning disabilities to participate in the STW program. However, in IDEA regulations, steps have been specified for transition service planning that involved transition assessment, parent participation, and specific instructions in the development of the IEP (Blalock & Patton, 1996). Additionally, school-to-work legislation offered an abundance of opportunities for the meaningful transition of students with learning disabilities, more than any other particular special education law or rehabilitation mandates (Blalock & Patton, 1996).

Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (1984) was reauthorized in 1998. This act was passed to assist students with disabilities with entrance into the workforce (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). According to Levinson and

Palmer (2005) the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act mandated public schools to supply students with opportunities for vocational education beginning in ninth grade with a vocational assessment of the student's interests and abilities and eligibility requirements for vocational classes. This act was reauthorized in 2006 as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Public Law 109-270). This reauthorized law provided additional rigor on the educational achievement of career and technical instruction students, reinforced the linkage with secondary and postsecondary education, and increased school system and state accountability (Carl Perkins Act, 2006).

Additionally, Dowdy (1996) reported that the 1992 Amendments of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (VR) of 1973 provided an opportunity for students with disabilities to obtain employment that was consistent with their needs and interests. Harvey (2001) found that "vocational education has been reported to make a significant difference in post-school employment for students with disabilities when it was occupationally specific and directed at labor market needs" (p. 32). In order to assist a student with learning disabilities the vocational rehabilitation counselor could work in collaboration with the school system for an effective partnership in the transition of services (Dowdy, 1996). Wagner and Blackorby (1996) found that students with learning disabilities were successful in finding jobs when they took four courses in their concentration area in the vocational program.

Transition Services Movement from School to College or Work

All local education agencies in the United States were required to offer transition services for students with disabilities to enhance their probability of attending college or finding employment (Johnson, 2008). Federal mandates did not view transition as a one

step process; they have included several steps to help students with disabilities from high school to adulthood (Savage, 2005). Schmitz (2008) indicated that IDEA transition services for students with disabilities from school to adult life included “a coordinated set of activities, a focus on improving academic and functional achievement, age appropriate transition assessments, transition services (including course of study), ... to assist children in reaching their goals, and creating measurable postsecondary goals” (p. 37).

The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASSET, 2005) delineated standards and indicators that could be used to ensure quality transition for students with learning disabilities. NASSET indicators and standards for students in the transition process from high school to the adult world included “schooling, career preparatory experiences, youth development and youth leadership, family involvement, and connecting activities” (p. 3).

Research indicated that an effective practice for transition services was student focused planning. This came from research that involved students with disabilities in making decisions within their transition plans that were based on assessment information and students’ goals and interests (Kohler & Field, 2003). Transition focused education was an effective transition framework that consisted of the following: 1) allowing students to be actively engaged in their transition planning process and use self-advocacy skills; 2) developing the student for work experiences, industrial skills, as well as academic achievement; 3) having collaboration with outside agencies within the community; 4) having family share in the transition planning process; and 5) structuring of the school to have an effective transition focused program (Kohler & Field, 2003).

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2007) provided

transition practices to secondary schools and indicated that student focused planning involved the student in the IEP development.

Kohler and Field (2003) indicated that findings of effective transition research practices were mentioned in the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). Results of the NLTS study indicated positive academic performance and postschool outcomes for students with learning disabilities. These findings suggested that students with learning disabilities benefited from vocational education, tutoring services, work experiences, parent involvement, and extracurricular group organizations (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, and Mack (2002) reported challenges that students with disabilities faced in the transition process. The first issue was a need to have access to general education instruction with the promotion of high expectations for academic success. This challenge was consistent with No Child Left Behind that held schools accountable for high scholastic standards for all students. Johnson et al. (2002) reported special educators and general educators should have knowledge of appropriate and methodical use of assessment in the classroom. In addition, inclusion in the general education classroom and professional development involving continuing education classes for teachers were needed to address this issue. The student's IEP should address an extensive array of programs that assist students with learning disabilities with a successful transition into their careers.

Johnson et al. (2002) indicated the second concern was that students with disabilities dropped out of school due to continuous failure of state graduation tests and that high schools should have continued to use passage of exit exams and state graduation

requirements for students with disabilities. Public schools should also promote the use of alternative assessments for the support of graduation decisions for a high school diploma. However, when students with disabilities used alternative assessment options and received less than a standard secondary school diploma, the question became whether this action limited a student's access to opportunities for postsecondary education and employment. Therefore, it was important to clarify to students with disabilities and their parents the difference between an alternative diploma and a regular high school diploma. Also, when a regular high school diploma was awarded to students with disabilities, goals and objectives on the IEP and all transition service requirements must be met.

Johnson et al. (2002) reported the third situation was to make sure that students with disabilities had access to and full participation in employment, independent living, and education opportunities. It was extremely difficult for students with disabilities to find jobs, access postsecondary education, obtain housing for independent living, and get involved in the community. However, after the reauthorization of IDEA in the 1990s, there had been an increase of 90% in enrollment of students with learning disabilities attending universities, vocational technical centers, and community colleges that offered classes for these students to continue their education. Self-advocacy skills were indicated as important for students with disabilities to have, as skills needed to negotiate postsecondary education. Conversely, according to Johnson et al. (2002) another challenge was the need to improve employment for students with disabilities "...only 32% of persons with disabilities, ages 18 to 64, work full or part time, compared to 81% of the nondisabled population – a 49% gap from National Organization on Disability, 2000" (p. 524). When students with disabilities graduated from high school, they had a

difficult time finding jobs. Unemployment and underemployment have been extremely high for these students, and they have experienced major financial hardships as compared to their nondisabled general education peers (Rusch & Phelps, 1987). This has been an important reason for schools to prepare students with disabilities for transition from school to work, college, and independent living. Therefore, to help students with disabilities to transition IEP teams have discussed the course of study and provided learning opportunities for students to develop academic skills needed for employment, college, and independent living (Johnson et al., 2002).

The fourth challenge involved the participation of students with disabilities and their families in the development of transition goals and services. Additionally, the student's goal for self-determination should be stated in the student's IEP (Johnson et al., 2002).

The last challenge indicated that collaboration and coordination of services were very important at all levels. General education and special education teachers needed to work together in a collaborative effort in student assessment, transition service planning, and inclusion. Additionally, state and local agencies, colleges, parents, administrators, employers, and other interagency collaboration needed to be involved in transition services for students with disabilities (Johnson et al., 2002).

Counselors' Knowledge and Involvement in the Transition Process

The school counselor's role was vital in the educational process for students with learning disabilities as stated by Fox, Wandry, Pruitt, and Anderson (1998). Lapan, Aoyagi, and Kayson (2007) indicated that "school counselors need to provide more extensive support to all students" (p. 269). Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) found that

high school counselors were viewed as institutional agents who have an impact on the success of students in postsecondary education. Rosenbaum and Person (2003) indicated that school counselors should have an understanding of how the demands of college and work have changed. Rosenbaum and Person (2003) also reported that school counselors should let students know what options were available to them and provide them with the assistance needed for their educational and work outcomes. Additionally, school counselors were responsible for providing students with useful assessments that were beneficial for college and workforce entrance. In addition, school counselors should have good communication with colleges and employers in the community, to help link students with jobs and postsecondary education.

The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements (n.d.) reported that communication and coordination were valuable ways that school counselors could help students with specific learning disabilities in the transition process. Collaboration and effective communication with other professionals and students were essential skills throughout the transition process. School counselors have made an effort to develop a working relationship with institutions of higher education, outside agencies within the community, families, and students. Therefore, before students with specific learning disabilities graduate from high school, the school counselor should have communicated with them, discussed their needs and interests, and maintained collaborative contacts with outside agencies for possible employment options.

Hughey and Hughey (1999) indicated that importance should be placed on career development and academic achievement by school counseling programs as a way to make sure that all students were effectively prepared for their careers. It was suggested

that there have been a number of changes in the workplace that were important for school counselors to know in order to help with career development activities and assist students with career and academic decisions. Additionally, it was noted that school counselors should become aware and stay current on changing workplace practices, then inform students about workplace implications of these changes. According to research findings, “learning about self is an important element of any career guidance program for students” (Hughey & Hughey, 1999, p. 211).

Quigney and Studer (1999) indicated that the school counselor’s role in the transition process was indispensable; however, students with disabilities did not often use the counselor’s resources during transition to post-school outcomes. In 1999 Quigney and Studer reported school counselors have unique skills, and counselors could teach students with disabilities problem solving strategies, learning strategies, and how to adapt to situations. Milsom (2007) reported that school counselors could teach students with disabilities important transition skills such as what to expect after high school and help increase the students’ knowledge about their own disability. Milsom and Hartley (2005) reported that school counselors have a lot of knowledge about the course of study and college admission requirements, and they could help students with disabilities explore future job options within the community. Milsom and Hartley also reported in 2005 that school counselors could make sure that efforts of transition service planning were approached collectively, involving the student, parents, and school staff. Most importantly, Milsom and Hartley (2005) indicated that the school counselor should make certain to be directly involved in the lives of students with learning disabilities.

Milsom (2002) examined current trends in the education of school counselors and addressed the following questions in the study: “What activities do school counselors perform for students with disabilities? How prepared do school counselors feel to perform activities for students with disabilities?” (p. 332). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supported the statement that “school counselors advocate for students with disabilities in planning for transitions to careers or to Postsecondary institutions, and make referrals to the appropriate specialists for students with disabilities” (Milsom, 2002, p. 332). Scarborough and Gilbride (2006) indicated that ASCA advocated for school counselors to help transition students from grade to grade and from middle to secondary schools as well as to assist students with disabilities in the transition planning process. The American School Counselor Association also indicated that the school counselor’s role in the transition process has consisted of the following: 1) assisted with the identification of students with learning disabilities, 2) participated as an active member of the Individual Education Program (IEP) team to provide information about available services, 3) offered counseling services commensurate with those for general education, 4) collaborated with teachers to discuss needs of students with disabilities, and 5) provided training for staff on meeting needs for all students (as cited by Deck, Scarborough, Sferrazza, & Estill, 1999).

