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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF A HIGHLY QUALIFIED TRANSITION SPECIALIST ON SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Northern Illinois University, 2018
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Using a self-report quantitative survey with additional open-ended questions, this study examined the transition experiences of 836 parents of children with Intellectual and / or Developmental Disabilities currently enrolled in a post-high school program for students ages 18-21 in the Chicago metropolitan region. More specifically, this study examined the influence that a highly qualified special education Transition Specialist had on positively influencing in-school experiences that in turn would expectedly result in positive post-school outcomes for children.

The independent variable in the study was presence or absence of an LSB-II transition specialist at IEP meetings. The dependent variables in the study consisted of a) Student focused planning; b) Family engagement; c) Student development; d) Interagency collaboration; e) Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas; f) IEP team member transition knowledge; and g) Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD, to compare experiences.

Results from the quantitative portion of the survey evidenced no difference in parent transition planning experiences using the independent variable of the LBS-II presence.

However, qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions suggests that parent knowledge of key transition practices, proven to influence post-school outcomes, are evident in richer detail when then LBS-II is involved in the planning. Secondary analyses conducted identified a significant discrepancy between parents' perception of the frequency of transition compliance mandates and their perceived importance of each mandate. Finally, results raise awareness that educational environment is a contributing factor to opportunities for student development.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF A HIGHLY QUALIFIED
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PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL
OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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AND FOUNDATIONS

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Kelly H. Summers

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As a young child school was not easy for me. It wasn't until my final years in my undergraduate program that things started to click. Personal career ambitions and encouragement from several important people in my life resulted in my returning to the classroom a few more times. To those who have encouraged me along my learning journey, I am eternally grateful! There are two people from my school psychologist and early administration years that I will be forever indebted to for their friendship and tutelage. Dr. Dave and Jean were more than mentors. Their genuine care for students, families, and colleagues shaped me into the special education administrator that I am today. I will forever treasure our years working together and the friendships.

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DEDICATION

To my Ever-Loving parents and all the parents who love their children unconditionally

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Success is a relative term. How a family defines success for their child transitioning from high school to the next stage of their life is unique to their own circumstances, the goals of the student, and their family. For families who have students with disabilities, especially those with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD), success is a subjective term (Henninger & Taylor, 2014; Maxwell et al., 1995). However, successful transition of individuals with I/DD from school to the next stages of their lives is influenced by the expertise and knowledge of educators and other persons responsible for providing transition supports and services (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994; Meadows et al., 2014; Noonan et al., 2008).

Since 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) became law, parents have come to depend on special education entitlement programs and services provided by qualified special educators trained to promote academic, functional and social growth throughout their child's school career. In 1990 when P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there was an added requirement that schools were to include Transition Plans for all students with disabilities. This requirement stemmed from decades of unacceptable success rates in education, employment, and community participation for people with disabilities, especially those with I/DD. The IDEA reauthorization required that beginning at 16 years of age, a Transition Plan be contained within the student's Individual Education Program (IEP) with the intent of preparing the student for post high-school

life in three areas: continuing or adult education, employment and/or training, and independent living. The definition for transition services embedded in the IDEA is somewhat ambiguous, however the definition encompasses five areas originally identified as essential elements for transition success, known as Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming. These five areas include; student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement, and program structures (Kohler, 1996). Despite the importance of transition planning, the IDEA does not require highly qualified transition personnel to complete the transition plan or provide the services necessary for the successful transition from school to adult life. This leaves special educators in a vulnerable position because they, along with administrators, are held accountable for providing programs and services, yet most lack the training to provide them. Research studies have affirmed that special educators lack the knowledge for successful transition planning (Benitez et al., 2009; Flannery et al., 2013; Li et al., 2009; McMahan & Baer, 2001; Rowe et al., 2015; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Furthermore, the effects of educator unpreparedness are substantiated through numerous research studies investigating parents' experiences and perceptions of the transition process. Specifically, the parents expressed not only fear and anxiety associated with uncertainty for the future, but also an unmet desire for a knowledgeable school team member to support them and their child in navigating the complex statewide systems (Ankeny et al., 2009; Bianco et al., 2009; Blustein et al., 2016; Davies & Beamish, 2009; Doren et al., 2012; Newman, 2005; Noonan et al., 2008). Yet, there is evidence presented in isolated studies validating the effectiveness that a highly qualified Transition Specialist can have on realizing successful transitions from school to adult life for students with disabilities (Meadows et al., 2014; Noonan et al., 2008).

