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Special Education Transition Programs for Three Southwest Virginia School Systems: A
Comparative Study

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

James R. Myers, Jr.

May 2011

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Keywords: Indicator 14, Postsecondary, Special Education, Transition Services

ABSTRACT

Special Education Transition Programs for Three Southwest Virginia School Systems:

A Comparative Study

by

James R. Myers, Jr.

Transition services at the high school level can make a positive difference in the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities by providing them a program of study or training at the secondary level. Transition services can also assist them in acquiring an education, vocational training, rehabilitative services, and work opportunities as they enter the postsecondary world of young adulthood.

The purpose of this study is to compare the transition programs of 3 Southwest Virginia school systems in an effort to determine the difference a full-time transition coordinator could make in the postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Findings revealed significant differences in the outcomes of students with disabilities in the 3 Southwest Virginia county school systems and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools. Differences were revealed in (1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas) and (2) the percentage of students who met the definition of Indicator 14. Each of the 3 Southwest Virginia county school systems has fewer positive outcomes than did students in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

Analysis also revealed there were no significant differences between Southwest Virginia school systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator in relation to postsecondary education, vocational training, and employment outcomes. The system with a full-time transition coordinator (Wise County) had least positive outcomes than did each of the other 2 Southwest Virginia county school systems. While there were no significant differences in the county with a full-time transition coordinator and the 2 counties without the coordinators, the graduation rates could have been even lower if the one county did not have a full-time transition coordinator.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, this study is dedicated to my Lord Jesus Christ who has sustained me, strengthened, and extended His Grace to me throughout this incredible academic journey.

To my wife, Vickie Myers, no amount of gratitude could ever express what she has meant to me during this process. She has been my motivating force, the one who has encouraged me and assured me constantly that I could accomplish the seemingly impossible, even when at times; I didn't believe it could be done. She has taken on many of my responsibilities at home and church over the last several years in order that I could dedicate myself to the completion of this program. To my wife of 41 years, I say thanks from the depths of my heart.

To my daughters Dawn and Missy and my son-in-law Ken, who helped me make the decision to enter the doctoral program, I extend my love and appreciation. You also have been real sources of the family love, patience, sacrifice, reassurance, and support that have sustained me. No father could ask for more in his children. I am so proud of each of you.

And last, but not least, to my mother, who provided a Christian foundation in my life since childhood. She has uplifted me through her prayers and words of encouragement during this time. I say thanks for your love.

With a Savior, a foundation and family like this, one could only succeed. It is to them I dedicate this work.

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Finally, I have been so blessed to have been a part of the Lee County, Virginia cohort while in the ELPA program. We have worked together as a team to reassure each other throughout it all. Special thanks to my fellow members for our cohort meetings, and encouragement from beginning to end. Lynn Metcalf, Jeff Harber, Robert Widener, Gary McCann, and Wandaleen Adams I am deeply indebted to you for including me in your lives, for keeping in constant contact with me during the research and writing process, and for providing much needed encouragement all the way to the end.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Successful transition from high school to postsecondary education or the workforce was found to be a necessary component that prepared students to reach their maximum potential personally and professionally. Research has revealed that significant populations of students who were deemed at risk, special education, and minorities did not receive a quality education that adequately prepared them to deal with the complex issues that occur during life after graduation (Kline & Williams, 2007). With regard to postsecondary education, they concluded that “The benefits of earning a postsecondary degree are clear, but minorities and persons with disabilities are disproportionately ill-prepared to enter into and succeed in higher education” (p. 3).

The National Longitudinal Transition Study² (NLTS2) was conducted to address concerns regarding the vocational training, guidance, and work-based experiences of students with special needs (Willis, 2008). It found that “Only 2% of high school juniors and seniors receiving special education services participated in work-based learning experiences” (Wills, 2008, p. 19). The NLTS2 also revealed that: 56% had received no career counseling, 51% had received no career assessments, 64% received no job-readiness training, 86% had received no job-skills training, and 64% had received no job-search instruction” (Wills, 2008, p. 19).

In an effort to stem potential failure and assist with student transition into postsecondary life, the federal government included certain provisions within the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Section 300.320(b) of that Act requires each state to address graduation and dropout rates by developing a postsecondary transition plan to be included in each child’s Individual Education Program (IEP) by age 16 or younger. The

purpose of each student's program is to conduct an assessment that enables the IEP committee to design a program that will guide the student through a course of study and preparation that will help him or her successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary life.

In Virginia at the secondary level the program must provide academic or vocational training and any rehabilitative or support services that are deemed necessary to ensure student success. Postsecondary success is monitored by state and local agencies. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2010c) IEP regulation (8 VAC 20-81-110) states,

The IEP should include measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills. The transition services must be based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests. Transition services, including courses of study, needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. (p. 68)

The U.S. Department of Education instituted a series of surveys, indicators, and monitoring priorities to ensure that each state was complying with the IDEIA 2004 requirements for students with disabilities and the postsecondary transition process. Indicator 14 was used to monitor outcomes regarding participation in postsecondary transition. Indicator 14 was defined as follows: the percent of youth no longer in secondary school who had IEPs in effect at the time of the survey and who were:

- A. Enrolled in higher education within 1 year of leaving high school;
- B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within 1 year of leaving high school; or

C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a) (3)(B))

Services provided by a full-time transition coordinator could guide and motivate students to progress through high school as well as to provide the assistance and guidance that would result in lower dropout rates and positive postsecondary outcomes for all students with disabilities (Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007).

Sitlington et al. (2007) found that a full-time transition coordinator or specialist's responsibilities included the following:

- Reviewing or securing vocational ability instruments for use within the district
- Reviewing or securing occupational interest instruments for use within the district
- Reviewing or securing learning style instruments for use within the district
- Reviewing or securing self-determination assessment tools for use within the district
- Conducting assessments for students with disabilities
- Recording results on student portfolios
- Interpreting assessment results for assessment IEP teams
- Facilitating student enrollment in courses that are consistent with interests and abilities
- Contacting adult support agencies for supplementary assessments and supports
- Assisting the student with applications to postsecondary educational programs
- Assisting the student with applications for postsecondary employment. (pp. 80-81)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare the outcomes of students with disabilities in three Southwest Virginia county school systems and those of the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

The second purpose of this study is to assess the postsecondary outcomes of all students with disabilities who were graduates of the three Southwest Virginia county school systems.

This study compares the transition programs in each of the three Southwest Virginia county school systems to determine if there were any differences between the system that had a full-time transition coordinator and the two other systems that did not have a full-time transition coordinator.

Students in the study met the definition of Indicator 14 (those who were competitively employed, and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school). The study involved students with different disabilities and who had graduated with Advanced Studies, Standard, Modified Standard, or a Certificate of Completion.

Research Questions

1. Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities in the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding:(1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas), and (2) the percentage of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 (who were competitively employed, and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school)?

2. Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and the outcomes of students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to: (1) students with disabilities' successful completion of their secondary education, and (2) whether they met the definition of Indicator 14?
3. Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status after leaving high school?
4. Were there any significant differences in the postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their enrollment in postsecondary education or training?
5. Were there any significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and with students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without a full-time transition coordinator regarding whether they received services from state or federal agencies?

Definitions of Terms

1. *At Risk*-Young people are at risk or educationally disadvantaged if they have been exposed to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences in the family, school, or community. This definition is intentionally vague about what constitutes "inadequate" or "inappropriate" experiences, as it would be difficult to secure agreement on what would be adequate or appropriate. Still, it provides some broad guidance for assessing the extent to which children can be described as educationally disadvantaged or at risk. (Source: ERIC Development Team. Retrieved on March 21, 2011 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov.ezproxy.etsu.edu:2048/PDFS/ED316617.pdf>)
2. *Certificate of Completion*- Available to students who complete prescribed programs of studies defined by a local school board but who do not qualify for diplomas.(Source: Virginia Department of Education-Graduation Requirements. Retrieved March 26, 2011 from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/other_diploma.shtml)
3. *Child with A Disability* “a child evaluated in accordance with Sec. Sec. 300.530-300.536 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title [20USCS§§ 1400 et seq.] as emotional disturbance), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004. IDEA Reauthorized 2005. Public Law 112-7. [20 U.S.C.S § 1401(14)])

4. *Exiters*-“Are defined as a student with a disability who exited on an IEP and is completely separated from secondary education for one year. Exiters are students with disabilities who received a diploma (any type of diploma option), no longer eligible for a free appropriate education or dropped out. (Drop outs can be individuals 9th grade and up).” (Source: E-Mail Correspondence from Dr. Elizabeth Getzel. The Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. March 31, 2011).
5. *Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* “Special education and related services that- (A) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (B) meet the standards of the State educational agency; (C) include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under section 614(d) [20 USCS § 1414(d)]” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004. IDEA Reauthorized 2005. Public Law 112-7).
6. *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA)* “That education of students with disabilities (between the ages of 3 and 22) must be provided at public expense, under public supervision at no charge to the parents and based on the child’s unique needs and not on the child’s disability” (Virginia Department of Education, 2010a, p. 3).
7. *Indicator 14*: “Percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of

postsecondary school or both, within one year of leaving high school” (U.S. Department of Education: *State, Performance Plans* (20 U.S.C. § 1416(a) (3) (B))).

8. *Individual Education Program (IEP)* The term ‘individualized education program’ or ‘IEP’ means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with section 614(d) (Source: Library of Congress, Retrieved April 13, 2011 from <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c108:1:/temp/~c108CAVJKq:e16556>)
9. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* “(A) In general. To the maximum extent appropriate children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with other children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be served satisfactorily” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004. IDEA Reauthorized 2005. Public Law 112-7. [20 U.S.C.S § 1401(14)]).
10. *Advanced Studies Diploma*- To graduate with an Advanced Studies Diploma, a student must earn at least 24 standard units of credit and at least nine verified units of credit. The school counselor can advise on available courses to fulfill the requirements for an Advanced Studies Diploma. (Source: Virginia Department of Education-Graduation Requirements. Retrieved March 26, 2011 from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/advanced_studies.shtml)

11. *Modified Standard Diploma*-The Modified Standard Diploma is intended for certain students at the secondary level who have a disability and are unlikely to meet the credit requirements for a Standard Diploma. Eligibility and participation in the program are determined by the student's IEP team and the student, when appropriate. Decisions of eligibility and participation may be made at any point after the student's eighth grade year. Written consent from parent or guardian must be obtained for a student to choose this diploma program. The student must: be allowed to pursue a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma at any time throughout his or her high school career; not be excluded from courses and tests required to earn a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma; and pass literacy and numeracy competency assessments as prescribed by the Board: For students who entered the ninth grade prior to 2000-01, the literacy and numeracy competency assessments were the reading and mathematics subtests of the LPT. For students who entered the ninth grade in 2000-01 and beyond, the literacy and numeracy competency assessments are the eighth-grade English Reading test and the eighth-grade Mathematics SOL test (Board action – November 30, 2000). The Board also approved four additional substitute assessments to satisfy the literacy and numeracy requirements for students pursuing a Modified Standard Diploma. (Source: Virginia Department of Education-Graduation Requirements. Retrieved March 26, 2011

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/modified_standard.shtml)

12. *Special Diploma* -Available to students with disabilities who complete the requirements of their IEP and who do not meet the requirements for other diplomas. (Source: Virginia Department of Education-Other Diplomas and Certificates. Retrieved March 26, 2011 from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/other_diploma.shtml)
13. *Special Education* -“Specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including, (A) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; including (B) instruction in physical education” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004. IDEA Reauthorized 2005. Public Law 112-7. [20 U.S.C.S § 1401(14)]).
14. *Standard Diploma*- To graduate with a Standard Diploma, a student must earn at least 22 standard units of credit by passing required courses and electives, and earn at least six verified credits by passing end-of-course SOL tests or other assessments approved by the Board of Education. (Source: Virginia Department of Education-Graduation Requirements. Retrieved on March 26, 2011 from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/standard.shtml>)
15. *The Equal Protection Clause*: the clause in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that prohibits any state from denying to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. Source: Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of Law equal protection clause. (n.d.).*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law*. Retrieved March 26, 2011, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/equal_protection_clause

16. *The Fourteenth Amendment To The U.S. Constitution:* Section. 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction there of are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Source: FindLaw-For Legal Professionals. Retrieved on March 26, 2011 from <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment14/>)
17. *The Tenth Amendment To The U.S. Constitution:* The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people. (Source: FindLaw-For Legal Professionals. Retrieved March 26, 2011) (<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment10/>)
18. *Transition Services:* “A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education , adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests and; (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional

vocational evaluation” (Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004, p. 49).