Milsom (2002) used the School Counselor Preparation Survey-Revised (SCPS-R) to review the activities school counselors performed for students with disabilities, assessed their preparation to complete those tasks, and looked at the school counselors’ educational knowledge base in working with students with disabilities. Results indicated that school counselors do help students with disabilities; however, school counselors

reported that they need additional preparation to work with students with disabilities. Findings also showed that “fewer than half of the participants indicated that they have assisted students with disabilities” (Milsom, 2002, p. 335).

Mitcham, Portman, and Dean (2009) explored the school counselor as an advocate for students with disabilities in the urban area. Emphasis was placed on school counselors assisting students who were culturally different and racially diverse. It is important for school counselors to competently exhibit multicultural skills to focus on the needs of a diverse population. School counselors could offer services to students with disabilities on how to handle problems with bullying, self-esteem issues, and academic difficulties.

Activities Counselors Facilitated to Prepare Students for College

Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) indicated teachers, counselors, and administrators for successful transition services from secondary school to college should prepare students with learning disabilities. Skinner and Lindstrom identified six areas that students with learning disabilities often demonstrated difficulties in when entering college: (a) preparation for tests such as note-taking and listening comprehension, (b) organizational skills, (c) interaction socially with others, (d) problems in specific content areas such as written expression and reading, (e) low self-esteem, and (f) dropout of school. A strategy used to help students with learning disabilities in the transition process was to teach them to understand their disability and to know their academic strengths and limitations. Aune, Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McQuire, Dalke and Schmitt, and Skinner reported that students with learning disabilities often go to college without any knowledge about their disability and the how their disability impacted their academic

achievement (as cited in Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Therefore, Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) indicated that counselors, teachers, administrators, and other school staff should take the lead and teach these students about their learning deficits and provide them with specific strategies that would reduce their limitations. Hamblet (2009) indicated that when students with learning disabilities go to college, they should know how to contact the disability coordinator, know what disability services are available at the school, and know how to access these services upon arrival to the college.

Additional Support from Counselors at Postsecondary Schools

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1996) reported that students with learning disabilities needed additional guidance and support from counselors for a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education. Several services in postsecondary schools were available that students with learning disabilities did not use. The study focused on understanding the accessibility of these services. Findings of the study indicated that postsecondary schools made available accommodations or modifications for students with learning disabilities. Also, some colleges offered disability support services that included helping students with note taking, testing accommodations, tutoring services, and other resources. Results of the study also indicated that all postsecondary schools required students with disabilities to provide verification of their disability. Additionally, they were required to provide a copy of a comprehensive psychological evaluation that had been completed within the past 3 years. Counselors at the colleges helped students with learning disabilities understand the psychological reports, and other school counselors assisted the students with academic advisement. Because it was important for

students with learning disabilities to be able to explain their learning deficits, several counselors taught students self-advocacy skills.

Counselors Encouraged Promotion of Self-Determination and Advocacy

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2007) indicated that students' self-determination strategies were needed to help students with disabilities make decisions, advocate for self, and conduct self-directed IEP meetings. Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Strang (2008) suggested the importance of promoting self-determination on student's IEPs and encouraged teaching seven key components in the classroom (i.e., problem-solving, self management, decision making, goal setting, making choices, self-awareness, and self-advocacy).

Self-Advocacy and Understanding College Demands

Mitcham, Portman, and Dean (2009) indicated that school counselors emphasized the need for students to self-advocate by providing them with effective strategies in interpersonal skills, peer mediation skills, and the proper way to speak up for themselves. Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) reported that educators should teach students with learning disabilities to self-advocate and speak for themselves in order to make sure they will receive appropriate accommodations in the classroom. Aune (1991) indicated that students with a disability should understand their disability, strengths, and limitations in order to self-advocate. Aune also indicated that self-advocacy skills should be developed and started as early as elementary school. Additionally, Aune (1991) recommended that "transition on programs begin early, prior to entering high school" (p. 186). Aune reported in 1991 that several students with learning disabilities were not ready to meet the demands of college. These students often do not participate in college preparatory

courses in secondary school due to instruction in special education classrooms or being placed in lower level classes. When students with disabilities were in high school, they were provided with services under IDEA. However, when they attend college, these students were expected to provide the appropriate documentation for their disability and state the accommodations needed in the classroom. Aune (1991) indicated that many students were not prepared to advocate for themselves, and school systems needed to help these students with transition services for postsecondary education. Therefore, an intervention model was implemented in schools to help students to transition from secondary to postsecondary instruction. Aune (1991) conducted a LD Transition Project in Minneapolis secondary schools to increase transition service programs for students with disabilities. Requirements for students with learning disabilities to participate in the LD Transition Project were as follows: 1) to possess a current IEP; 2) to be eligible as a student with learning disability; 3) to have an average ability level; and 4) to have an achievement that was commensurate with their classmates.

In the study project counselors reviewed the student's special education record and interviewed the students, teachers, school staff, and parents to get a better understanding of the student's interests and needs. Students with learning disabilities also completed the following assessments: a self-report test that measured the students' self-concept; a career assessment was used to identify their interests and needs; and a transition questionnaire that provided information on students with learning disabilities' knowledge of self-advocacy skills and study skills. These activities were used prior to the implementation of the interventions (Aune, 1991).

Aune (1991) indicated that the questionnaire was vastly informative. Several students were not aware they had a learning disability or denied having learning difficulties. Many students with learning disabilities were not knowledgeable of requirements needed for postsecondary education and exhibited little knowledge of postsecondary schools. Students with learning disabilities have a limited compilation of study skills. Also, at the time of the project intake, counselors discovered that several students with learning disabilities did not have knowledge of what an IEP was and did not know how to access their modifications or accommodations.

Steps to Self-Advocacy

The LD Transition Project intervention model included a transition counselor who worked with school staff and each student to develop a transition plan. The transition service plans included the selection of the appropriate coursework. The counselor helped students look at the requirements of postsecondary schools and matched them with their coursework, including college preparatory classes in their course of study. Intervention also included teaching students study strategies, exploration of career opportunities, and distinguishing differences between postsecondary schools. In the student's senior year, a second transition meeting was held and the vocational counselor became a part of the transition team. Also, during the senior year the students learned about the different types of accommodations, rights, responsibilities and practiced self-advocacy skills, and the counselor helped with college applications and selection (Aune, 1991).

Findings from the study indicated necessary steps for successful transitions for students with learning disabilities. These included the following: perception of themselves, preparation for college coursework, knowledge of their accommodations,

commitment to self-advocacy, students' involvement in IEP transition meetings, support from a transition team, and help from a transition facilitator (Aune, 1991).

Self-Determination

Transition service requirements included courses of study and provided students with learning disabilities accommodations in general education classrooms without altering the content of instruction. When emphasis was placed on transition services, the completion of a self-assessment, a means of self-determination, helped students with their future career plans. Additionally, students with learning disabilities who complete their courses of study made transition services pertinent to future educational and employment outcomes (Bowen & Rude, 2006).

Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) indicated that legislative acts such as the American With Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-336) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-17) supported students with disabilities and promoted self-determination within the provisions of both laws. Also, there were 26 models focusing on self-determination projects that have been funded by the U. S. Department of Education. Field et al. reported in 1998 that this initiative by the federal government made obvious the positive force that self-determination holds in the transition planning process and special education service programming.

Summary

According to the literature review school counselors have been beneficial in transition service plans of students with specific learning disabilities. Federal and state mandates have required that transition services be included in IEPs of students with disabilities. Researchers agreed that self-advocacy and self-determination were key

components in the transition process, and school counselors' roles as advocates were instrumental with helping students with transition needs.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter discussed the research methods and procedures used to complete the study. The study explored the perceptions of high school counselors' involvement in the provision of transition services for students with specific learning disabilities. This study took place at high schools in an unnamed county. Qualitative research methods were used to investigate the perceptions of high school counselors' involvement in the transition process of students with learning disabilities. Qualitative research methodology involved "gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 26). Richie and Lewis (2009) indicated that qualitative researchers examine to understand social phenomenon and study things in their natural settings. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) reported that a qualitative study observed reality as subjective, and concepts and theories evolved after data have been collected.

This study helped the researcher to gain an understanding from the information provided by high school counselors about their perceptions of transition. Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research focused on understanding and explaining the world as others have experienced it and providing a thick description of the social phenomenon. This chapter also includes the methods used, research questions, researcher's role as an interviewer, data collection, interviews, ethical considerations, data analysis, validity and reliability, and summary.

Research Questions

1. What were the perceptions that high school counselors provided on postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities?

2. What activities have school counselors reported to be involved with in helping students with specific learning disabilities go to college or obtain employment?

Researcher's Role

Merriam (1998) indicated that in a qualitative study, “the researcher [acts] as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive” (p. 11). The researcher’s role in this study was as an interviewer. Interviews with seven high school counselors were conducted individually to collect data. Interview questions were piloted with three high school counselors from a different school system prior to the interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) indicated that the researcher’s role involved selecting people for the study who provided rich details about the research questions. As a researcher, I was able to communicate effectively, listen attentively, and establish rapport with all of the participants in the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) also reported that the researcher played the role of a field worker who “acquires language fluency with the participants, interacts to obtain data, establishes social relationships, and moves from role sets appropriate for one person to different role sets for other persons” (p. 346).