Since 2003 Illinois' higher education institutions have offered advanced studies for special educators known as the LBS-II endorsement. One of the seven strands offered as part of the LBS-II programs is the Transition Specialist (23 Ill. Adm. Code 25.43 (e)(1). As of September 2018, there are thirty-five Illinois Universities approved for LBS-I Learning Behavior Specialist or special education teacher programs. However, only three Illinois Universities currently offer and are approved for the LBS-II Transition Specialist endorsement program, (<https://www.isbe.net/doap>).

According to the University of Illinois at Chicago website, coursework for the Transition Specialist prepares the special educator to “support students and families to improve school outcomes and interface with both community organizations and agencies”, (<https://education.uic.edu/sites/default/files/LBS2%20webinfo.pdf> p. 3). Similarly, the program description at Illinois State University promotes the LBS-II Transition Specialist program as one that “prepares secondary transition personnel to develop, implement, and evaluate secondary transition programs across disability categories, including program components related to student-focused planning and development, family collaboration, and interagency collaboration”, (https://education.illinoisstate.edu/cert_transition para 1).

As of March 2017, the Illinois State Board of Education reported 76 endorsed LBS-II Transition Specialists in Illinois; a total that dwarfs in comparison to the over 500 school entities outside of the city of Chicago responsible for providing special education programs to youth in secondary transition programs.

Current Illinois policy does not require Illinois school districts providing transition services to employ a trained LBS-II Transition Specialist. However, as a result of recent

legislation, employing or having access to a Transition Specialist is being considered by statewide transition stakeholders and policy makers. On July 16, 2013, then Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed into law House Bill 2591, The Employment First Act. Because of that legislation, the Illinois Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) linked to the implementation of Employment First in Illinois was formed. A subcommittee of this task force is the Transition Workgroup, which is comprised of diverse representation from multiple state agencies, focused on post-secondary school transition issues in Illinois. The workgroup was tasked to identify activities, long-range goals, and perceived barriers and challenges to transition planning. They were then to propose recommendations, each with the goal of producing results needed to improve Transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Specifically, this subcommittee was charged with developing a comprehensive system of transition services/practices that would result in seamless, easily accessible, culturally competent, geographically sensitive post-school outcomes. The intent of the workgroup's proposal would be to support school districts in their efforts to prepare transition plans and offer services to students based on the presumption that all individuals can work in the community after appropriate academic outcomes, on an individual basis,

(<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27897/documents/EmploymentFirst/StrategicPlanOpenComment.pdf>). On February 6, 2018 representatives from the EEOPD Task Force presented the collective recommendations of the four workgroups at a Joint Committee Hearing in Springfield, IL. The representatives presented the Transition Workgroup's recommendations to address the mission of the EEOPD including: 1) make LBS-II Transition Specialist training more widely available in Illinois and, 2) require each school district have available to them the services

of at least one LBS-II Transition Specialist or a person that has the qualifications of a research-based Division of Career and Transition/Council of Exceptional Child Transition Standards.

Problem Statement

In Illinois, employing a trained LBS-II Transition Specialist is not required. Yet, parents and school teams alike are looking to those knowledgeable in Transition to assist families of individuals with an identified disability, more specifically those with I/DD, as they prepare to transition from school supports to adult life. The LBS-II Transition Specialist is trained to strengthen their school's transition programs, including the understanding of program components related to student-focused planning and development, family engagement, and interagency collaboration for individuals with disabilities. Comparing the experiences of parents of individuals with I/DD, who have had a LBS-II Transition Specialist on their team, to those who do not may provide evidence of an effective practice for school district administrators to consider in their hiring practices, and for policy makers to consider in light of a state and national momentum to integrate people with disabilities. In particular, one can ask if the training provided to the LBS-II Transition Specialist translates into positive and successful transition experiences to result in anticipated successful outcomes for individuals with I/DD and their families based on their definition of positive and success, and if so how.