Limitations and Delimitations

The findings of this study are delimited to the three Southwest Virginia public school systems involved in this study and may not be generalized to other school systems. This study only consisted of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 and exited, dropped out, or graduated from each of the three school systems in 2007 (The Virginia Department of Education, 2010a). This study is limited by my intense involvement in Special Education and the possible resultant biases.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 contains the statement of the problem, research questions, and definitions of terms, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 includes a review of pertinent literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology including procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides statements of findings based on analysis of data. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and recommendations to improve practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The recognition of discrimination against students with intellectual or physical disabilities and legislation mandating the proper services and accommodations for them in American public school systems and education has been a process that began in the early 1800s (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006).

Today, more than at any other previous time in American education, contemporary students with special needs and disabilities have benefited from past court decisions, federal laws passed, and new policies that have been instituted over many decades. The inclusion of each student into regular education classrooms has enabled them to receive instruction and resources that ensure each individual student the opportunity to work academically and successfully within his or her disability in order to obtain a diploma or certificate of completion (Swanson, 2008).

Regarding the secondary educational process, Swanson (2008) reported that a potential problem existed:

Completing high school and transitioning into adulthood represent critical stages of life for all young people. Students with disabilities, like their peers, aspire to take part in a wide range of activities as they leave high school and enter adult life. Yet our analysis shows that students with disabilities graduate from high school at lower rates than their peers. In addition, compared with the general student population, those students who do finish high school appear more likely to earn an alternative credential as opposed to a regular diploma. Once they are out of high school, students with disabilities follow a wide variety of paths. Nearly 8 in 10 of those young adults engage in some form of activity related to employment or postsecondary education. (p. 2)

Research concerning technology has found that the global implementation of the internet and the rapid pace at which science and technology had progressed resulted in radical shifts in both the worldwide economy and the job market (Friedman, 2005). Friedman (2005) labeled this global technological phenomenon as the, “flat-world platform” (p. 10), which began in 2000, resulting from a convergence of the personal computer, fiber optic cable, and the increase of available work-flow software. The shift in technology had a profound impact on employment when individuals came to realize that they were no longer just competing locally for jobs, but that they were now competing against individuals from all around the world (Friedman, 2005).

In relation to this change in technology, a report was issued entitled *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts*, (Steinberg & Almeida, 2008). The authors of the report concluded that postsecondary education and training were essential for anyone wanting to have career choices that would lead to better salaries and a better life by becoming able to compete in the global economy. They said, “Earning a high school diploma was no longer a guarantee that a graduate was adequately prepared to compete in either a college classroom or the modern workplace.” (p. 1)

Meanwhile, the number of freshmen students with documented disabilities who had entered postsecondary education had risen from 2.6% in 1978 to 9.0% in 1996. This represented a substantial increase during that period of time (Thomas, 2000).

In order to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to succeed in life, postsecondary education, and employment, provisions were made within the IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act that required transition services for all students who were qualified. Those services were designed to enable students with disabilities to effectively transition from school to postschool life and to be able to set and achieve such life goals as personal independence,

postsecondary education, training, or employment. (National Council on Disability and The Social Security Administration, 2000).

Overview of the Review of Literature

This review of literature includes a historical overview of certain laws regarding special education and its progression toward current transition planning and services, followed by the historical progression of special education transition in the United States. An examination of the literature concerning the need for effective transition services, and the importance and impact of transition planning on postsecondary student with disabilities outcomes was conducted. The review concludes with a section concerning transition toward postsecondary life, work and education and a summary of findings and recommendations for further research and to improve practice.

In this review of literature the terms “Students with Disabilities” and “Children with Disabilities” were used in accordance with the different categorical areas of disabilities defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

A Historical and Chronological Overview of Certain Laws

Regarding Special Education and Transition

The journey toward contemporary special education and transition-related planning and services has been long and arduous. Historically, under the Tenth Amendment, educational rights for children were to be determined by the individual states instead of the federal government. Before the 20th century, with a few exceptions overall, the states did not provide opportunities for children with disabilities in their public schools, thus depriving them of a public

education. Private and charitable institutions were the first to offer any substantive educational services to children with certain disabilities such as blindness and deafness. However, most of the private services offered were available only to students whose families had the financial resources to afford them (Myhill, 2008).

With regard to the educational rights of students with disabilities who had been segregated into separate educational environments that were supposed to be equal to those of their peers in regular education, a landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* handed down on May, 17, 1954, was considered to be the turning point (Pardini, 2002). Pardini (2002) noted that the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that, “Separate but equal would no longer be acceptable, and in doing so declared that under the Fourteenth Amendment it was illegal to discriminate against any of several groups of people” (p.1). This ruling later brought recognition to the fact that to segregate and exclude children with disabilities from public schools was a direct violation of their right to an equal education under the Fourteenth Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause (Pardini, 2002).

Progress toward such equal educational opportunities and supplementary services as transition for students with disabilities was further advanced shortly after John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th President of the U.S. in January of 1960. Osgood (2008) reported that, “President Kennedy had a very special bond he shared with Americans with disabilities. His sister, Rosemary Kennedy, was mentally challenged. President Kennedy’s civil rights work to advance the rights of minorities benefited persons with disabilities” (Osgood, 2008, p.100).

The movement toward improved education and services continued to progress because the 1960s proved to be a time when the federal and state governments began to pass legislation

that required schools as well as public facilities to devote resources to persons with disabilities and to become more aware and sensitive to their special needs (Sacks, 2001).

The issue of the desegregation of students with disabilities and the recognition of their need for a higher quality of educational opportunity were marginally advanced, but nonetheless, assisted with the passing of *The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Public Law 88-352*. In assessing the tenets of this law, Portley (2009) summarized by stating:

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also provided strong backing for educational opportunities for individuals from marginalized backgrounds; however the pedagogical practices of educating students did not change with the many issues of segregated instruction for students with disabilities (Stahlecker, 1964). Many students with disabilities suffered segregated settings beyond the educational setting alone. Educational practices of the time paid little attention to accommodations specific to ensure that students with disabilities benefited academically. (p. 14)

The next year *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) was the first federal law to provide funding to states for the provision of direct services to selected student populations in public elementary and secondary schools (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996).

Although ESEA advanced the provision of much needed services and was a positive step in the right direction, some writers contended that it failed to fulfill its original intent because it did not produce the level of education and services for students with disabilities that was needed (McDonough, 2008).

Even with the progress made and legislation enacted, before the 1970s many students with disabilities (more than 1.75 million) still were not even enrolled in public schools. They did not receive special services until federal courts began to enforce laws requiring mandatory attendance. Of those children who were enrolled, more than 3 million did not receive services appropriate to their individual special needs. In the early part of the 1970s only about 20% of students with disabilities were educated in America's public schools. Some were excluded because of the types of disabilities they had. Those factors along with the inferior services offered, led parents to seek legal solutions by initiating court actions that eventually led to more legislation and court decisions concerning the rights of persons and students with disabilities with regard to education, vocational training, and employment (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001).

The National Council on Disability (NCD) (2005) also affirmed the educational conditions that merited legal action when it stated:

Until 1975, children with disabilities were often excluded from school. When allowed to attend, children with many disabilities were lumped together in generic special education classes. Because schools segregated children with disabilities from non-disabled children, special education classes were often held in undesirable, out-of-the-way places, like trailers and school basements. (p. 8)

In reference to attendance the NCD went on to say, "Despite compulsory attendance laws, most states allowed school authorities to exclude children if they believed that the child would not benefit from education or if the child's presence would be disruptive to others, i.e., to non-disabled children and teachers" (2005, p. 8).

Two key court decisions in the 1970s improved educational rights, services, and conditions for students with disabilities included being mentally challenged (Valentino, 2006).

In *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, the district court enjoined state officials and school districts from denying or postponing “any mentally retarded child access to a free public program of education and training”. *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* further held that no child eligible for public education shall be excluded from public education placement unless such child is provided (a) adequate educational services suited to the child’s needs, which may include special education or tuition grants, and (b) a constitutionally appropriate prior hearing and periodic review of the child’s progress, status, and the adequacy of any educational right alternative. (p.1)

These two key cases, along with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown*, ensured that education was a right that was to be made available to everyone on an equal basis. That was essential because, “children with disabilities had been continually separated from regular education programs for the 21 years since the Brown decision” (Valentino, 2006, p.1).

Major laws and amendments were passed in the 1970s that began to extend the quality and quantity of educational opportunities for special needs children and students with disabilities. *The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, especially *Section 504*, was designed to prohibit discrimination against and protect the rights of disabled persons (Smith, 2001). That law “also applied to any program or entity receiving federal financial funds or assistance which included public schools” (p. 335). The Act mandated that nondiscrimination be enforced, and that a Free

and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as well as procedural safeguards must be provided for each eligible school age child with disabilities (Smith, 2001).

More gains continued to be realized in the effort to attain equality in educational rights and supplemental services for students with disabilities when Congress passed the landmark legislation known as *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, or *Public Law 94-142*, in 1975. That law specified that a program must be implemented for each student with disabilities that provided the student with not only with FAPE but also with special education and related services that met the student's specific individual needs. The law also contained safeguards that protected the rights of students with disabilities and their parents and provided mandates for states and localities in an effort to provide equal and quality education opportunities for all students with disabilities (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007).