Bogdan and Bilken (1982) contended that data collected in qualitative research were thick, rich, and deep, which often took precedence over the preconceived thoughts of the researcher. As a school psychologist, I do bring knowledge and experience to this study and in an attempt to minimize any bias I may bring, member checking was used to confirm the participant’s agreement with what was recorded. I was careful and sensitive on how I approached the topic of transition services for students with disabilities because

I already have a strong view about it based on my professional experiences. Hoepfl (1997) reported the following about the researcher's role:

Strauss and Corbin believe that theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional literature, professional experiences, and personal experiences. The credibility of a qualitative research report relies heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field, [cited by Eisner, 1991; Patton, 1990] (para. 19).

At the end of the study, I went back to those researched and asked them if data collected were accurate or if there was a need for correction or elaboration of data. I used verbatim language of the participants from interviews and a tape recorder for accuracy.

Merriam (1998) also reported the researcher "must have enormous tolerance for ambiguity" (p.20). Merriam also contended that there were no set procedures in data collection and analysis in a qualitative study; the researcher maintained flexibility, exhibited the ability to think analytically, and put pieces together to come up with conclusions.

Purposeful Sampling

The population for this study was two high schools in Unnamed County, Tennessee. Two high schools were selected as participants because they were the only high schools in the Unnamed County school system. I used purposeful sampling to select participants because of the "researcher's knowledge of the population and a judgment is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.126). Purposeful

sampling was used to help gain a better understanding of high school counselors' perceptions in the transition process for students with specific learning disabilities. Gall et al. (1996) indicated the goal for purposeful sampling was to select cases that were expected to provide rich detail information with respect to the study.

Seven high school counselors from Unnamed County Schools were selected to participate in the study. Gall et al. (1996) contended that the sample size in a qualitative study was usually small in number and "entirely a matter of judgment; there are not set rules" (p. 236). I used the following criteria for the selection of school counselors: 1) number of years of experience that consisted of employment for at least 1 year and no more than 30 years of service as a school counselor and 2) worked as a high school counselor in Unnamed County Schools. In both schools there were a total of eight high school counselors. At one high school four counselors met criteria and were selected to participate in the study; at the other school three counselors met criterion for selection. Criterion selection helped to assure that all participants studied were people who have some experience with the phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected by interviews with seven high school counselors using an interview guide. With the collection of data, participants were able to report an understanding of a social phenomenon and give descriptions of their perceptions in thick, rich details (Richie & Lewis, 2009). Prior to individual interviews with participants, I piloted interview questions with three high school counselors as a group from other school systems. Merriam (1998) reported that pilot interviews were important because it was a way to try out the research questions. Prior to meeting with the three high school

counselors, I had developed approximately 70 questions for their review. At the meeting, each question was reviewed with the three high school counselors and inappropriate questions were eliminated. I determined which questions caused confusion or needed to be reworded. This process allowed me to select 20 appropriate questions for the actual study. Additionally, the three school counselors were able to offer suggestions of appropriate questions that could be used in the study. After the meeting with the three high school counselors, an interview guide was developed.

Merriam (1998) contended that interviews were needed when participants' behavior or feelings cannot be observed. In this study open-ended questions were used with seven high school counselors. There were several contacts with the participants during the study. Initial interviews were conducted with each participant. During the one-on-one interviews with each participant, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. Notes were also taken during interviews. Merriam (1998) indicated that the use of a tape recorder ensured that everything stated was preserved for the analysis of data.

Interview Guide

Merriam (1998) indicated that an interview guide included a list of questions the researcher planned to ask in an interview (Appendix A). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) contended that with an interview guide topics were selected in advance, and this allowed the researcher to determine the wording or sequence of questions asked during the interviews. In this study the guide included topics that dealt with perceptions of high school counselors in providing transition service to students with learning disabilities in the following areas: vocational assessments, preparation of students with learning

disabilities for adult life, students' awareness of college admissions criteria, assistance with the development of IEP postsecondary goals, and helping students with disabilities with self-determination and advocacy skills.

Interview Logistics

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), the interview logistics that impacted interview sessions consisted of the following:

...(1) duration, or length of session; (2) number, or how many separate interviews are required to obtain the data; (3) setting, or location of the interview; (4) identity of the individuals involved and the number present in the session; and (5) informant styles, or communication mores of the interviewees (p. 355).

The duration of each interview session was 45 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were held at the convenience of the participants on different occasions and locations. Each session was individually conducted with the participants. After the counselors arrived for interviews, there was a conversation about the purpose, reassurance of confidentiality, ethical protocol, and permission to audio record the interviews. Participants were also put at ease with the use of personal questions. Prior to the start of interviews, general questions were asked to each participant to help establish rapport; but these questions were not part of the interviews. Richie and Lewis (2009) indicated asking factual background questions at the beginning helped participants to begin with a subject matter they were familiar. Individual interviews were conducted, and verbatim language was recorded with the use of audiotapes. Recorded interviews were then transcribed.

Data Analysis Methods

Interview transcripts were used for data analysis and interpretation. Merriam (1998) indicated that data analysis involved making sense of collected data, which consisted of merging, reducing, and understanding what the participants stated. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) reported that qualitative data included “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). Also, Patton (1990) reported that qualitative researchers used inductive analysis of data. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) indicated that inductive analysis involved analysis of data inductively in which qualitative researchers do not try to find data that prove or disprove a hypotheses developed prior to the study. Merriam (1998) suggested that data analysis involved “...organizing a narrative description of the phenomenon, to constructing categories or themes that cut across the data, to building theory” (p. 196).

In this study concrete information was used to describe the research, and then I moved to a more abstract level with the use of concepts to describe the phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Coding procedures were used in this qualitative study to compact data into themes and create categories in support of research questions. Data were reread several times to identify recurring themes; then themes became emergent categories, and chunks of data were put in categories. Merriam (1998) indicated that the first step in the coding process was to read the interview transcripts. Margin notations were also made, on bits of data that I thought were important in regard to research questions and the theoretical framework. I also grouped data that appeared to go together. I used systematic coding procedures to organize data in preparation for interpretation (Merriam,

1998). Categories were developed from the data and also named to replicate the purpose of the study. I then organized all of the data to get ready for an analysis of the findings. Data were placed on index cards for emerging concepts. Merriam (1998) contended that these cards could be sorted into piles by regularly putting data cards side by side, labeling the piles, and then coding accordingly. Each card was coded and retrieved by the code that was placed on the cards.

Coding was a subjective endeavor, as I used my judgment and intuition to gather data that supported or dismissed the research questions or theoretical framework; data were used to explain meaning for interpretation (Merriam, 2006).

Validity and Reliability

Gall et al. (1996) indicated that qualitative research has been used to understand social phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings; these researchers have a belief that reality can change and is not subject to strict rules. Gall et al. (1996) also contended that qualitative research is used to observe reality as subjective, and the rigor of the study was imperative. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that trustworthiness of a study could be used to evaluate the integrity of a qualitative study. Trustworthiness was a term used to refer to the overall reliability and validity of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that trustworthiness involved the establishment of credibility and can be assessed in the study through member checking.

Merriam (1998) indicated that triangulation was a strategy used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies. Triangulation has been established from the use of different methods, different data sources, and different

researchers to confirm findings. Denzin (1978) identified “four types of triangulation: across data sources (i.e., participants), theories, methods (i.e., interview, observations, documents), and among different investigators” (as cited by Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126-127).

Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1998) indicated other techniques used for establishment of credibility that included prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checking. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) suggested the following procedures as strategies to enhance validity in qualitative research: 1) prolonged and persistent fieldwork that involved the researcher spending more time in the field in contact with the subjects and their environment; therefore, the researcher was able to gain more insight, and this helped with interpretation; 2) the use of participant’s verbatim language that included interviews phrased in the participant’s language; 3) low-inference descriptors involved including the precise descriptions of the environment; 4) the use of mechanically recorded data that included tape recorders, photographs, and/or videotapes; 5) the use of participants to record perceptions in diaries or anecdotal records for corroboration; 6) member checking involved the strategy to check informally with participants for accuracy during data collection, and the researcher returned to participants at the completion of the study and asked whether findings were accurate or needed correction or elaboration on constructs; and 7) the use of multiple researchers that involved the agreement on descriptive data collected by other researchers.

In this study the following techniques were used to establish validity and credibility. Creswell and Miller (2000) indicated that a validity technique included a self-

disclosure of the researchers' assumptions and beliefs about the study; I used this process as a way to acknowledge my own biases and personal beliefs about transition services. I used a peer researcher to review my study for biases and check to make sure that I kept my professional experiences from influencing my findings. I also used member checking, and I constantly checked for accuracy while collecting data from participants. Member checks were also used when participants reviewed statements made in my report. This method helped to identify any factual errors that needed corrections and indentified the need to collect additional information from participants (Gall et al., 1996). Lincoln and Guba (1985) portrayed member checks as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in research. Credibility involved richness of the information gathered and analytical abilities (Patton, 1990). Creswell and Miller (2000) indicated that credibility in a study was derived from description of the setting, the participants, and the themes of a research in rich detail. Credibility was established when readers can actually read the narrative account and then relate it to the phenomenon. Also, the practice of writing using thick, rich descriptions in the study involved obtaining as much detail as possible from the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I also listened to the audio tape recordings and compared them to the word-by-word typed transcriptions.