PL 94-142 also held that as soon as a child was identified with a disability, an Individual Education Program (IEP) must be designed and implemented in such a way as to reflect and fulfill each child's individualized autonomous needs (Bursztyn, 2007). He stated that, "The IEP was to serve as a type of contractual agreement between the parents of a child and the school district concerning the child's legal rights. Any violation of the IEP, federal law, or the procedural safeguards it contained could lead to a loss of federal funds to the school district" (Bursztyn, 2007, p. 45). The law required that each child be educated in a "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE) (Bursztyn, 2007, p. 45). The purpose of the LRE was to provide accommodations and supplemental services necessary for the child to receive an optimal educational experience in an academic setting closest to his or her home. "The LRE also was defined to ensure that students with disabilities would receive their education in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers" (Bursztyn, 2007, p. 45). *PL 94-142* specified, "That a

student was not to be removed from a regular classroom because he or she could not achieve the desired academic outcomes with those accommodations and related services,” (Bursztyn, 2007, p. 45).

The related service areas for students with disabilities continued to be expanded because *PL94-192* also mandated that related services that covered transportation and developmental, corrective, and supportive services be provided. *PL 94-142* made a very noticeable difference in the academic as well as related services and settings offered to students with disabilities (Daugherty, 2001).

Lipsky (2005) compared the before-and-after conditions of *PL 94-142*. She stated,

Prior to the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975, special education reform efforts crept along mostly propelled by parents and parent organizations seeking public educational opportunities for their children. The reluctant signing of the law by President Gerald Ford led to a rapid increase in the number of students served, with the greatest growth among students with learning disabilities. The key word in the title of the law was “all”, as in the Education of All Handicapped Act. After expensive and often exhaustive court cases, no child was deemed too severely impaired to be denied service. School districts were required to develop and implement programs of benefit to each identified child. (p.156)

The importance of preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary life was more fully realized and mandated when *Public Law. 98.199, (P.L. 98.199), The Education of The Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 (EAHCA)*, was passed and implemented by Congress (Portley, 2009). The law contained provisions that established new services and programs for

students with disabilities and their parents (Harris, 2006). That was done, "...in an effort to facilitate transitional programming that would lead to successful vocational training, independent living, postsecondary education, and competitive employment training for high school students with disabilities" (Harris, 2006, p. 26).

Career and technical education (CTE), which is a more recent name for vocational education, was considered to be an integral part of any effective transition program (Threeton, 2007). In giving a brief history of CTE, he concluded that *The Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984* with three subsequent amendments in 1990, 1998, and 2006 provided students with disabilities access to career (vocational) and technical programs. Each amendment was updated to keep it legally and educationally current. The amendments have collectively mandated that all CTE programs be aligned with current academic and technical standards. The act also, "provides opportunities for each regular and special education student to learn a vocational skill, which could make a positive difference in the life of each student as they transition from secondary school in to the world of adult life and work" (Threeton, 2007, pp. 67-68).

Concerning later legislation that focused on CTE Threeton (2007) stated,

Another significant piece of federal legislation concerned with the economy of the U.S. was the *School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994- (PL103-239)*. The purpose of this act was to address America's skill deficit by providing a comprehensive system to assist students in acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities in order to successfully transition school to career-oriented work or further education. The School to Work Act provided funds for an educational platform of core elements which included school, and work-based learning

activities. The main components of this legislation included: integration of academics and occupational learning, work experience, structured training, career guidance and a variety of work-based learning activities. (p. 68)

When Congress enacted *P.L. 94-142 (EAHCA)* in 1977, it required the law to be reauthorized and funded every 4 years. Because of reauthorizations, the law has undergone many changes over the years since its inception. One very significant change occurred in 1990, when the name was changed to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA)* or (*Public Law 101-336*). That law was reauthorized again in 1997 under the same name and acronym *IDEA1997* (Mock, Jakubecy, & Kaufmann, 2010). They contended that the focal point of that law was the mandate for each student with disabilities to receive a “Free and Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE). “The student’s IEP is to guide and ensure the process by which that is to take place” (Mock et al., 2010, pp. 5-6). Also, under that law special education students were no longer to be referred to as, “handicapped”, they were to be addressed as, “students with disabilities” (Mock et al., 2010, pp.5-6). Such students were to receive special education services in smaller classes with teachers who were trained in such specialty areas as learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, autism, etc. Students with disabilities also began to be mainstreamed for one or more regular education classes per student each day. Transition planning was required to be included in each student’s IEP at age 14 in order to help each student with a disability plan an academic or vocational track that would help him or her experience a successful transition after graduation (Mock et al., 2010, p. 6).

IDEA 1997 expanded transition services to be based upon each individual student's needs, preferences, and interests. It was to include instruction, any related services needed, adult life goals, life skills, and vocational testing. This law defined transition as follows:

A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, (including supported 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. (*IDEA, 1997*, Section 602, 30)

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, like *PL 94.142*, was yet another piece of landmark educational legislation. It contained provisions that improved secondary transition services. NCLB required schools to implement a comprehensive transition plan for all students with disabilities by age 16. That plan would guide them toward postsecondary independent living, competitive employment, vocational training, or education.

NCLB required states whose schools received federal funding to develop testing and assessment instruments in all basic academic skill areas. NCLB required that such tests and assessments be given to all students, including students with disabilities. Federal funding was contingent upon each state being accountable and meeting the standards set forth in NCLB (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

Academically, according to the U.S. Department of Education, NCLB contained four basic tenets:

1. *Stronger Accountability for Results*-individual schools and states would be held accountable for making sure that all students, including those with special needs and the disadvantaged, became academically proficient.
2. *More Freedom For States and Communities*-which gave both states and local school districts a greater degree of freedom and discretion concerning the use of federal funds toward their individual systemic needs.
3. *Proven Educational Methods*-NCLB emphasized the use of research-based data to determine the most efficient programs, methodologies, and practices to use in order to improve student learning and achievement.
4. *More Choices for Parents*- This principle gave parents whose children attended low-achieving schools, (schools that did not meet state standards for 2 consecutive years) the option of sending them to higher-achieving schools (pp. 1-3).

Although NCLB was comprised of mandates for student achievement, proficiency, and raised expectations, testing was the centerpiece of the law. Under NCLB, all states were held accountable for student results on those tests and for closing gaps in achievement. Schools and systems that failed to attain the mandated levels of achievement and proficiency faced possible restructuring having to make school choices available to students with disabilities and parents, the provision of supplemental services, or having the state come in and literally take over the administration and operation of the system (Guilfoyle, 2006).

In order to obtain the most accurate assessment results possible, NCLB required that all student populations must be tested. Students with disabilities were required to be included in those standardized tests and accommodations were required to be provided in order to enable them to experience success in testing (Wenning, Herdman, Smith, McMahon, & Washington, 2003).

The testing requirement created concern about the potential of students with disabilities to meet the standards of proficiency on the tests, especially because less than desirable results could impact students' academic outcomes and, thus, their ability to successfully transition to postsecondary education, or vocational training, or to obtain work. The implications of failing those tests could have a lifelong impact on a student's life (Meek, 2006). Meek contended that the main emphasis of NCLB focused on the testing of children and not on teaching them.

Additionally Meek (2006) maintained that the structure of the tests, even with accommodations, was not conducive to some students with disabilities' personal ability to successfully meet the required standards. In an examination of the tests, she highlighted the different aspects of the tests that could cause potential problems. In relation to students with disabilities taking the tests, she pointed out:

The density of the words packed together on each page, levels of difficulty relating to the depth and breadth of the questions, and duration of the test, which, in many cases, had far exceeded the attention span of many special-needs students. All of those factors served to create an environment that nurtured minimal success and possible failure for many students. (Meek, 2006, pp. 4-5)

Two keys to overcoming those barriers and to preparing students with disabilities for the tests were NCLB's; (1) emphasis on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classrooms and, (2) the provision of alternative assessments. Inclusion was necessary in order for them to learn the curriculum content, pass the tests, and achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To accomplish this goal accommodations were required to be provided in the IEP to allow them to participate to the fullest extent possible. Regarding alternative assessments a student's IEP team would evaluate the individual needs of the student and decide on the appropriate assessment tool to be used. In its decision the team was to consider the long-range implications of the assessment with regard to graduation with a standard or alternative diploma (Bowen & Rude, 2006). The future implications of each decision could, "impact a special needs student's ability to successfully transition from school into adulthood by limiting both job and future educational opportunities" (Bowen & Rude, 2006, p. 26).

In response to the mandates by NCLB that applied to special needs students, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA)* was signed into law in December of that year. That law was a reauthorization of IDEA that contained several very important and pivotal changes made with regard to transition planning and services delivered to special education students. Under IDEIA, student needs assessment and planning must be included in each student's IEP and be actively initiated at age 16 or by the ninth grade and be results oriented. The intention of that new transition requirement was to create a plan that would provide a number of possible postsecondary outcomes. That was expected to result in guiding the students with disabilities toward postsecondary education, training, and employability, as well as with independent living. The ultimate goal of the plan was to enable the students to

make positive contributions to their communities and society in general (Modell & Megginson, 2001).

Additionally, students with disabilities who either graduate or exit school due to their age must be provided with a summary of their academic and functional skills as well as recommendations that would assist the students with their postsecondary goals (Hyatt, 2007). IDEIA (2004) also required that special education teachers become highly qualified to teach content areas. That requirement along with the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom was supposed to result in better academic preparation for the students who had to participate in standardized testing as well as in their preparation to successfully transition into the postsecondary world (Smith, 2005).

A Historical Note about Special Education Transition in the United States

Historically, a number of substantive definitions for transition have been developed. Each definition has reflected changes in the needs of students with disabilities and the challenges they faced as they prepared to transition into postsecondary life at that particular time in educational history.

Will (1984) provided the following definition that portrayed transition as the bridge between school and postsecondary adult life, education, and employment:

The transition from school to working life is an outcome-oriented process *encompassing* a broad array of experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional postsecondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and

the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of leaving school, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations. (Will, 1984, p. 3)

Brolin and Schatzman (1989) built upon and broadened Will's (1984) definition of transition and reflected transitions into a variety of work roles and the need for additional services involving career development when they stated:

Transitions occur throughout one's lifetime and include both paid work and the work roles of students, homemakers, family members, volunteers, and retirees, as well as productive recreational, vocational, and leisure activities. Many people encounter problems when making various transitions. Adults in transition, especially many of those with disabilities sometimes become confused and need special assistance to help them solve their problems and make wise decisions. The "transition from school-to-work" concept is inextricably related to the career development concept that has theorized and been implemented in various education and agency settings for many years. (Brolin & Schatzman, 1989, pp. 22-23)

Halpern (1994) furnished his definition of transition that reflected the additional focus on the need to begin transition planning as early as the elementary school years as well as student involvement their own transition planning. He stated:

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agencies, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (p. 117)

The Virginia Department of Education (2010) provided a very short, concise, and contemporary definition of transition as it pertains to this study as follows:

Transition is the process students and their families use to think about life after high school to identify their desired outcomes, and to plan their community and school experiences to assure that the students acquire knowledge and skills to achieve their goals. (p. 1)

Wrightslaw (2010) provided the following legal definition of transition services from IDEA 2004:

Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that-
(A) is designed to be a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the

academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests;

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

IDEIA required transition planning and services to focus on academics and results that support students with disabilities as they moved from school to postschool activities and student centered in a way that took the student's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests into account when setting up the transition program and comprehensive enough to include postschool adult living goals (Holtz, Owings, & Ziegert, 2006).