Merriam (1998) contended qualitative research focused on understanding and explaining the world as others have experienced it, and it was assumed that multiple realities exist. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that the term dependability in qualitative research was intended to be similar to reliability. Additionally, they used the words dependability and confirmability together to imply reliability. Rather than focusing on the ability of others to replicate and repeat results, the intent became having

others agree that the results were consistent with the collected data (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research reliability largely depended on the skill and rigor of the researcher. Reliability involved the extent to which there was consistency in research findings, the researcher's ability to explain the assumptions of the study by triangulation, and the researcher's ability to describe how findings resulted from the data (Merriam, 1998).

Ethical Protocol

An application to conduct the research was filed with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at East Tennessee State University. Gall et al. (1996) indicated that "...a form completed by researcher in which she describes the proposed research in sufficient detail and attaches supporting documents, so that the IRB can decide whether the study meets the criteria for human subjects protection" (p. 86). A letter was received from the IRB Board that indicated final IRB approval of the study. The Director of Schools of Unnamed County was contacted to request written permission to conduct the study; permission was granted from the Director to conduct the study by way of a letter to the IRB. The participants in the research were contacted during the 2010-2011 school year, seeking their permission for participation in the study. As an introduction to the study, the researcher contacted each high school counselor individually by email. The email included a letter attachment that indicated I am in the process of conducting a study, working on my dissertation, and attending East Tennessee State University (Appendix B). Also, the informed consent letter was written to ask for participation in the study. The school counselors signed the informed consent for permission to participate in the study. The letter stated the purpose, included interview information,

indicated no risks anticipated in the study, and provided procedural safeguards for confidential information (Appendix C).

School counselors were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. They were informed that they could refuse involvement with the study, not answer questions, or withdraw participation at any time during the study. Data collected from the school counselors have been kept confidential and secure. School counselors' names were not revealed in this study. There were no risks or harm involved in the study for either participants or researcher.

Summary

Chapter 3 includes an overview of the qualitative research methodology used for this study. This chapter also includes the research questions, researcher's role as an interviewer, and data collection methods used. Data were collected from high school counselors who agreed to participate in this study and met the purposeful sampling selection criteria. Specific details on data analysis methods, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations techniques are also included in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of the study was to examine high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) indicated that federal legislation mandated that students with disabilities have postsecondary goals and outcomes indicated in their Individual Education Program (IEP) plans by age 14. In addition, the transition service plan should have steps that were delineated in the students IEPs for postsecondary outcomes.

In this study 20 open-ended questions were used with seven high school counselors. Interviews were conducted with each participant and held in a meeting room or counselor's offices. During the interviews the door was closed for privacy. At the beginning of each interview participants were again informed of the purpose of the study and given a review of the signed informed consent. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymous and confidential data. During interviews with each participant, a tape recorder was used to record data. Notes were also taken during interviews. Participants were contacted several times during the study.

Coding procedures were used in this qualitative study to compact data into themes and create categories in support of research questions. The researcher transcribed each interview. Transcribed data were returned to participants to review for accuracy, and participants checked transcripts to make sure quotes were correct. Merriam (1998) indicated that the first step in the coding process was to read the interview transcripts. Interviews were reread several times to identify recurring themes. Margin notations were also made of data that I thought were important in regard to research questions and the

theoretical framework. Subsequently, themes became emergent categories, and pieces of data were put in categories. Emerging themes from each participant's interview were placed on colored index cards. Merriam (1998) contended that these cards could be sorted into piles by regularly putting data cards side by side, labeling the piles, and then coding accordingly. Pseudonyms were used on the index cards. Each card was coded and retrieved by the code placed on cards. Data were grouped that appeared to go together. Categories were developed from the data and named to replicate the purpose of the study.

Demographic data on each participant were also collected as a means to identify the sample. Participants provided information on the following: number of years worked in Unnamed County Schools as a school counselor, highest degrees earned, and colleges attended. All participants reported they have master's degrees in counseling. The number of years of experience as a school counselor ranged from 1 year to 18 years. There was one participant who had also received National Board School Counselor's Certification. Additionally, six counselors attended college at their local universities or at colleges within the southern United States, and one counselor attended college in the north. The interviewees consisted of one male counselor and six female counselors.

Research Questions

The following research questions used in this qualitative study related directly to understanding high school counselors' perceptions in the postsecondary transition service planning process for students with specific learning disabilities:

1. What were the perceptions that high school counselors provided on transition services for students with learning disabilities, during the process from high school to adult

life?

2. What activities have school counselors reported being involved with to help students with specific learning disabilities go to college or obtain employment?

Emerging Categories

Categories that involved school counselor's perception on the provisions of postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities emerged from the data. These themes were as follows: 1) plan of study for postsecondary goals based on transition assessments; 2) assistance and activities promote outcomes for college or work; 3) duties of counselors and involvement in the transition process; and 4) the IEP team, postsecondary goals, and self-advocacy of accommodation needs. There was also an area of other findings that was noted but was not identified as a theme. The other findings involved a participant's postsecondary vocational personal experience.

Plan of Study for Goals Based on Transition Assessments

In the first theme the participants discussed postsecondary goals for students with learning disabilities based on transition assessments, which included course of study. These activities were needed to enable students with learning disabilities to meet their postsecondary goals. Participants explained the different assessments administered, and the grade level these tests were given (i.e., KUDER and EXPLORE – 8th grade, PLAN – 10th grade, and ACT and ASVAB – 11th grade). Participants reported that the 4-year plan of focused elective study should be developed prior to the 9th grade. The plan should be reviewed annually, and the purpose was to connect the student's academic and career goals to school. IDEA (2004) indicated that students with learning disabilities have IEPs that included transition services, with courses of study needed to assist

students in reaching their postsecondary goals. Participants discussed the importance of making sure that the special education teacher and school counselor work together. This teamwork was needed to determine if students' interest and goals on their 4-year plan of study match IEP postsecondary goals and course of study.

The State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2011 Annual Division of College and Career Readiness Conference, indicated in their handouts "prior to the 9th grade, all students will develop an initial four-year plan of focused and purposeful high school study. The plan will be reviewed annually and will connect the student's academic and career goals to school" (p. 5). All participants indicated that transition assessments were administered to all students, and a plan of study was completed on each student in the school. Participant 01 expressed the following:

I know at the high school level we begin assessing that in the 9th grade. You know planning for a student's high school career; we have to know what their career interests are. With the new graduation requirements, students are required to have a focused elective area. They must have three classes in that area. And we recommend that they chose those focused elective credits based on their career goals, and that discussion usually begins in 9th grade or if not before.

Participant 03 added, "each student on campus creates 4-year or 6-year plan of study in 9th grade. A 6-year plan is a working document that is revised every year, which includes tentative plans of what they plan to do after high school."

Additionally, IDEA (2004) required that the IEP include the following:
"Appropriate measurable Postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where

appropriate, independent living skills; the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals” (Sec. 300.43).

Participant 01 continued, “We try to work closely with the student and the special education coordinator, to see if student’s interest matches IEP career goals.” School counselor’s IEP participation about postsecondary career goals was described by

Participant 06, “every IEP meeting I ever been to really, they mentioned goals. What you want to do? Are we moving in that direction? What skills are you learning to help you accomplish that goal?” Participant 02 elaborated on the importance of collaboration with the special education teacher in the development of Postsecondary goals:

As a counselor, I have always invited my caseworker to come in and look at those 4-year plans. On some of our students, we have also sat down and kind of work through them together to see that they did match up (i.e. 4-year plan and course of study on IEP). So we are going in the same direction. It would be sad for one of us to be advising a student one-way and taking a totally different angle with it. I know that I often call my person and I would say okay, what is this person’s IEP say they want to do?

Participants indicated that transition assessment tests were administered starting in the 8th grade to help students with learning disabilities develop career goals and interests. Participants 02 commended:

At my high school, we obviously provide the PLAN test, which is a pre-ACT test. It is similar to the EXPLORE, which is given in 8th grade at the middle school. It’s a pre-college testing entrance exam, but it also does a nice ability and interest sessions. Students get a chance to really get a feel for what they

may be interested in or areas they have strengths or a little bit weaknesses.

We also offer the PSAT, which is a pre-SAT test. There are national scholarships that are attached to that for students who do well and place well. The PLAN is given for 10th graders. ASVAB is opened for 11th and 12th graders, and it's more an aptitude test and ability test. We always tell our students that it does ask some knowledge pieces, but it is not an intelligence test. It is not geared toward how smart you are, so it kind of help take the pressure off the students, knowing that they can go in and take the test and see where their interests lie or their aptitude, things that they are strong at. We do also have the ACT; it is a national college test. It is accepted at colleges across the country.

Participant 06 also reported that transition assessments were administered at various grade levels:

The PLAN test is given in the 10th grade, and then I go over the results with the kids in classes. The EXPLORE is given in the 8th grade. The PLAN can predict a score on the ACT; we give that one at the junior level. The PLAN test though from what I understand of it from my readings, it is more toward their career and some of the different skills that they want to work on. Some courses they want to take to get to the point where they can go to college for that career and be focused in that area. The KUDER is now given in the 8th grade. We do more stuff on collegefortn.org in our Career Management classes. It can link you up to different assessments such as personality assessments, personal value assessments, what your skill sets are, guide you to different careers you may want to look at, then what schools specialize in

that area, and check to see what programs would lead you to one of those careers.

Participant 05 indicated that transition assessment tests were administered to students with learning disabilities to help them find out their interests. Participant 05 expressed the following:

We like to use not just the KUDER vocational assessment test, but we use the TCIDS, the TN Career Information Delivery System. I can't tell you how many times kids will say; I do not know what I want to do. I push ASVAB a lot just because it is not just for the military, but it is actually a career assessment that will hone in on very specific strengths and areas that you are not so strong in. And it will help you can decide on what areas you should address. It is one of the best tests out there.