Transition plans were thought to best guide a student with disabilities toward successful postsecondary outcomes included time lines, identification of persons who would oversee the services to be rendered, all agencies involved in providing services and their contact persons, the listing of all planned outcomes, and the monitoring and assessment of all transition activities (Roberts, 2010).

The foregoing comprehensive changes demonstrated the critical need for the implementation of effective transition planning and follow-up services in order to properly guide students with disabilities toward the greatest possible degree of postsecondary success.

Research Concerning the Need for Effective Transition Planning

During the transition from high school to adult life, many students with disabilities were found to have encountered serious difficulties because of the emotional, social, and physical demands made upon them in adulthood. Effective school based related services (academic, vocational, transitional, etc.) provided much needed support for them as they navigated through the transition process from high school into their chosen area of life (Swanson, 2008; Trainor, 2010).

Several disabilities and stressors were examined in relation to the problems encountered in school and its impact on a student's transition to adulthood. This examination also demonstrated the need for effective transition planning for students with disabilities.

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

The difficulties that students with Emotional Disturbances (ED) and Behavioral Disorders (BD) had encountered during their transition outcomes, the first National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) revealed that they often had experienced higher incidences of failing grades, dropout and arrest rates when compared to other youth. Also, they did not do as well in their attempt to live independently in comparison to their peers. (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005). Wagner et al. (2005) demonstrated the need for effective transition with related services and the difference they could make when they stated that, "...students' optimal success could be greatly enhanced if both the school and the mental health systems worked together to guide ED students toward academic and personal success in both the secondary and young adulthood arenas of life" (Wagner et al., 2005, p. 25).

In other studies concerning students with ED/BD disabilities, failing grades and dropout rates were found to have created postsecondary difficulties for those students in their attempts to obtain and retain meaningful employment. Very few students had taken advantage of secondary transition programs that offered them job and skills training. That omission left many of them poorly prepared to enter the job market or experience job retention for long periods of time that had in turn resulted in much higher unemployment rates when compared to students with other disabilities. Once again secondary transition programs were found to be essential in properly equipping students with ED/BD disabilities with the skills necessary to experience postsecondary success (Carter & Wehby, 2003; Sitlington & Neubert, 2004). With proper training and follow-up services, it was found that ED/BD students with disabilities had been able to transition to maintaining paid employment in a number of fields such as manufacturing, retailing, delivery, warehousing and distribution, printing, etc. (Wehman, 2006).

Autism Spectrum Disabilities

Concerning students with autism spectrum disabilities (ASD) and the problems they faced in school and adulthood research and new diagnostic procedures have heightened public awareness of ASD to a degree that did not exist before the 1990s (Gillenbergh, 2007). Compared to the 1970s when only 1 in 10,000 children were diagnosed with autism, in 2002 an average of 4-6 children of each 1,000 were diagnosed with autism or other similar disabilities (Myler, Fantacone, & Merritt, 2002). Other studies have shown that an autistic disability is a lifelong disability (Nyden et al., 2010).

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have faced many personal challenges during school and in transition to adult life, education, and work. That was because ASD was

found to be a convergence of disorders that affected neurological development in relationship to communication, social interaction, and behavior that was found to cause problems with interpersonal relationships in school, life, and work (Autism-PDD-NET, 2007).

Even with the wide range of developmental disorders, students with ASD were found to be able to successfully transition toward living independently, integration into their communities, securing and maintaining competitive employment, and participating in postsecondary education and training, if proper preparatory and transition services were carried out and followed through (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). However, Hendricks and Wehman (2009) concluded that in reality, "...transition planning and implementation is falling short of what the federal government intended for many with ASD, and that many students do not often receive the services they need to address the complex set of issues they possess" (p.84). In spite of this shortfall Schall, Cortijo-Doval, Targett, and Wehman (2006) suggested that given proper invention and support with social interaction and other problem behaviors, students with ASD are capable of obtaining and keeping a job in a number of work-related fields and businesses instead of being relegated to only a sheltered-workshop environment as in the past.

Moderate and Severe Disabilities

Research has indicated that postsecondary outcomes for students with moderate and severe disabilities were less than acceptable (Wehman, Kregal, & Seyfarth, 1985). Several studies have documented the fact that such students experienced high unemployment rates. In consideration of those results, students with moderate to severe disabilities requires secondary vocational training and preparation, along with high quality, consistent transition support and

follow-up support services if they are to succeed in their adult lives (Rabren, Dunn, & Chambers, 2002; Wehman et al., 1985).

Teachers and full-time transition coordinators have been forced to play very important roles in the development and execution of the kind of transition plans, support, and follow-up that are needed by these students both while in school and in their postsecondary life. Such services are critical because students with severe disabilities generally learn at a much slower pace and execute necessary skill building activities that would enable them to successfully obtain and retain meaningful employment (Ryndak & Alper, 1996).

Regarding the development and execution of transition plans, support and follow-up for students with moderate and severe disabilities, the reauthorization of IDEA 97 mandated that all students with moderate and severe disabilities be provided with coordinated secondary transition programs that met their individual needs and interests as well as providing them with training, real work experience, and employment goals. That provision required postsecondary components that would assist such students with their transition from secondary to postsecondary life (Stuart & Smith, 2002).

Stuart and Smith (2002) concluded by stating, “All professionals, otherwise known as stakeholders (general education teachers, special education teachers, transition specialists, employment specialists), need to be prepared to participate in an ongoing process that begins in secondary schools and continues in the post-school environment” (p. 236).

Female Gender Barriers

Effective transition programs and services are not only needed to overcome emotional, physical, behavioral, and mental barriers, but they also must be able to address the gender

differences that exist in students with disabilities as they prepare to transition into the postsecondary world. Numerous studies have been conducted that have examined the influence of gender on transition goals and in particular the experiences of female students with disabilities (Hogansen et al., 2008).

The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS) found a gap in the graduation rates between male and female students with disabilities. In a comparative study of these findings pertaining to gender differences, Coutinho, Oswald, and Best (2006) concluded that women often experienced lower outcomes when compared to men in the areas of graduation rates, postsecondary success in employment, education, wages, and training. Their findings justified the need to provide differentiated and improved transition services that would offer work experience and gender sensitive plans that address both academic and career goals. Gender differences had a profound impact, especially on women's transition goals and academic experiences, as well as their overall outcomes as compared to men (Hogansen et al., 2008). Effective transition programs and related services in high school were needed to direct female students with disabilities toward potential success in their postsecondary life.

Women with disabilities reported that the failure of special education programs in meeting their academic needs and transition goals included lack of teacher involvement, lack of adequate job training opportunities and paid work experiences, and the inability of teachers, parents, and students to work together in their transition planning. (Hogansen et al., 2008).

Two other areas were examined in relation to the need for effective transition planning and follow-up services. These studies focused on the ethnic-minority, and socioeconomic status of students with disabilities and the effect on their postsecondary outcomes. It was determined that students with disabilities who were from an ethnic-minority and low socioeconomic

background were generally in greater need of special education services (Baca & Almanza, 1991).

Racial and Ethnic Minorities

The increase of racial and ethnic minorities within the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Zhang & Benz, 2006) has resulted in corresponding increases in student populations of racial and ethnic minority students with disabilities (NCES, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Racial and ethnic minority students with disabilities were generally found to experience low secondary academic performance and high unemployment rates, and to have limited access to postsecondary educational opportunities, vocational training, and independent living (Simon, 2001; Stodden, Stodden, Kim-Rupnow, & Galloway, 2003).

Cultural differences, perspectives, and values were found to have a possible negative impact on the goals and postsecondary outcomes of racial and ethnic minorities as well as on culturally and diverse students with disabilities (Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Kim, Lee, & Morningstar, 2007). This was found to be especially true in cases when full-time transition coordinators had planned programs and follow-up services using only single or mainstream cultural values with regard to the students' transition to adulthood. Transition program coordinators needed to consider such differences in order to develop programs that offered the racial and ethnic minority students with disabilities the best possible secondary and postsecondary transition outcomes (Jordan & Dunlap, 2001).

Socioeconomic Factors

Based on their study of students and children who were at risk or had the combination of a disability and poverty factors, Peterson, Mayer, Summers, and Luze (2010) stated:

Families who have children with disabilities and live in poverty are truly in a double-bind. The same poverty-related factors that place their children at higher risk for disabilities also serve as barriers to accessing services for their children and themselves. (p. 509)

Additional research confirmed the foregoing findings and reiterated that children with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, disproportionately lived at or below the levels of poverty than did nondisabled children (Birenbaum, 2002). Park, Turnbull, and Turnbull (2002) found “twenty-eight percent of children with disabilities from ages 3-21 years old were living with families with less income than the income threshold (for poverty) set by the U.S. Census Bureau” (p.151). Those findings concerning children and students with disabilities who lived in poverty indicated that poverty affects very important aspects of children’s lives in regard to their successful transition into school and adult life. Their ability to concentrate and learn, (Food Research and Action Center, 2000), their productivity, cognitive development, self-esteem, and opportunities for learning were found to be limited by living in an impoverished environment (Park et al., 2002). This contributed to a 34.1% dropout rate of children from families living in poverty, as compared with a national average of 17.3% (Mayer, 1997).

Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin, and Doh (2006) discovered that some students with disabilities in high-poverty rural schools were able to overcome their impoverished environments in order to achieve higher than required performance-based results. Their success was attributed to a number of factors. In successful rural, impoverished schools, teachers and principals implemented comprehensive support programs to help such at risk students with disabilities. Those programs consisted of multi-grade restructuring, access to regular education classes, intense intervention programs, and comprehensive support programs that included

special education coordinators or specialists who provided guidance and assistance to struggling students with disabilities. That was coupled with the willingness to work together within the school and community and with parents as well as the use of creative resources that served to produce stable academic environments with high standards and expectations for students with disabilities. The results yielded higher than average academic outcomes for impoverished students with disabilities that allowed them opportunities and options to experience successful adult and quality of life outcomes (Nagle et al., 2006).

In the transition to adulthood, obtaining paid employment was found to be a gauge of personal success, accomplishment, and satisfaction as well as a way to improve the standard of living (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). Students with disabilities who participated in paid work experiences and vocational training that centered on their interests and abilities while in high school were found to experience higher postsecondary employment outcomes (Doren, Lindstrom, Zane, & Johnson, 2007; McDonnall & Crudden, 2009).

Postsecondary education has been another way for students with disabilities to enhance their employment and earning potential. Research has shown that earnings and employment outcomes for students with disabilities who graduated from college generally have been comparable to those of others in the American workplace (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Madaus, 2006).

However, Getzel and Briel (2006) stated:

Without effective planning and preparation, students with disabilities can become overwhelmed and unable to adapt to a postsecondary environment. Therefore, the transition to college must begin early in their education experience. Pre-high school activities could include taking challenging courses in English, math, science, history, or foreign language. (p. 356)

Full-time transition coordinators and specialists were able to provide students with disabilities whose goals were to obtain postsecondary education comprehensive student-centered transition services. These services involved the student and their families in every aspect of their program and preparation. They were also instrumental in integrating related services and implementing collaboration with postsecondary institutions (Paiewonsky & Ostergard, 2010). They concluded by emphasizing “Transition services that include postsecondary education (PSE), paid employment, and independent or supported living training must be developed and offered to ensure that students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have the skills and experiences to pursue their goals and be adequately prepared for life” (p. 125).

Best Practices for Transition Services and Programs

Since the inception of the special education transition movement in the 1980s, numerous transition practices have been born from necessity and experience. Over the years from the gathering of empirical data, transition standards have been developed. Those standards have continued to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of students with disabilities as they transition to adulthood (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). The authors narrowed a multitude of best practices to three basic areas: “Transition agency service practices, transition education programming changes, and transition planning practices” (Landmark et al., 2010, p. 166).

Within the three foregoing areas of transition studies and practice, the research emphasized the importance and influence of transition planning best practices. Specifically, the importance and influence of; self-determination, development of an effective Individual Education Program (IEP) with regard to transition and the importance and influence of student and family involvement in the transition planning process.

*Self-Determination and Its Role in Successful Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Students
with Disabilities*

The concept of self-determination was born from a culmination of efforts by individuals, advocacy groups, and legislation as a way to seek higher quality transitional outcomes for students with disabilities. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) deemed it as a "best practice procedure in the education of students with disabilities, particularly regarding facilitating students transition from high school to adult life" (p.242).

When designing a quality transition program for students with disabilities, research has shown that self-determination was the quintessential catalyst that served to bring secondary transition programming resources together and, in turn, provided numerous quality life outcomes (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, & Lattin, 1999).

Several significant definitions of self-determination have been posed that postulate its importance in the transition process. Field and Hoffman (1994) defined it as, "One's ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself" (p 136). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) also defined self-determination as, "the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (p. 246). Ten years later, Wehmeyer and Field (2007) recorded a redefinition that added the words, "volitional actions," (p.3) to further enhance the concept of self-determination as being a personal, intentional, and independent action on the part of the student with disabilities in an effort to achieve their personal goals and improve their lives.

The self-determined mindset or behavior enables the student with disabilities to become what Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, and Shogren (2006) also described as, “the primary causal agent.” (p.42). They implied that a causal agent is, “the individual who makes or causes things to happen in his or her life.” (p. 43). This action empowers them to exercise control over the variables in their lives that can lead to success or failure in their transition to adulthood and throughout their lives.

Concerning students with cognitive disabilities, research has found that self-determination did play a major role in heightening their sense of becoming self-sufficient, achieving personal independence, desired employment, and acceptance and integration into their communities (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). The authors concluded from their research that “students in the high self-determination group scored higher in each life category, including employment, benefits, financially, and living independently” (pp. 139-140), which led to more successful transition outcomes for self-determined students with disabilities. Self-determination was ascertained to be a learned behavior that needed to be taught, facilitated, and encouraged. Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner, and Lawrence (2007) pointed out that, “self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-knowledge” (p. 31) were key components that influenced the self-determination learning process and were the, “sole predictors of transition planning knowledge and skills” (p. 31). Cultural identity and environmental factors among culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities were also found to influence self-determination and transitional strategy outcomes (Trainor, 2005).

Successful teachers of self-determination skills were found to be individuals who modeled these positive attributes in their own personal lives before they were able to exert positive influence upon the lives of their students (Field et al., 2003). Students with disabilities

were able to access and acquire the skills that comprise self-determination within the general education curriculum in all grade areas (Eisenman, 2007). Eisenman (2007) emphasized this when she stated, “Strategies associated with various models of problem solving, setting performance goals, monitoring completion of tasks, and evaluating products can be incorporated into many classrooms” (p.4). One such program proffered by Eisenman (2007) that incorporated such strategies was the, “Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction” (p. 4).

Lastly, because self-determination consists of acquired developmental skills, researchers have emphasized the importance of starting to learn such skills as early as elementary and middle school as a foundation for positive high school and postsecondary transition outcomes (Chambers et al., 2007; Eisenman & Chamberlin, 2001; Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2008).

Student-Focused Transition Planning

Currently, the focus of transition has been transformed to a multifaceted approach from the provision of merely a transition plan and follow-up services written into the Individual Education Program (IEP) for each student with disabilities. This approach actively involves the student in the development of a program that is centered on his or her personal interests, preferences, and educational goals as well as the follow-up services he or she feels he or she needed in order to succeed in life (Rauch & Millar, 1998; Warger & Burnette, 2000). As part of the multi-faceted approach of IEP development and in accordance with NCLB2000, which required that a comprehensive transition plan be written and put into effect by age 16 for each student with disabilities, studies in transition theory have suggested that an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) should also be included and written into each IEP. Wehman (2006) noted that the ITP had two goals; (1) “to identify the outcomes desired and expected by the students and their

families along with the services and supports needed to achieve these outcomes; (2) to use these needs data to drive local systems-change efforts” (p.72).

Wehman (2006) also advocated that ITP planning must be activated using both, “person-centered practices,” and, “student-directed IEPs” (pp.72-73).The “development of a transition IEP should be conducted as the opening component of a student’s IEP meeting” (Wehman, 2006, p. 87) so “the goals and objectives of the IEP reflect the transition IEP” (p. 87). As a part of this process, the students were asked to write their own person-centered plan that would encompass their lives, goals, and the support systems they believed they would need to achieve positive postsecondary outcomes throughout their lifetime (Kellums & Morningstar, 2010).

The purpose of the ITP was to assist, guide, and prepare students with disabilities who had chosen to attend college after high school graduation; however, it also could be used for students with disabilities who planned to work after graduation (Purcell, 1993; Smith, English, & Vasek, 2003). The student’s interests, needs, strengths, and weaknesses were assessed and the ITP was designed to provide individual skills that would prepare him or her for postsecondary education or work by using goal-oriented plans for them to follow during and after high school. Additionally, the ITP was designed to have necessary services in place when the students with disabilities transitioned into postsecondary education or work settings that were found to keep the student with disabilities from being overwhelmed by the transitional changes and adjustments experienced after high school graduation as the students entered the postsecondary world.

Smith et al. (2003) summarized their findings by stating:

An ITP, when implemented appropriately, can increase the type and number of options available to students with learning disabilities. By using an ITP early in the high school student’s career, the team of educators, parents, counselors, and

specialists can cooperate to ensure that the school experiences of a student with disabilities successfully propel the student towards academic and social maturity.

(pp. 495-496)

Literature Concerning the Importance of Family Involvement in the Transition Process

One of the central mandates of IDEA-97 emphasized the essential role of parental involvement in the decision-making and planning process with regard to the education of their children with disabilities. Empirical data confirm the differences parents made in the educational growth and success of their children with disabilities. As early as the 1900s the crucial importance of family involvement and influence was seen as it related to the transition from school to work of students with disabilities. Parents were considered to be the principal factor and influence in the success of transition outcomes for students with disabilities (Grigal & Neubert, 2004; McNair & Rusch, 1991). In regard to career choices there was a strong indication that the careers of family members had influenced the choices ultimately made by many students with disabilities (Morningstar et al., 1995).

The influence and perspectives of family members were also found to affect the relationship between postsecondary educational opportunities and students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Dwyre, Grigal, and Fialka (2010) discovered that with persistence, determination, and hard work coupled with the vision and influence of family members, students with ID were, “provided with another unforeseen accomplishment: participation in a college experience” (p. 189). Together, they were often able to overcome the limited options and typical outcomes that often plagued the opportunity for students with ID to experience success in postsecondary educational settings.

Newman (2004) summarized findings from the National Longitudinal Transitional Study 2 (NLST2) that explored the level of parental involvement at home with educational assignments and at school with school-related activities as well as parental interest and expectations concerning their children's educational and transitional postsecondary outcomes. Those findings were compared with families of children without disabilities.

Both the degree of parental involvement at home and school and educational support and encouragement were found to be reflections on the parents' beliefs about how their children's disabilities had affected their failure or their potential for success in school and life. Newman (2004) reported that the NLTS2 had revealed the following results concerning parent's active involvement in their children with disabilities educational and transitional outcomes:

- Youth whose families are more involved in their schools are less far behind grade level in reading, tend to receive better grades, and have higher rates of involvement in organized groups (many of which are school based) and with individual friendships than youth with less family involvement at school.
- In the independence domain, youth whose families are more involved in their schools are more likely than youth from less-involved families to have had regular paid jobs in the preceding year. (p.ES5)

Because it was found that parents had such an impact on the outcomes of their children with disabilities, studies were conducted to ascertain which variables negatively or positively associated the degree of parental involvement. Parents indicated that a quality relationship, or the lack thereof, between them and their children's service providers was the main determinant of their degree of involvement in their children's transition process (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). The authors explored the reasons that had created barriers to or motivated

parental involvement in the transition process. They concluded that the attitudes of teachers and administrators often had created barriers by making parents feel inferior, the principal's negative attitude toward special education, not listening to parental input, and their concerns about being inconsiderate of their diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Motivational factors for parental involvement included honesty and direct communication among teachers, administrators, and parents. Collaboration among parents, teachers, and administrators in helped them connect with other parents involved in the transition process and lastly, those who honestly cared for and had true compassion concerning their children and their future (Defur et al., 2001).

When the power of parental influence was considered, it was found that teachers and administrators needed to work to enhance parents' perspectives and knowledge of transition planning potential outcomes for their students with disabilities. Parental and family perspectives were found to be a crucial building block in addressing strategies and services that could lead to postsecondary success for students with disabilities. Educators needed to provide information at the onset pertaining to all the options available for parents and their children's consideration with regard to postsecondary education, training, or work that challenged them. They also needed to provide guidance pertaining to early sibling involvement and support of the student with disabilities in the transition process, not only to enhance the support system, but also, if at some point in the student with disabilities' future they had to rely on their siblings to care for them and provide homes for them (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004).

Pertaining to the often untapped potential for positive powerful influence that parents could have in their children with disabilities transition outcomes, Wehman (2006a) summarized his findings when he stated:

Parent power is underutilized by schools and community agencies. Parents have the most knowledge of their children. They have a deeply vested interest—they love their children and will do anything for them. They are not transient, they are not passing, and they do not forget when they go home at night. Parent power provides transition specialists a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on a resource that can problem solve many issues related to students' transition.

Unfortunately, this resource is underutilized. (p. 25)

Most parents have a strong desire to play an active role in their children's postsecondary journey toward successful transition outcomes.

A Summary of Findings and Recommendations Regarding Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

Research has well documented the fact that record numbers of students with disabilities have been transitioning into the postsecondary world of competitive employment, vocational education, independent living, and higher education. With those goals in mind, transition has been transformed by research, legislation, and proven best practices over many years into a systematic process today by which students with disabilities can gain the critical life, job, and academic skills and experience that will enable them to achieve the same kinds of postsecondary outcomes that are mandated by law to all students (Morningstar & Mutua, 2003). Studies have also shown that the best planning practices actively involve the students and their families in the development of the transition plan and begin well before graduation. Levine and Wagner (2005) contended that the, "seeds of a successful transition to adulthood are planted well before high school graduation" (p.1).

Researchers have found that full-time transition coordinators could facilitate effective transition programs that motivated students with disabilities toward achieving the necessary secondary academic coursework, vocational assessment and training, independent living, and work experiences that would equip them for positive life outcomes after high school.