Participant 02 elaborated on the Career for Management for Success class, assessments, and career postsecondary goals:

The Career Management for Success (CMS) class is new to the program and new to the Tenth Grade Academy this year. It is a class that all 10th graders take, and what's really nice about that class is that inside that class they are taking several different types of assessments. The purpose of that class is to give students a chance to explore different careers; that they may not have even heard of or have very limited access to otherwise. They are using several different websites such as for as [planningyourdreams](#). They are also using just career goals but job descriptions [and] salaries, and they get a chance to explore different things as well.

Participants were asked how students were informed of results of transition assessments based on their goals and interests. Participant 05 reported, “They meet with them and go over them [transition assessments] and talk about the results at the IEP meeting. The special education teacher is the one that I have always seen do this.” Participant 02 provided detailed information on how students were provided results from PLAN and ACT assessments:

We give those results back in the classroom, and we talk about general ideas, so we kind of go over that together as they are looking at their scores. As a counselor, I am interpreting the scores and telling them what that means: ranges, the difference in composites verses subcategories. We also explain how they can study to do better the next time they take a test, like the ACT. So that is done in a small group setting, and we do individual and small group settings for test interpretation. For 10th graders, the PLAN results are actually done inside their Geometry or Chemistry class. When I did their schedule this year, I made sure that every student was in one of those classes second semester. Our special service students are actually in Biology this semester, so it works out great. We will just see those students along with our Chemistry students. It has timed out perfectly and could not have planned it better.

Assistance and Activities Promote Outcomes for College or Work

In this second theme, participants discussed how they work with students with learning disabilities to best prepare them to graduate and enter college or go to work. Some of the participants discussed the School-to-Work program, which help students with learning disabilities gain work experiences within the community. Participants

talked about the importance of attending the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) conference and obtaining ideas of best practices in working with students with disabilities in the postsecondary transition process. Participants elaborated about how they provide academic counseling for students with disabilities. All of the participants indicated the benefits of Career Technology Education (CTE) classes, and how these classes have helped students to be job ready when they graduate.

Participant 01 indicated school counselors do help students to prepare for college and have provided assistance in several areas:

I think most of that our counselors do have a lot of knowledge about the course of study and what is required of students to be admitted to college. And they try to work with students to make sure they are best prepared when they leave high school to enter into the post-secondary institution they choose.

Participant 02 added, “Counselors are an excellent source to understand what colleges are looking for, and what admission counselors are looking for on campus.” When asked how do they help students with learning disabilities find jobs, Participant 02 reported “we have school-to-work; a program here that does take some of our students out and let them work in different places here in the city. This is an opportunity that we can place some of our students.”

Also, Participant 01 suggested that school counselors should advocate for students with disabilities, “For those counselors that are able to attend their national conference as well as state conference and receive their resource materials, they do provide lots of suggestions and ideas for advocating and working with students with disabilities.”

Participant 03 stated, “We do work really hard to help young people to become self-

advocates, and be able to start to express what is it that you need and advocate for those needs in a responsible adult-like matter.”

Participant 03 also indicated the following:

High school counselors really do know course offerings, requirements and planning students’ academic journey, and all of those things are very much a part of what counselors do, in terms of academic counseling for kids. How you go about the process of post-secondary work? Here in this community is a glitch for students who are not going to go to traditional post-secondary schools, and I think that transition piece is missing.

Additionally, Participant 06 explained that the Career-Tech classes have helped students and provided “a strong connection with the community and businesses in the community.” Participant 06 continued that the Career-Technology classes have “helped get these kids in some cases certified (i.e., Information Technology, Cosmetology, and Health Science) to the point where when they left high school, they were job ready.”

Participant 02 suggested that school counselors have assisted with the following:

We always try to get our kids involved in our Career and Technical Education classes. So they can experience not just the education side of life but also some hands on training, especially either in our Engineer Program, our Agriculture Science Program, and our Green House Management Program. Letting our students learn not just educational pieces but hands-on knowledge that will serve them well even after high school.

School counselors and career technical teachers have provided scholarship information to students with learning disabilities. Participant 01 reported:

Since Career-Technology teachers have students in class every day, they do talk to them about scholarships. We also offer financial aid seminars and events for the students, so we can talk to them and their parents about the different opportunities available. The Wilder-Naifeh is one of those scholarships that we talk about. We also have a scholarship center, and we post information in that center about that grant (scholarship). It is a great program for students who are interested in pursuing a career-technical degree, and it is open to many students. However, when asked other participants about their involvement with guiding students toward the Wilder-Naifeh scholarship, Participant 05 reported “I honestly don’t know.” Additionally, Participant 06 stated, “No, I don’t know anything about that.” However, Participant 04 indicated the following:

I am aware of that scholarship, and we do post those scholarships. We rely a lot on our CTE teachers, we would recognize in those goal setting meetings that a student expressed an interest there; but of course, that scholarship is available to anyone, special needs or not.

Participant 05 reported that a math teacher in one of the high schools has integrated career and college options in the curriculum, and students have to research their career area of interest. Participant 05 added, the following:

I am so excited about that one project that the Math teacher is doing Math Concepts, Secondary Plans and Planning. How do you do it? I am very excited about that those kids in general would not have researched that [to] that degree on their own. They have to do everything from: What degrees are offered? What is the room and board cost? What student services are there? What is the tuition?

What is the average financial aid packet? What are the majors offered? What do you have to do for the major? I mean it is very in-depth. The kids become very knowledgeable about that. This is in the Discrete Math class, which is good and bad. It is good because we are reaching those students that will more than likely definitely go to college. It is bad because you are looking at your upper level students. I wish that it was in some of the lower level classes too, that every student would take such as Algebra.

Duties of Counselors and Involvement in the Transition Process

All of the participants indicated that scheduling, developing plan of study, administrative duties, and test administration responsibilities have taken the majority of their time, which left little time for guidance for students with learning disabilities. However, if students with disabilities need individual attention, then they can make appointment or come by the school counselor's office at any time. Participant 02 reported that duties and responsibilities of high school counselors were as follows:

Most of our time is geared toward non-counseling duties or administrative duties and not direct contact with the kids. But really there is so much administration and so much paperwork that go into it. Maybe, it is a 65 to 35 split, and that's probably really kind of generous (i.e., 65 for administrative and 35 with guidance). The more support staff that we can add then the better off those statistics get. If we can add more support to help with master scheduling and stuff like that, then we can start spending more time with our students.

Participants also indicated that time was limited for direct guidance, but students with learning disabilities can come by the counselor's office for individual guidance on

transition and other issues. Participant 02 indicated the following about 10th graders at her high school:

We do test 400 students and it's really hard for one counselor to be able to meet individually with 400 students. But we give the general testing information up front in the classroom setting. If the student is still unclear and want more information, by all means they can make an appointment with their counselor and come in and get clarification in a one-on-one situation.

According to Participant 06, "There is not enough time for me to be as individualized with those students with disabilities because of the paper work, it's overwhelming." Participant 04 added, "A lot of the job responsibilities are just class schedules. The students are in the classes they need. My duties include scholarships, newsletters, checking websites, and parent conferences; we do all kinds of administrative duties as well." Participant 01 indicated that the duties of a high school counselor "really depend on the counselor." Participant 01 also suggested the following:

When I was working with 9th graders, I spent a lot of time on conflict resolution. I would say that 40 to 50% was spent doing that, but still a large majority of time is doing scheduling and working with at-risk students and developing remediation plans for them. Testing is very time consuming at certain times of the year.

During the week of Gateway testing that is all that we are doing.

Participant 01 also described how they are responsible for other duties than direct student guidance. School counselors have to be work on schedules, registration for the following school year in the spring semester, and data entry of scheduled information.

Participant 02 pointed out as follows:

There is a lot of testing duties that take up a part of the counselor's department time. Especially, in the State now where we have an End of Course test for 11 different areas, by the time the kids graduate from high school this class of 2013 they will take 11 different standardized or structured given tests, which is pretty extensive. So when you are talking about testing, minimally 400 kids at a time, it's pretty massive in the undertaking of organizing something like that. Of course, building a master's schedule takes a lot of not necessary the whole department, but individual counselor's time.

However, participants indicated that they have several duties, but they were still involved in the plan of study and career counseling of students with learning disabilities in the transition process. Participant 02 added:

We sit with our students at least once a year and help them revise the 4-year plan. That is a road map as we talk to the kids about every year, you planning out the classes that you are going to take and see how those classes connect to life after high school. We do a nice piece of guiding them from Stage 1 as freshman to all the way through graduation. For most of our students, we do, especially, our senior counselor, he will do a lot of graduation stuff and guidance from college to career tech centers and things like that after high school.

Participant 03 stated as part of guidance they have to check cumulative records to make sure all students have what they need for graduation:

We have to interpret the transcripts to make sure the student is on track for graduation. We have an integral piece in terms of scheduling. The testing part is certainly a big piece other than direct guidance for students. Anything

in terms of awards, honors, or determining whether a student has met certain criteria for a certain program, all come out of guidance.

In one of the high schools in this Unnamed County, Participant 04 elaborated: “We have a guidance counselor within the special needs department. This has helped us because we were doing all of that before and now a counselor within the special education department has been so beneficial.”

Several of the participants indicated that they have a large caseload. However, participants reported they still work with students with learning disabilities in the developing career goals, and students were welcome to drop-in the office at anytime.