Lastly, respected authors have recommended that transition planning must not stop at high school graduation. They have advocated that it follow, guide, and assist students as they transition into the postsecondary world by collaborating with agencies, vocational training centers, area businesses, and institutions of higher education in order to ensure the students have optimal opportunities to succeed.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In addition to federal mandates for secondary and postsecondary transition services, the Virginia Department of Education Special Education regulation (34 CFR 300.43) requires that transition services be in place and included in each student's Individual Education Program (IEP) by age 14, when the student enters secondary school. Postsecondary success is presumably monitored by state and local agencies. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2010c) IEP regulation (8 VAC 20-81-110) states,

The IEP should include measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills. The transition services must be based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests. Transition services, including courses of study, needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. (p. 68)

The purpose of this study is to compare the outcomes of students with disabilities in three Southwest Virginia county school systems and those of the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

The second purpose of this study is to access the postsecondary outcomes of all students with disabilities who were graduates of the three Southwest Virginia county school systems.

This study compares the transition programs in the three Southwest Virginia county school systems to determine if there were any differences between the system that had a full-time

transition coordinator and the two other systems that did not have a full-time transition coordinator.

Students in the study met the definition of Indicator 14 (those who were competitively employed, and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school). The study involved students with different disabilities and who had graduated with Advanced Studies, Standard, Modified Standard, or a Certificate of Completion.

Population

The population for this comparative study was limited to the special education graduates of three Southwest Virginia school systems in Lee, Wise, and Scott Counties. The graduates consisted of students with different disabilities who had received Advanced Studies, Standard, Modified Standard, or a Certificate of Completion.

The students with disabilities in this study met the Indicator 14 definition of youth who were competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school. Population sizes for the survey were as follows: Lee County-61; Wise County-70; and Scott County-36.

Research Design

The data for this study were gathered from the 2008 Indicator 14 survey conducted on the 2007 graduates from each of the three county school systems. The Indicator 14 survey was administered by special education teachers in each system. Demographic information was obtained using records of special education students and graduates from each school system. Only students who had IEPs and had received or were receiving special education services according to the Indicator 14 definition were allowed to participate in the survey. Data for this

survey were gathered from students, legal guardians, parents, grandparents, teachers, and guidance counselors. Information was obtained from other individuals only when the students were not available for interviews.

This study was designed to be a comparative study based upon survey information from three Southwest Virginia county public school systems as it related to competitive employment, postsecondary training or education, and the manner in which the students exited school. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated, “Comparative research examines the differences between two or more groups on a variable” (p. 219). Therefore, comparative research was deemed appropriate for this particular study.

In this study the comparative design enabled me to compare the postsecondary outcomes of special education graduates, exiters, and dropouts from the Wise County, Virginia public school system (which employed the services of a full-time transition coordinator) with the postsecondary outcomes of special education graduates, exiters, and dropouts from the Lee County and Scott County, Virginia public school systems that did not employ a full-time transition coordinator in order to identify any differences between the groups. Comparative data were gathered by use of statistical summaries.

To provide a baseline, the data gathered from the three county school systems were compared with corresponding data from the Virginia Department of Education taken from Indicator 14 surveys conducted in all of the state’s school systems.

Data Collection

Before research began, permission was obtained from the special education director of each of the three county public school systems to access and use administrative data from the

legacy files on the survey website for each county. Existing data were used to conduct this study. Data were gathered by means of special access to the special education administrative legacy file that contained results from the 2008 Indicator 14 survey. That survey was designed, maintained, and made available by the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. The center works in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education to acquire information from postsecondary students with disabilities who have met the definition of Indicator 14. The Indicator 14 survey contained all the predictor variables and criterion variables used in this study.

Data Analysis

Initially, the 27 indicators that comprised the Indicator 14 survey were narrowed to five that focused on data from systems with and without full-time transition coordinators. They were used to compare graduation rates and students who met the definition of Indicator 14 (competitively employed or were enrolled in postsecondary education or vocational training within 1 year of graduation). Graduation and Indicator 14 data from the three systems were compared with data from the state of Virginia graduation rates in order to form a baseline. The research questions and associated null hypotheses that guided the research for this study were as follows:

1. Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding: (1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas) and (2) the percentage of students who met the definition of Indicator 14 (who were competitively employed,

and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training one year after leaving high school)?

To answer this research question, two-way contingency tables with the Chi-square test were used to test the null hypotheses.

Ho₁: Among special education students who graduated there is no difference between the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding whether students graduated with advanced or standard diplomas and those who earned certificates of completion or modified or special diplomas.

Ho₂: There were no significant differences between the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding the percentage of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator#14 (youth who were competitively employed, enrolled in post secondary education or training, or 1 year after leaving high school.)

2. Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to: (1) students' successful completion of their secondary education and (2) whether they met the definition of Indicator 14?

To answer this research question, contingency tables with the Chi-square test were used to test the null hypotheses that compared the observed values with the State of Virginia expected values.

Ho2₁: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators and those students' successful completion of their secondary education.

Ho2₂: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether those students met the definition of Indicator #14. (Competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school).

3. Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status after leaving high school?

To answer this research question, two-way contingency tables with the Chi-square test were used to test the following null hypotheses.

Ho3₁: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students

with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently employed.

Ho3₂: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently employed in a competitive work environment (competing with other applicants for jobs).

Ho3₃: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status (employed full or part-time).

Ho3₄: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment in jobs with benefits (jobs without benefits versus jobs with benefits).

Ho3₅: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities

who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students found jobs on their own or had assistance.

Ho3₆: Among students with disabilities who were not currently employed there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether they had worked since leaving high school.

Ho3₇: Among students with disabilities who were not currently employed but had worked a job since leaving high school there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to whether students found the job on their own or had assistance.

4. Were there significant differences in the postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to their enrollment in postsecondary education or training?

To address this research question, two-way contingency tables with the Chi-square were used to test the null hypotheses.

Ho4₁: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students

with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently enrolled in postsecondary education in two or four-year colleges or vocational training.

Ho4₂: Among students with disabilities who were not currently enrolled in postsecondary education or training there were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities had ever been enrolled in postsecondary education or training since leaving high school.

5. Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems that did not have full-time transition coordinators with regard to whether they received services from state or federal agencies?

To answer this research question, two-way contingency tables with the Chi-square test were used to test the null hypothesis.

Ho5: There were no significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students received services from state or federal agencies.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to execute the statistical analysis for this study. The reported findings were based on .05 level of significance (alpha) and are fully discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study evaluates and compares the outcomes of students with disabilities' from the three Southwest Virginia school systems with the outcomes of study at the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding all students with disabilities who had IEPs and graduated with regular diplomas and those who met the definition of Indicator 14 (who were competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school). The population involved in this study consisted of 167 students with disabilities from the three Southwest Virginia county school systems and 26,895 students with disabilities from the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

Additionally, this study compared and assessed Special Education performance rates for the three Southwest Virginia county school systems in relation to state target rates for students with disabilities who graduated. Data indicated that all three counties failed to meet the Virginia Department of Education target graduation rate (45.0%) for students with disabilities during the 2007-2008 survey year. (Lee-28.5% Scott-42.9% and Wise County 35.0%). (Source: Virginia Department of Education-Special Education Performance Report, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to assess the postsecondary outcomes of special education graduates, exiters, and dropouts from each of the three Southwest Virginia public school systems. This study compares the transition programs in each of those three systems to determine if there are any differences in postsecondary student outcomes between one system that has had a full-time transition coordinator and each of the other two systems that have not had a full-time transition coordinator.

Analysis of Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Research Question 1 and Null Hypotheses

Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between each of the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding: (1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas) and (2) the percentage of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 (who were competitively employed, and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training one year after leaving high school)?

Ho₁: Among special education students with disabilities who graduated there is no difference between the three school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding whether students with disabilities graduated with advanced or standard diplomas and those who earned certificates of completion or modified or special diplomas.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a difference between the three school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools, regarding the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with advanced or standard diplomas and those who earned certificates of completion or modified or special diplomas. The two variables were the grouping variable the three schools in Southwest Virginia versus the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools) and whether students with disabilities graduated with advanced or standard diplomas. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were significantly different, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 27005) = 16.768, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of students

with disabilities in Southwest Virginia schools who graduated with advanced or standard diplomas was only 23.6%, as compared with 43.0% of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools who graduated with advanced or standard diplomas.

Table 1

Percentage of Students Who Graduated with Standard or Advanced Diplomas

	Schools in SW VA		Commonwealth of VA	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	84	76.4	15,330	57.0
Yes	26	23.6	11,565	43.0
Total	110	100.0	26,895	100.0

Ho₁₂: There were no significant differences between the three school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding the percentage of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator #14 (youth who were competitively employed, enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school).

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences between the three school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools, in terms of the percentage of students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 (youth who were competitively employed, enrolled in postsecondary education or training, or both 1 year after leaving high school). The two variables were the grouping variable (the sum of the 3 schools in Southwest Virginia versus the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools) regarding whether students with disabilities met the definition of Indicator #14. The Chi-square test showed the variables were significantly different, Pearson χ^2

(1, $N = 5907$) = 24.158, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. As shown in Table 2, the percentage of students with disabilities in the three Southwest Virginia schools who met the definition of Indicator #14 was 67.5% compared with 83.9% of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools who met the definition.

Table 2

Two-Way Contingency Table for Those Students with Disabilities Who Met the Definition of Indicator #14 by Southwest Virginia Schools versus the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools

Met The Definition of Indicator 14	Schools in SW VA		Commonwealth of VA	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	41	32.5	932	16.1
Yes	85	67.5	4849	83.9
Total	126	100.0	5781	100.0

Research Question 2 and Null Hypotheses

Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students in the two Southwest Virginia school systems that did not have full-time transition coordinators regarding: (1) students' successful completion of their secondary education, and (2) whether they met the definition of Indicator 14.

Ho2₁: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems

without full-time transition coordinators and their successful completion of their secondary education.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding the students with disabilities' successful completion of their secondary education. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in a system without a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in systems with full-time transition coordinators) regarding whether students successfully completed their secondary education. The Chi-square test found that the variables were not significantly different, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=160) = 1.121, p = .290$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained because the probability was greater than the Alpha Level of .05. The relationship between the variables was weak. As shown in Table 3, the percentage of students with disabilities who successfully completed secondary education was 72.0% in systems without a full-time transition coordinator compared to 64.2% of students in a system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 3

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities' Successful Completion of Secondary Education in Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator

Successful Completion of Secondary Education	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	26	28.0	24	38.5
Yes	67	72.0	43	64.2
Total	93	100.0	67	100.0

Ho₂: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in each of the school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities met the definition of Indicator #14(competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school).

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students met the definition of Indicator 14(competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school). The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in systems with and without full-time transition coordinators) and whether students met the definition of Indicator 14. The Chi-

square test was not significant, Pearson χ^2 (1, N=126) =.093, p = .760. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 4, the percentage of students with disabilities in the two systems without full-time transition coordinators who met the definition of Indicator 14 was 68.7%, compared to 66.1% of students with disabilities in a system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 4

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities' Who Met The Definition of Indicator 14 (competitively employed and or enrolled in postsecondary education or training one year after leaving high school) in Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator

Met The Definition of Indicator 14	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	21	31.3	20	33.9
Yes	46	68.7	39	66.1
Total	67	100.0	59	100.0

Research Question 3 and Null Hypotheses

Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two Southwest Virginia school systems that did not have full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status after leaving high school?

Ho3₁: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without

full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently employed.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a difference in current employment outcomes between students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators and students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether or not students with disabilities were currently employed. The Chi-square test was not significant, Pearson χ^2 (1, N=106) = .730, p = .393. Because p = .393 is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 5, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators who were currently employed was 60.3% compared to 52.1% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 5

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who were Currently Employed.

Currently Employed	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
No	23	39.7	23	47.9
Yes	35	60.3	25	52.1
Total	58	100.0	48	100.0

Ho3₂: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently employed in a competitive work environment (competing with other applicants for jobs).

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether there were any differences between students with disabilities in the school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in the two systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding students with disabilities who were currently employed in a competitive work environment. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether students with disabilities were currently competitively employed. The Chi-square test showed the variables were not statistically significant, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=60) = .522, p = .470$. Because $p = .470$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 6, the percentage of students with disabilities in a school system without a full-time transition coordinator was 80.0% compared to 72.0% of students with disabilities in school systems with full-time transition coordinators were currently employed in a competitive work environment.

Table 6

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who were Currently Competitively Employed.

Currently Competitively Employed	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	7	20.0	7	28.0
Yes	28	80.0	18	72.0
Total	35	100.0	25	100.0

Ho₃: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed, there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status (employed full or part-time).

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding students with disabilities' employment status (full or part-time). The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator and their employment status (full or part-time). The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=58) = 1.475$, $p = .225$. Because $p = .225$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05) the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 7, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without a

full-time transition coordinator was 73.5% compared to 58.3% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 7

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who were Employed (full or part-time).

Current Employment Status (Full or Part-Time)	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Part-Time	9	26.5	10	41.7
Full-Time	25	73.5	14	58.3
Total	34	100.0	24	100.0

Ho3₄: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed, there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding employment in jobs with benefits (jobs without benefits versus jobs with benefits).

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding students with disabilities who were currently employed in jobs with benefits (jobs without benefits versus jobs with benefits). The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator)

and whether students with disabilities were currently employed in jobs with benefits. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not statistically significant, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=55) = .662, p=.416$. Because $p = .416$ was greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 8, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators that were currently employed in jobs with benefits was 25.8% compared to 16.7% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 8

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who were Currently Employed in Jobs with Benefits.

Currently Employed in Jobs With Benefits	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
No	23	74.2	20	83.3
Yes	8	25.8	4	16.7
Total	31	100.0	24	100.0

Ho3₅: Among students with disabilities who were currently employed there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students found the jobs on their own or had assistance.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding students with disabilities who were currently employed and had found the jobs on their own or had assistance. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether students found their job on their own or had assistance. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, N=55) =.049, p=.825. Because $p = .825$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 9, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators who had assistance in finding their job was 51.5% compared to 54.5% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 9

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who Obtained Their Job on Their Own or with Assistance.

Students Who Found Jobs On Their Own or With Assistance	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
On Their Own	16	48.5	10	45.5
With Assistance	17	51.5	12	54.5
Total	33	100.0	22	100.0

Ho3₆: Among students with disabilities who were not currently employed, there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with

disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether they had worked since leaving high school.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students who were not currently employed had worked since leaving high school. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether students with disabilities who were not currently employed had worked since leaving high school. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not statistically significant, Pearson χ^2 (1, N=47) =.093, $p=.760$. Because $p = .760$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 10, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators who had worked since leaving high school was 42.9% compared with 38.5% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 10

Two Way Contingency Table for Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who Had or Had Not Worked Since Leaving High School.

Students Who Had or Had Not Worked Since High School	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	12	57.1	16	61.5
Yes	9	42.9	10	38.5
Total	21	100.0	26	100.0

Ho3₇: Among students with disabilities who were not currently employed, but had worked a job since leaving high school there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to whether students found the job on their own or had assistance.

A two-way contingency table was used to evaluate whether there were differences between students in schools with and without a full-time transition coordinator regarding whether students who were currently unemployed but had worked, regarding whether they found a job on their own or had help. Analysis showed there was a violation of an assumption of Chi-square and, therefore, the Chi-square test was not used to test the null hypothesis. The violation of the assumption was that more than 20% of the cells (50%) had an expected frequency of less than five.

Table 11 shows that seven of the nine students (77.8%) in systems without full-time transition coordinators had help finding a job, while only three of the nine students (33.3%) in a system with a full-time transition coordinator had help finding a job.

Table 11

Students Who Had Worked Since High School but were Currently Unemployed

Students With Disabilities Receiving or Not Receiving Help Finding a Job	Systems without a Full- Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
No	2	22.2	6	66.7
Yes	7	77.8	3	33.3
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0

Research Question 4 and Null Hypotheses

Were there significant differences in the postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities in the two Southwest Virginia school systems without transition coordinators regarding their enrollment in postsecondary education or training?

Ho4₁: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in each of the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently enrolled in postsecondary education in a two or four year college or vocational training.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities were currently enrolled in postsecondary education or training. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without

and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether students with disabilities were currently enrolled in postsecondary education or training. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not statistically significant, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=107) = .134, p = .714$. Because $p = .714$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 12, the percentage of students with disabilities in school systems without full-time transition coordinators who were currently enrolled in postsecondary education and training was 13.8% compared with 16.3% of students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 12

Two Way Contingency Table Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator, Who were Enrolled in Postsecondary Education or Training

Students With Disabilities Enrolled in Postsecondary Education or Training	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
No	50	86.2	41	83.7
Yes	8	13.8	8	16.3
Total	58	100.0	49	100.0

Ho4₂: Among students with disabilities who were not currently enrolled in postsecondary education or training, there were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding

whether students with disabilities had ever been enrolled in postsecondary education or training since leaving high school.

Regarding students who were not currently enrolled in postsecondary education or vocational programs, a two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those in systems without transition coordinators regarding whether they had ever been enrolled in postsecondary education or training. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a transition coordinator) regarding whether students had ever been enrolled in postsecondary education or training since leaving high school. The Chi-square test showed that the variables were not significant differences, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=91) = .661, p=.416$. Because $p = .416$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 13, the percentage of students with disabilities who were enrolled in school systems without transition coordinators and had never been enrolled in postsecondary education or training was 12.2% compared to 7.1% of students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 13

Two Way Contingency Table Students with Disabilities in School Systems With and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator Who Had Never Been Enrolled in Postsecondary Education or Training

Never Been Enrolled in Postsecondary Education or Training	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	43	87.8	39	92.9
Yes	6	12.2	3	7.1
Total	49	100.0	42	100.0

Research Question 5 and Hypotheses

Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether they received services from state or federal agencies?

Ho5: There were no significant differences between those students with disabilities who were enrolled in a school system with a full-time transition coordinator and those students with disabilities who were enrolled in the two school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students received services from state or federal agencies.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate and compare whether there were differences between students with disabilities in a school system with a full-time

transition coordinator and those in systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding whether students with disabilities received services from state or federal agencies. The two variables were the grouping variable (students with disabilities in school systems without and with a full-time transition coordinator) and whether students with disabilities had received services from state or federal agencies. The Chi-square test was not significant, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=86) = .273, p=.602$. Because $p = .602$ is greater than the Alpha Level (.05), the null hypothesis was retained. As shown in Table 14, the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in school systems without a full-time transition coordinator who had received services from a state or federal agency was 42.9% compared to 37.3% of students with disabilities who enrolled in school systems with a full-time transition coordinator.

Table 14

Two Way Contingency Table Students With Disabilities in School Systems with and Without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator Who Had and Had Not Received Services from A State or Federal Agency

Received Services From A State or Federal Agency?	Systems without a Full-Time Transition Coordinator		System with a Full-Time Transition Coordinator	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	20	57.1	32	62.7
Yes	15	42.9	19	37.3
Total	35	100.0	51	100.0

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE
RESEARCH

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the outcomes of students with disabilities in three Southwest Virginia county school systems and those of the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

The second purpose of this study is to assess the postsecondary outcomes of all students with disabilities who were graduates of the three Southwest Virginia county school systems.

This study compares the transition programs in the three Southwest Virginia county school systems to determine if there were any differences between the system that had a full-time transition coordinator and the two systems that did not have a full-time transition coordinator.

Students in the study met the definition of Indicator 14 (those who were competitively employed, and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school). The study involved students with different disabilities and who had graduated with Advanced Studies, Standard, Modified Standard, or a Certificate of Completion.

Existing data were used to conduct this study. Data were gathered by special access to the special education administrative legacy file that contained results from the 2008 Indicator 14 survey. This survey was designed, conducted, and made available by the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. The center works with the Virginia Department of Education on such studies to acquire data from special education student's postsecondary and school exit data. The survey contained all the predictor variables

and criterion variables used in this study. Initially, the 27 indicators that comprised the Indicator 14 survey were narrowed to five. Those indicators focused on data from systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator. A Pearson Chi-square (χ^2) formula and two-way contingency tables were used to analyze data.

Summary of Findings, Analysis, and Conclusions

Five research questions were formed to ascertain comparative results for this study. Analysis and findings of each question is addressed in the following section.

Research Question 1

Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between the three public school systems in Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools regarding: (1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas) and (2) the percentage of students who met the definition of Indicator 14 (who were competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education or training 1 year after leaving high school)?

The two variables were the grouping variable (schools in Southwest Virginia versus the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools) and whether or not students with disabilities graduated with an advanced or standard diploma. Results from the Chi-square test indicated that the graduation rates for the three counties as compared with the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools were significantly different, from each other, Pearson $\chi^2 (1, N = 27005) = 16.768, p < .001$. The percentage of students with disabilities in Southwest Virginia schools who graduated with advanced or standard diplomas was

significantly lower (23.6%) as compared with students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools who graduated with advanced or standard diplomas (43.0%).

Results from the Chi-square test regarding the variable concerning students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 for the three counties compared to students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools were significantly different, Pearson $\chi^2 (1, N = 5907) = 24.158, p < .001$. The percentage of students with disabilities in the three Southwest Virginia schools who met the definition of Indicator #14 was significantly lower (67.5%) compared with students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools who met the definition (83.9%).

Significant differences were found in the graduation rates of the three Southwest Virginia public school systems when compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

Research Question 2

Were there any significant differences in postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator and students with disabilities who were enrolled in two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to: (1) students' successful completion of their secondary education, and (2) whether or not they met the definition of Indicator 14?

Regarding students with disabilities and their successful completion of their secondary education, the Chi-square test found that the variables were not significantly different, Pearson $\chi^2 (1, N=160) = 1.121, p = .290$. The relationship between the variables was weak (72.0% in systems

without a full-time transition coordinator compared to 64.2% of students in systems with a full-time transition coordinator).

In relation to students with disabilities who met the definition of Indicator 14 in systems without full-time transition coordinators and a system with a full-time transition coordinator, the Chi-square test results were not significant, Pearson χ^2 (1, N=126) = .093, $p = .760$.