Participant 02 elaborated:

We talk with our kids on a regular basis; at least as regular as we possibly can do, and like I said we meet with all of our kids at least twice a year whether they want to see us or not; we are talking to them. Then obviously students can come in and see us on appointments or drop-in or however, that works. School counselors can do a whole lot by talking to that student and say “okay” this is what we talked about the last time. Are we still following this? Do you want to try something different? Have you thought about these schools for these kinds of outlook or those kinds of ideas? Keeping that line of communication with that student open and letting that student feel like an adult in the building or someone who cares about them.

IEP Team, Goals, and Self-Advocacy Accommodations

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) indicated that federal legislation mandated that students with disabilities have postsecondary goals and outcomes indicated in their

Individual Education Program (IEP) plans by age 14. Participants reported they have supplied a vast amount of information, when they have attended IEP meetings for students with learning disabilities in the transition process.

Participant 01 described the transition process at IEP team meetings and the need to collaborate with the special education teacher:

When I was 9th grade counselor, I attended IEP meetings quiet frequently. The special education coordinator would let me know if I was needed to talk about a scheduling issue or needed for guidance or graduation purposes or transition purposes, from looking at a career standpoint or what their plans are after high school. And a lot of times, parents are not sure whom to contact. If parent schedules a meeting, a lot of times, they would often go through me first; then I would definitely always attend those meetings, if there was a problem and the parent contacted me first.

Participant 06 indicated she has attended several IEP meetings to discuss students with learning disabilities' postsecondary goals in the transition process. Participant 06 stated the following:

I have missed one [IEP meeting] simply because I forgot it. At the last [school] I was at [the other high school in county], you attended if you could or if it was convenient. I was so overwhelmed there that I could not get to all of them, but I got to the ones [IEP team meetings] that I could. But here [at this school] things are so streamlined and structured there is no reason for me to miss an IEP meeting, and I will not miss an IEP meeting, unless I just mess up. Every time I have attended IEP meetings, I feel like that I can make an important contribution

to the Team, and I know the kid. Now that I know what they need because I did my own digging and there is not a special education counselor here, I can make a contribution.

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2007) provided transition practices to secondary schools and indicated that student focused planning involved the student in IEP development. Participant 02 indicated that counselors do attend IEP meetings and provide information about students with learning disabilities' graduation requirements, credits, and course of study or focused plan of study:

I try to go every time I get my little notice in my mail. If it was not a crisis in my office at the time, I was definitely showing up for the IEP meetings. If it looked like it was going to be long, and they did not necessary need my services, I would sometimes excuse myself out and step back to my office. At meetings, I would speak about credits, graduation requirements and course planning or 4-year plans. Where is the student going from here? I would sometimes make adjustments to a current schedule or a second semester schedule, depending on the meeting we were in. Also, as the IEP team meets and invite people from the technical centers and colleges to come in to speak to our students, as they are exiting so that they know what their options are as far as that individual or university provides for students with learning disabilities. Or [how] technology centers provide for students with disabilities. We do invite people to come in and speak to our students to help them with transition.

In addition, Participant 01 indicated that school counselors help students with learning disabilities learn their accommodations and develop a relationship with parents

and students. Also, Participant 01 indicated a need for training for school counselors in the areas of postsecondary needs and the law:

I think it is important for counselors to be present in IEP meetings. So they are aware of what the accommodations are, and also that is a great way to develop a great relationship and get to know the parents and students too. Sometimes with so many students, you might not know all of your students individually, what's their concerns, and their needs are. But by attending that meeting, you're meeting that particular student and you know what areas they need help with, so that is an important start. I also think it will be helpful for counselors to receive more training on what are the options for students with disabilities, as far as post-secondary education. You know we learn some stuff through attending IEP meetings, but we don't know everything that is available to the students even in our area. We need continual training because things change, laws change, and new opportunities arise. So we would need continual training.

Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) indicated that when students with disabilities graduate from high school the IEP no longer applies for college. Therefore, students with learning disabilities need to know they have rights at college and accessibility to accommodations at the college level. However, students with disabilities need to self-advocate for themselves to let universities know they need accommodations and services.

Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) reported that educators should teach students with learning disabilities to speak for themselves in order to make sure they will receive appropriate accommodations in the classroom. Aune (1991) indicated that students with a disability should understand their disability, strengths, and limitations in

order to self-advocate. Aune reported in 1991, that several students with learning disabilities were not ready to meet the demands of college. Participant 01 elaborated:

I know assisting students with learning disabilities with self-advocacy is one of the things that the special education coordinator talks about in their IEP meetings. Just in some of the IEP meetings that I have been in with other students, they [special education] mentioned that there are services available once they [students with learning disabilities] leave high school. And they [special education] stressed the importance of making contact with the appropriate people to get those set up. But that's also something that counselors can talk about as well. I do think it would be good to have more training in that for our counselors, while we're knowledgeable about the basics of that, we do not know everything; all the ins and outs that we probably should.

Participant 03 expressed that "self-advocacy is a great life skill for kids to learn how to do that. So we hope they can practice while they are here, so they can do that when they leave."

Participant 04 indicated at her high school:

We have the special education school guidance counselor that attends the majority of the IEP meetings. But in previous years before she [special education school counselor] was there I would say probably I could attend everyone I was supposed to, of course, dependent on your caseload.

Participant 05 indicated, "I attend IEP team meetings when I can." Additionally, Participant 05 elaborated that attendance at IEP meetings was a waste of time:

If I could come in and then once my portion was over and be able to leave, that would be great. But a lot [of] times, I feel like I'm wasting my time listening to a lot of things at that point and time really would not have any impact or bearing, does that makes sense, and then there is always so much to do up here [upstairs in her office]. If I had the freedom to come in and leave when I could I would attend a lot more.

Participant 04 indicated that she no longer attended IEP team meetings because her school has a special education school counselor within the special education department:

I think we know in our load that [who] is special needs, but we [general education school counselors] don't go over those IEPs anymore. Now that we do have a Ms. ___ [special education school counselor] down there, we are really distant from it [attending IEP meetings]. Before I did know whom they [students with learning disabilities] were and sitting on IEPs, you do hear [about] their disabilities, able to hear them [students with learning disabilities] talk, and the parents; and we just do not get that anymore. Like this year, I don't think that I have been to one IEP meeting, this whole school year.

Other Findings

One participant had a personal experience with the postsecondary transition process to college and provided some valid transition information that other participants did not mention. This participant's spouse received money from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Research indicated that in order to assist a student with learning disabilities the vocational rehabilitation counselor could work in collaboration with the school system for an effective partnership in the transition of services (Dowdy,

1996). When Participant 05 was asked about the importance of students with learning disabilities knowing the difference between IDEA, Section 504, and ADA federal laws, Participant 05 reported the following:

Yes, actually I have personal experience with [this], and it is important because there are different rights afforded to them [the laws]. For example, here under IDEA they can get more extensive testing accommodations and things like that than under 504. So if they need that it good thing then to have the right to that. My husband actually had fallen under IDEA, but he is a teacher now. He received Vocational Rehab money to go to college and everything, and he was able to take his test in a separate area and all sorts of things at college.

Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Strang (2008) suggested the importance of promoting self-determination on students' IEPs and encouraged teaching seven key components in the classroom (i.e., problem-solving, self-management, decision making, goal setting, making choices, self-awareness, and self-advocacy). Participant 05 reported information about her husband's self-determination or will to be successful:

I make recommendations and encourage them [students with learning disabilities] to do the best they can. Like I say, my husband is dyslexic and he has a math degree. He does computer program and things like that. I know that students no matter what their disability depending on the determination of their strength, they can certainly excel.

Participant 05 reported that at her school's college and career fair, she asked the university people about their Office of Disability Services and was told:

When we [the high school] have college and career fairs, I did ask some of the colleges about their student support services. It was funny because one of the ladies in particular was like I have never had that question asked to me before. I said well I know of a young lady [student with learning disabilities] who will definitely go on to a 4-year college. She will need those services, and she will need to know how to get to that information. How can I guide her there? Again, to be honest with you, I think it was mainly because of my experience with my husband. I know the struggle. I really do wish we could be more involved than [what] we are [doing].

In addition, Participant 05 expressed the need for Vocational Rehabilitation counselors to be available at schools to discuss available resources:

There is Vocational Rehabilitation money that you can get to help to go to school too. I do not think [it] is being utilized much, mainly, because the individual [Vocational Rehabilitation counselor] that is our main contact seems to be unavailable most of the time. Speaking out from [another unnamed] county [within the State], I know that Vocational Rehabilitation helps them [students with learning disabilities] with applying to college and finding work and even transportation, so I am assuming the same is done here [Unnamed County schools].

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Seven high school counselors in Unnamed County Schools were interviewed to examine their

perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. The interviews were held at two different high schools in the county. During interviews with each participant a tape recorder was used to record data. The researcher transcribed each interview.

All counselors reported they have master's degrees, and one counselor also has National Board School Counselor's Certification. The number of years of experience as a school counselor ranged from 1 year to 18 years.

Coding procedures were used in this qualitative study to compact data into themes and create categories in support of research questions. Categories that involved school counselor's perception on the provisions of postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities emerged from the data. These themes were as follows: 1) plan of study for postsecondary goals based on vocational assessments; 2) assistance and activities promote outcomes for college or work; 3) duties of counselors and involvement in the transition process; and 4) the IEP team, postsecondary goals, and self-advocacy of accommodation needs. There was also an area of other findings that was noted but was not identified as a theme. This other findings involved a participant's postsecondary personal experience.

In the first theme the participants discussed postsecondary goals for students with learning disabilities based on transition assessments that included course of study. These activities were needed to enable students with learning disabilities to meet their postsecondary goals. Participants explained the different assessments administered and the grade level these tests were given (i.e., KUDER and EXPLORE – 8th grade, PLAN – 10th grade, and ACT and ASVAB – 11th grade). Participants reported that the 4-year

plan of focused elective study should be developed prior to the 9th grade. The plan should be reviewed annually, and the purpose was to connect the student's academic and career goals to school. IDEA (2004) indicated that students with learning disabilities have IEPs that included transition services with courses of study needed to assist the students in reaching their postsecondary goals.

In this second theme participants discussed how they work with students with learning disabilities to best prepare them to graduate and then enter college or go to work. Some of the participants discussed the School-to-Work program that helps students with learning disabilities gain work experiences within the community. Participants elaborated about how they provide academic counseling for students with disabilities. All of the participants indicated the benefits of Career Technology Education (CTE) classes and how these classes have helped students to be job ready when they graduate.

In the third theme all of the participants indicated scheduling, developing plan of study, administrative duties, and test administration responsibilities have taken the majority of their time, which leaves little time for guidance for students with learning disabilities. However, if students with disabilities need individual attention, they can make an appointment or come by the school counselor's office at any time.

In the last theme the participants discussed their attendance and participation in IEP team meetings. Some participants indicated that they make sure they attend meeting to get to know the students with learning disabilities, parents, accommodations, and postsecondary goals. However, two counselors at one high school indicated they do not attend IEP meetings because their school now has a special education school counselor. Participants also discussed students with learning disabilities need to speak for

themselves in order to make sure they will receive appropriate accommodations in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Federal laws have been passed that impacted how public schools facilitated postsecondary transition services and assisted students with learning disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 indicated that postsecondary transition services on the IEP included activities based on the child's needs, "taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests" to help them achieve their postsecondary goals (Sec. 300.43). House and Martin (1998) indicated that school counselors were critical to a school system because they have an impact on academic placement and postsecondary opportunities of all students. However, the lack of assistance from high school counselors hinders the transition process for students with specific learning disabilities. According to Milsom (2002) the American School Counselor Association recommended that high school counselors advocate for students with disabilities in planning for postsecondary transition to work or college. Additionally, IDEA (2004) required that the IEP included "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills; the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals" (Sec. 300.43).

High school counselors have a depth of knowledge and understanding of postsecondary colleges and the employment process for all students. Hughey and Hughey (1999) indicated that importance should be placed on career development and

academic achievement by school counseling programs as a way to make sure that all students were effectively prepared for their careers.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the study was to examine high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) indicated that federal legislation mandated that students with disabilities have postsecondary goals and outcomes indicated in their Individual Education Program (IEP) plans by age 14. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) were mandated by federal legislation from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476), to provide planned transition services. The transition service plan should have steps that were delineated in the students IEPs for postsecondary outcomes. This law also indicated that transition involved "...a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training and integrated employment" (Savage, 2005, p. 43). School counselors have a lot of knowledge about admission requirements to postsecondary colleges and can help students with career choices. Additionally, school counselors have supplied an enormous amount of information for transition service plans for students with disabilities when they have participated in IEP meetings (West & Taymans, 1998). Educators and support staff have been encouraged to collaborate with the development of curriculum and instruction in self-determination and advocacy skills for all students. Self-determination skills were needed to help students with disabilities take responsibility for their own goals and self-regulation of their behavior (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998).

Additionally, self-advocacy skills allowed students with learning disabilities to self-advocate their needs, have knowledge of their strengths and limitations, and understand their disability and rights (Hadley, 2006).

Discussion and Conclusions from Findings

The research questions focused on the perceptions of high school counselors in the provision of postsecondary outcomes to students with learning disabilities. Participants reported that they just wanted to make sure that all students were on track for graduation and have classes they need to meet their postsecondary goals. Participants in both high schools in the Unnamed County reported that they have completed transition assessments and helped students with their plans of study [course of study]. Participants also indicated that transition assessments should be administered in 9th grade or sooner in middle school. Also, postsecondary goals were based on results from transition assessments. The State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2011 Annual Division of College and Career Readiness Conference indicated in its handouts, “prior to the 9th grade, all students will develop an initial four-year plan of focused and purposeful high school study. The plan will be reviewed annually and will connect the student’s academic and career goals to school” (p. 5). Additionally, IDEA (2004) mandated students with disabilities to have postsecondary goals and outcomes indicated in their IEP plans by age 14.

Participants indicated that various on-going transition assessments were administered with students with learning disabilities in high school. The KUDER and EXPLORE assessments were usually administered in 8th grade at middle school. Participants indicated that when the 9th graders arrived at the high school, they would

have already taken the EXPLORE transition assessment. All of the participants indicated that all 10th grade students were required to take the PLAN transition assessment that can predict a score on the ACT. The ACT and ASVAB assessments had been administered to 11th graders.

Participants reported that the postsecondary goal, students' interest, and the plan of study [course of study] were based on results from transition assessments. Additionally, participants reported that as students with learning disabilities take classes, they might change their postsecondary goals and course of study. All students in the state were required to have a focused elective area. Participants indicated that students with learning disabilities were also required to choose focused elective credits [4-year or 6-year plan] that were based on their career goals and transition assessments, which should have been done in 9th grade or in middle school. All participants reported that as students with learning disabilities career interests changed, then the high school counselors had to revise the 4-year or 6-year plan of study. It was revealed that when this happens, school counselors and special education teachers need to collaborate to make sure that the guidance department's plan of study and students' career goals match the IEP's course of study and postsecondary goals.

Students with learning disabilities' postsecondary transition plans have delineated steps in their IEPs, with a set of activities that promoted outcomes from high school to college or work. During the interview process, there were numerous participants who discussed how they work with students to best prepare them when they leave high school and enter into the workforce or college. The participants discussed that they want to make sure that students were in the right academic program to meet their needs and

learning the skills to help them accomplish their goals. Participants also revealed that both high schools have a new Career Management for Success (CMS) class this school year. All 9th grade students at one high school and each 10th grader at the other high school were required to take the CMS class. Many participants explained that this class has given students an opportunity to explore different careers, and all of the students have learned to use several different websites to investigate their options.

A few participants mentioned how beneficial the School-to-Work (STW) program has been for students with learning disabilities. Participants indicated that the STW program has helped students with learning disabilities work in different places within the city and to get some experience in their area of interest.

Several participants reported that they have attended state and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) conferences, and this has helped to obtain ideas on how to work with students with learning disabilities in the postsecondary transition process. However, participants reported that not all high school counselors have attended conferences nor obtain materials on best practices for working with students with learning disabilities.

Participants reported that students with learning disabilities have attended Career Technology Education (CTE) classes, which provided a strong connection with the community and businesses. Participants reported that CTE classes have helped students get jobs after they have graduated from high school.

Participants reported the duties of high school counselors and their involvement in the transition process. All participants indicated scheduling, developing plans of study, administrative duties, and test administration responsibilities have taken the majority of

their time, which left little time for guidance of students with learning disabilities.

However, if students with disabilities need individual attention, then they could make appointment or come by the school counselor's office at any time.

Participants spoke about their depth of knowledge on courses, scheduling, college admissions, and the employment process for all students. Participants supplied information for the postsecondary transition service plans for students with disabilities at IEP meetings. Participants discussed their knowledge on what colleges have looked for in students and admission requirements. In addition, participants stated their jobs were all about graduation requirements, transcripts, registration, entering data into computer, and scholarships; little time had been spent on direct individualized counseling.

Participants reported that they work with students with learning disabilities in developing career goals and plans of study. Participants elaborated that they do help students with their academic journey and provide academic counseling for students with learning disabilities. Participants indicated there was not enough time for high school counselors to provide direct individualized counseling to students with learning disabilities due to overwhelming paperwork.

Several participants expressed the need to attend Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings for students with learning disabilities. These participants indicated that they make an important contribution to the IEP team, and they get to know the student, the students' needs, and the parents. At IEP meetings the participants discussed scheduling issues, courses of study, graduation requirements, and students' plans for after high school. However, two participants at one of the high schools explained that they do not go to IEP team meeting anymore because they have a special high school education

counselor. Now they were distant from the students with learning disabilities because they no longer attended their IEP team meetings. These two participants stated that before the special education school counselor was hired, they did know the students with disabilities and attended their IEP team meetings. Therefore, these participants were able to hear about the students' disabilities and talk to students and parents but now were no longer in contact with students with learning disabilities.

Two of the participants reported that school counselors were very knowledgeable about the curriculum. However, as far as postsecondary transition in helping students find jobs, there is a hole and a need to figure out how to make that transition better.

Participant 03 indicated the following:

It would be interesting for all of us, I think, to sit down and maybe figure out where the crack is between high school and not [those] kids who are going to college or even technical school. But for those students that need to go to vocational training programs. Somehow there is a hole there, and I don't know and maybe that would a place that I think would be a really good place to spend a little time trying to figure out how to make that transition better.