Therefore, there were no significant differences in the two grouping variables (students with disabilities in systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator).

Research Question 3

Were there significant differences between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator compared to students with disabilities who were enrolled in two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their employment status after leaving high school?

There were no significant differences in the outcomes of students with disabilities in the Southwest Virginia school systems with and without a full-time transition coordinators in relation to; those who were currently employed, (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=106) = .730, $p = .393$); employed in a competitive work environment (competing with one another for jobs), (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=60) = .522, $p = .470$); currently employed (full-or part-time), (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=58) = 1.475, $p = .225$); employment in jobs with benefits versus jobs without benefits, (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=55) = .662, $p = .416$); found the job on their own or had assistance, (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=55) = .049, $p = .825$); and whether or not they had worked since leaving high school, (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=47) = .093, $p = .760$);

Concerning students with disabilities in the three Southwest Virginia school systems who were not currently employed but had worked since leaving high school regarding whether they had found jobs on their own or with assistance, analysis indicated there was a violation of an assumption, therefore, the Chi-Square test was not used. The violation of assumption was that more than 20% of the cells (50%) had an expected frequency of less than five.

With the exception of the violation of assumption regarding students with disabilities in the three Southwest Virginia school systems who were not currently employed, but had worked since leaving high school and whether or not they had found jobs on their own or with assistance, there were no significant differences in the two grouping variables (students with disabilities in systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator) with regard to their postsecondary employment, postsecondary education or vocational training outcomes after leaving high school.

Research Question 4

Were there significant differences in the postsecondary outcomes between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator compared to students with disabilities who were enrolled in two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators regarding their enrollment in postsecondary education or training?

There were no significant differences in the outcomes of students with disabilities in systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator regarding their enrollment in postsecondary education or training, specifically, those currently enrolled in a 2-or 4-year college or vocational training (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=107) =.134, p=.714), and those students with disabilities

who had never been enrolled in a 2-or4-year college or vocational training (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=91) =.661, p=.416).

Research Question 5

Was there a significant difference between students with disabilities who were enrolled in a Southwest Virginia school system with a full-time transition coordinator compared to students with disabilities who were enrolled in two Southwest Virginia school systems without full-time transition coordinators with regard to whether or not they received services from state or federal agencies?

There was not a significant difference between students with disabilities in systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator regarding whether they received services from state or federal agencies (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=86) =.273, p=.602).

Conclusions

Significant differences were found between the outcomes of students with disabilities in three Southwest Virginia schools compared to students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools. Differences were revealed in (1) the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with regular diplomas (either advanced or standard diplomas) and (2) the percentage of students who met the definition of Indicator 14. The three Southwest Virginia county school systems had least positive outcomes than did students in the Commonwealth of Virginia Public Schools.

Surprisingly, analysis revealed there were no significant differences between Southwest Virginia school systems with and without full-time transition coordinators in relation to postsecondary education, vocational training, and employment outcomes. These findings

confirmed that a full-time transition coordinator had not made a significant difference in postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in the one Southwest Virginia school system compared to the two systems without full-time transition coordinators. The system with a full-time transition coordinator (Wise County) had least positive outcomes than did the other two Southwest Virginia county systems. While there were no significant differences in the county with a full-time transition coordinator, and the two counties without full-time transition coordinators, the graduation rates could have been even lower if the one county did not have a full-time transition coordinator.

Implications for Practice

With an ever increasing number of students with disabilities entering the postsecondary adult world of work, training, and postsecondary education, the need for proper training and guidance during the high school years has become critically important. Individually designed transition services can greatly increase students with disabilities' potential to experience positive postsecondary outcomes.

By providing assessment, guidance, and encouragement, transition service coordinators can set up programs for each student with disabilities that will guide him or her toward educational, vocational, or employment goals. Attainment of these goals can provide opportunities for many students with disabilities to compete in the global job market for gainful employment.

Despite the outcomes of this comparative study that revealed no significant differences in the indicators between the Southwest Virginia school systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator, the influence of such services should not be disregarded. Research has

demonstrated the difference a full-time transition coordinator's services make in student outcomes, and by providing assistance to the special education classroom teacher with regard to transition planning for students at the secondary level. Therefore, the following implications for practice should include but not be limited to the following:

1. School systems without full-time transition coordinators should investigate establishing and funding these positions through federal and state education grants because most local school budgets have limited budgets and resources.
2. Secondary school systems should allow full-time transition coordinators to vocationally test students in order to develop additional educational programs that will build upon their strengths and interests.
3. Full-time transition coordinators should be allowed to work with area industry, sheltered employment workshops, vocational training centers, and colleges to develop postsecondary opportunities for students with disabilities.
4. Full-Time transition coordinators should develop programs and plans that will reward, motivate, and guide students with disabilities toward completion of their secondary education as a prerequisite for potential employment, training, or education.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that future studies be conducted to determine why there were no significant differences in systems with and without a full-time transition coordinator

A study should be conducted in the three Southwest Virginia county school systems to determine rates of change that have occurred in the last 5 years in Wise County since the

acquisition of a full-time transition coordinator. For comparative purposes the same study should be made in the two other Southwest Virginia school systems.

Lastly, it is recommended that future studies be conducted that use a larger population of students with disabilities in order to eliminate the possibility of a violation of assumption and yield more reliable results.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB Approval Letter

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East Tennessee State University

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707 • (423) 439-6053
Fax: (423) 439-6060

October 22, 2009

James R. Myers, Jr.
P.O. Box 115
Jonesville, VA 24263

Dear Mr. Myers,

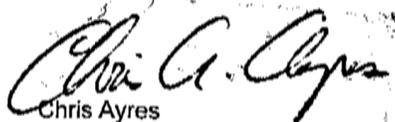
Thank you for recently submitting information regarding your proposed project regarding the "Indicator 14" Survey.

I have reviewed the information, which includes a completed Form 129.

The determination is that this proposed activity as described meets neither the FDA nor the DHHS definition of research involving human subjects. Therefore, it does not fall under the purview of the ETSU IRB and does not require ETSU IRB approval.

Thank you for your commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,


Chris Ayres
Chair, ETSU IRB



Accredited Since December 2005

APPENDIX B

Permission to Conduct Research from Wise County Public Schools

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WISE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"A Touch of Class"

September 14, 2010

Mr. Jim Myers
Special Education Teacher
Dryden Elementary School
Lee County Schools
5 Park Street
Jonesville, VA 24263

Dear Jim:

I wish you success in using the data from Wise County Schools in your dissertation to determine if there are any significant differences in the outcomes of special education students with regard to high school graduation rates, postsecondary education, vocational training, and competitive work outcomes by comparing Wise County Schools, which has a full time transition coordinator to Lee and Scott Counties, which do not.

As the Director of Special Education for Wise County Schools, I give you permission and support your efforts to use the legacy data for Wise County Schools in your study. I will be happy to assist you in any way with your study and look forward to receiving a synopsis of your results.

Sincerely,
Jerrie Adams
Director of Special Education & Student Services

APPENDIX C

Permission to Conduct Research from Lee County Public Schools

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Lee County Public Schools

Fred Marion
Superintendent

5 Park Street
Jonesville, Virginia 24263

Telephone (276) 346-2107
Fax (276) 346-0307

September 14, 2010

Mr. Jim Myers
Special Education Teacher
Dryden Elementary School

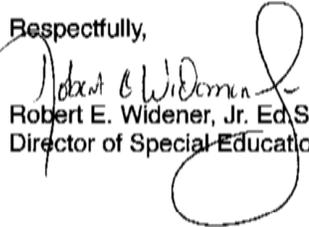
Jim:

Congratulations on your advancement through the proposal process! Your study should prove to be interesting and I will be interested in seeing your results.

As Director of Special Education for Lee County Public Schools, I authorize you to access the Legacy data relating to SPP Indicators for Lee County Public Schools as you compare our school division to our neighboring divisions.

Let me know if I, or any of my staff can be of further assistance.

Respectfully,


Robert E. Widener, Jr. Ed.S.
Director of Special Education and Fine Arts

APPENDIX D

Permission to Conduct Research from Scott County Public Schools

03-17-2011 10:29 5464443

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SmartZone Communications Center

themyersclan@comcast.net

± Font size ±

letter

From : Brenda Robinette <brenda.robinette@scott.k12.va.us>

Wed Mar 16 2011 3:44:51 PM

Subject : letter

To : themyersclan@comcast.net

September 14, 2010

Mr. Jim Myers

Scott County Public Schools gives permission to access Transition/Indicator 14 data to be used for survey purposes and data collection. I look forward to seeing the results.

Brenda P. Robinette
Director of Special Education
Scott County Public Schools

APPENDIX E

Virginia Department of Education Survey Post School Survey

Student:

If unable to complete survey,
please indicate why:

Student home phone:

Student cell phone:

Student work phone:

Contact dates:

Primary disability:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

LEP status:

Who served as the source
for the majority of these
data?

RESPONDENT QUESTIONS

1. Which classes did you take in high school that you found to be most helpful? (Check all that apply.)
2. Which classes in high school do you wish you had taken that would be helpful to you now? (Check all that apply.)
3. Since leaving high school have you received services—or are you currently receiving services—from any of the following agencies? (Check all that apply.)
4. How satisfied are you with your life at the present time?
5. Right now—at this time—are you working? (Note: Full-time homemaker is considered employed.)

6. Describe the type of employment (ASK THE RESPONDENT TO DESCRIBE THE JOB AND CHECK ONLY ONE OPTION.)
7. How many hours do you usually work per week?
8. How much are you usually paid an hour for your job before any money is taken out for taxes? (IF NECESSARY CALCULATE THE HOURLY WAGE AND WRITE IT DOWN.) Minimum wage: \$5.85 per hour
9. Does the job provide you with benefits (for example, health insurance, vacation, or sick leave)?
10. Who helped you the most in finding your current job?
11. At any time since leaving high school, have you ever worked?
12. Describe the job. (ASK THE RESPONDENT TO DESCRIBE THE JOB AND CHECK ONLY ONE OPTION.)
13. How many hours did you usually work per week?
14. How much were you usually paid an hour for your job before any money was taken out for taxes? (IF NECESSARY CALCULATE THE HOURLY WAGE AND WRITE IT DOWN.) Minimum wage: \$5.85 per hour
15. Did the job provide benefits (for example, health insurance, vacation, or sick leave)?
16. Who helped you (the individual) the most in finding this job?
17. Right now, are you enrolled in any type of school or training program?
18. Describe the kind of school or training program. (ASK THE QUESTION AND THEN CHECK ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS.)
19. Are you enrolled full-time or part-time?
20. Since leaving high school, have you ever been enrolled in any type of school or training program?
21. Describe the kind of school or training program. (ASK THE QUESTION AND THEN CHECK ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS.)
22. Were you enrolled full-time or part-time?
23. If you have never been employed, do you want to work?

24. Have you attempted to find a job since leaving high school?
25. If you have never been employed, what do you think makes it difficult for you to get a job?
(Check all that apply.)
26. If you have never been in postsecondary education, do you want to be enrolled?
27. If you have never been in postsecondary education, what makes it difficult for you to participate in these programs? (Check all that