Implications for Practice

Generalizations cannot be made from qualitative research. However, the following recommendations for practice for high school counselors were based on the data gathered from the interviews and the meaning the researcher constructed from the study:

- The principals at both high schools may want to consider the benefit of high school counselors attending IEP team meetings. At IEP team meetings the

- school counselor will learn information about students through attendance, be able to learn students' accommodation needs, develop a relationship with the student and get to know the parents, and know what content areas the students need help with in the classroom. In addition, school counselor will be able to share information about transition assessments, career goals, and plan of study.
- Administrators at both high schools may want school counselors to become familiar with the Wilder-Naifeh scholarship. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission indicated that the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant will allow Tennessee students after high school “enrollment in a certificate or diploma program at a Tennessee Technology Center.” (State of Tennessee, n.d., p. 3). Additionally, awards provided for this grant are \$2,000 annually.
 - During the interviews several high school counselors indicated a lack of knowledge or training in working with students with learning disabilities during postsecondary transition. Therefore, training in the following areas may be helpful to school counselors:
 - IDEA of 2004 on Postsecondary Transition
 - Community Based Instruction
 - Teaching Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy Skills
 - The IEP Transition Plan
 - Difference between IDEA and ADA and Why Students Need to Know their Rights for Postsecondary Education
 - Principals may want to promote more school-to-work opportunities for students with learning disabilities. When school counselors were asked about future work

options within the community, two of the participants indicated that “as far as transition for special needs, there is a hole there.”

- Participants indicated that scheduling, developing plan of study, administrative duties, and test administration responsibilities have taken the majority of their time, which left little time for guidance for students with learning disabilities. Therefore, administrators at both high schools may want to schedule specific times for school counselors to work with students with learning disabilities in the following areas: career counseling, academic advisement, college admission requirements, how to contact the college Office of Disability, and when or how to apply for scholarships.
- The high school principals may want school counselors and special education teachers to have collaboration time to discuss students with learning disabilities’ transition assessment results, plans of study and/or courses of study, and postsecondary outcomes.

Implications for Further Research

Based on this study the following are suggestions for additional research in the area of postsecondary transition planning for students with learning disabilities:

1. Research on the effectiveness of collaboration of high school special education teachers and school counselors during the transition process of postsecondary outcomes
2. Research on the effectiveness of high school counselors working with students with learning disabilities with the use of looping practices

3. Replication of this study with a larger population to see if there will be similar findings
4. Comparative study that addresses differences between the two high schools in this study on the provision of postsecondary transition for students with learning disabilities (i.e., climate, administration, culture)

Summary

Chapter 5 included an introduction, the statement of the problem, discussion and conclusions drawn from findings, implications for practice, implications for further research, and the chapter summary. In addition, this chapter addressed the federal law that impacted how public schools facilitated postsecondary transition services for students with learning disabilities and high school counselors understanding of postsecondary colleges and the employment process for these students.

The discussion and conclusions that came from findings were developed from the research questions. The participants elaborated on all the transition assessments that were administered to students with learning disabilities to determine career interests and strengths. Participants also discussed how transition services included the plan of study and career goals.

The participants indicated that the STW program has helped students with learning disabilities work in different places within the city and to receive work experiences in their area of interest. Participants reported that Career Technology Education (CTE) classes have a strong connection with the community and businesses, and these classes have helped students with learning disabilities get jobs after they

graduate. Participants spoke about their depth of knowledge of courses, scheduling, colleges' admission standards, and the employment process for all students.

Recommendations included that administrators may want to encourage collaboration time between high school counselors and special education teachers on a consistent basis to discuss postsecondary goals, courses of study, and postsecondary outcomes. Principals at both high schools may be encouraged to promote school counselors to become more familiar with available scholarships such as the Wilder-Naifeh grant. Additionally, principals may be encouraged to provide high school counselors with training in postsecondary transition, community based instruction, and differences between federal laws and teaching students self-determination and advocacy skills. Most importantly, principals may want to make sure that school counselors will attend IEP meetings for students with learning disabilities.

Further research on postsecondary transition for students with learning disabilities should be accomplished. Findings from this study may have encouraged high school counselors to expand their practice and perform at an enhanced level when helping students with special needs go to college, get a job, and succeed in life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide

I. Introduction

- A. Statement of Intent: The intent of this study is to examine high school counselors' perceptions of their involvement in the provision of post-secondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities.
- B. IRB letter of informed consent.
- C. The interviewer will ask general questions to help put interviewee at ease: i.e., number of years of experience and type of degree held.
- D. The tape recorder will be turned on and interviewer will ask for permission to tape record the interview.

II. Interview Questions

- 1. Do you know the difference between IDEA, Section 504 and ADA federal laws?

Why is it important for students with learning disabilities who will attend college, to know the difference between IDEA, Section 504 and ADA federal laws?
- 2. What type of transition assessments (i.e., KUDER, CAREERSCOPE, ABVAS, TCIDS, and EXPLORE OR PLAN) do you administer? What grade level are these tests administered?

3. At what age or grade level does the IEP team discuss the course of study and information about measurable postsecondary goals based on the age appropriate transition assessment?
4. How are students with learning disabilities informed about the results of transition assessments, based on their goals and interests?
5. How students with disabilities are informed of the results of EXPLORE and PLAN and given guidance concerning these test results?
6. What percentage of the school counselor's time is devoted to direct student guidance and what percent is devoted to administrative duties?
7. What are duties other than direct student guidance?
8. How well do counselors feel their education or training has prepared them to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in transition?
9. What level of involvement does counselors have guiding the diploma path; course of study; transition assessment; and career counseling of students with disabilities?
10. What is their level of involvement with disability services personnel at institutes of higher education: i.e., do they invite personnel from disability services to the school to meet with students; do they know or communicate with them; do they coordinate or facilitate student involvement with disabilities?
11. How often do counselors attend IEP meetings?
12. What is their knowledge your involvement in with guiding students toward the Wilder-Naifeh scholarship for voc-tech school?

13. What impact does NCLB standards have on access to general education instruction: i.e., the impact of accountable of high expectations for academic success for all students?
14. Who can assist students with learning disabilities in your school with self-advocacy skills that indicate the students' need to negotiate postsecondary education?
15. Do you think school counselors have a wealth of knowledge about the following:
- course of study?
 - course requirements needed for college admission?
 - helping students with disabilities look at future work options within the community?
16. What are your thoughts about the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that supported the statement that school counselors advocate for students with disabilities in planning for transitions to careers or to postsecondary institutions?
17. What types of measurements do school counselors use to help students with learning disabilities complete a self-concept or self-determination assessment?
18. How can school counselors help students with learning disabilities learn their accommodations, rights and responsibilities, practice self-advocacy skills, and help with college applications and selection?

19. What can school counselors do for students with disabilities in helping to obtain verification of their disability for postsecondary schools?

20. Do you have any additional comments?

Appendix B

Letter to Participants

Dear High School Counselors,

I am a student at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee and seeking a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. Presently, I am in the process of working on my dissertation about Perceptions of High School Counselors Involvement in the Provision of Postsecondary Transition Services to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities. I am writing to ask you to participate in the study.

This research will examine high school counselors' perceptions of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities. School counselors have offered academic advisement, career development, and a variety of other services that support all students on a daily basis, as a way to help students maximize their potential. In addition, your involvement with the postsecondary transition service process has been vastly beneficial to students with specific learning disabilities.

As a participant in the study, I will ask you questions with reference to your views on transition assessments, course of study, college admission and selection, career development, and other transition areas. Selected participants will be interviewed for the study, and interviews will last approximately one hour. Your identity and information provided in the interviews will be confidential. With participation in this research, you are providing permission to use quotations of your statements from the interviews. However, to protect your identification in the study, each interview will be coded using a pseudonym. After the information has been collected, you will be asked to review your

transcripts for accuracy.

Please consider participation in this research, it is completely voluntary. You are encouraged to contact me with any questions about the study and reply to this letter with your response.

Sincerely,

Diana Hudson

Appendix C

Informed Consent

**EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR PROSPECTIVE RESEARCH INTENDED FOR REVIEW**

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE

The purpose(s) of this research study is as follows:

The purpose of the study is to examine high school counselors' perceptions and gain an understanding of their involvement in the provision of postsecondary transition services to students with specific learning disabilities.

DURATION

Eight high school counselors from Unnamed County Schools in Tennessee will be selected to participate in the study. The duration of each interview session will be approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The interviews will be conducted over a period of 4-weeks. Each session is individually conducted with the participants.

PROCEDURES

In this study open-ended questions will be asked to the eight high school counselors. Initial interviews will be conducted with each participant. During the one-on-one interviews with each participant, a tape recorder is used to record the exact wording of the interviews and preserved for the analysis of data. Notes are also taken during interviews.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

There are no alternatives.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no known or expected risks/discomforts.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The possible benefits of your participation are:

This research could assist high school counselors with gaining a better understanding on the importance of legislative implementation of transition service plans for students with

specific learning disabilities starting at age 14. This study could help high school counselors to report their depth of knowledge and assistance provided in helping students with learning disabilities go to college or work.

FINANCIAL COSTS

There are no costs to participants in the research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Joy Hudson, whose phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Joy Hudson at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or Dr. Virginia Foley at 423-439-7615. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored at Joy Hudson in Tennessee for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE _____

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR DATE

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable) DATE

VITA

DIANA JOY HUDSON

- Personal Data: Place of Birth: Bridgeport, Alabama
Marital Status: Married
- Education: Public Schools, Bridgeport, Alabama
A.S. Social Work, Chattanooga State Community College,
Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1977
B.S. Social Work, University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1987
M.S. School Psychology, University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1992
Ed.D. Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee, 2011
- Professional Experience: School Psychologist, Marion County Schools, Jasper,
Tennessee, 1989-2003
Adjunct Professor, Chattanooga State Technical College,
West Campus-Kimball, Tennessee, 2002-2003
Management Consultant & NCLB Intervention Team,
Tennessee Department of Education, Cleveland,
Tennessee, 2003-2006
School Psychologist and Special Education Coordinator,
Bradley County Schools, Cleveland, Tennessee,
2007 to present
- Awards and Training: Ruby Payne Poverty Training Award, 2003
Service Learning Training Award, 2005
Response to Intervention Train the Trainer, 2007