Defining the Issue

During the years leading up to the 1990 IDEA reauthorization of the special education legislation, there was an increase of public concern that youth with disabilities, especially those

with I/DD, were not exhibiting high success rates in education, full-time employment and community participation. The current 2004 IDEA changed the required age for inclusion of transition plans to age 16 from the 1997 IDEA legislation which required transition plans at age 14. Despite the change in the requirements, Illinois has maintained more rigorous regulations requiring transition planning to begin at age 14 ½ years, the age more closely aligned with the regulation written into the 1997 iteration of IDEA. The Transition Plan must be included within the student's Individual Education Program with goals developed to prepare the student for post high-school life in three areas: continuing or adult education, employment and/or training, and independent living.

While special educators have been held accountable for completing the task of transition planning for their students for almost three decades, the concern for poor representation in post-secondary education, competitive community employment, and independent living continues to resonate nationally, but specifically in Illinois and for those identified as I/DD. While Illinois is among the states that begin transition services early, it has ranked among the worst five states since 2007 in community participation, employment and support services for individuals with I/DD (<http://cfi.ucp.org/Bragdon>, 2016). This annual analysis, sponsored by the United Cerebral Palsy, looks at a variety of data points to assess how people with disabilities live and participate in their communities, their ability to access supports, and how satisfied they are with their lives. In this most current report based on 2014 data, Illinois ranks 47 of the 51 United States and District of Colombia in areas of supported or competitive employment, residential living, financial and other supports from state agencies. The disheartening trend in Illinois served as

motivation to the Employment First legislation, and the establishment of the Task Force Workgroups, specifically the Transition Workgroup subcommittee.

Since the 1990 reauthorization of IDEA, there have been many federally funded transition projects designed and implemented in an effort to improve transition programs and services. One of these federally funded projects, Project SET, conducted through the University of Illinois Chicago, aimed to prepare 56 highly qualified LBS-II Transition Specialists with knowledge, skills and leadership, with a goal to improve transition processes for high-need youth with disabilities and their families (<http://project-set.org/whatisprojectset.html>). Project SET was just one of 41 federally funded projects awarded to a total of 18 states between the years 2001 and 2016 (Plotner & Simonsen, 2018). The effects that these highly trained educators and those licensed through similar programs at Illinois State University, National Louis University and previously, the University of Illinois Champaign / Urbana, on preparing the student with a disability, specifically those with I/DD enrolled in Illinois schools, for post high-school life has yet to be studied. Along with studying the effects of federally funded projects, researchers have also invested in both quantitative and qualitative studies, learning from both special educators and parents, in an ongoing effort of improving the transition process and specifically looking for evidence-based practices to implement. The clear majority of these studies have concluded that the transition process is inadequate to properly prepare the individuals with I/DD for the adult world. My study seeks to explore the experiences of parents/families of individuals with I/DD who have a trained LBS-II Transition Specialist on the IEP team compared to those who do not, to determine how the specialized training and knowledge of the LBS-II impacts parents' experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to examine the possible effects that a trained LBS-II Transition Specialist has on the development of the transition plan. My quantitative study will employ purposive sampling of parents/families whose children are currently enrolled in a transition program beyond their four high school years. This population is being selected since those with I/DD represent the discouraging trends of unemployed and undereducated adults as acknowledged in the Employment First legislation. Additionally, this population has been the source of a national analysis since 2007 as conducted by the United Cerebral Palsy. My purposive sampling will include parents from local education agencies and special education cooperatives in the northern region of Illinois exclusive of the City of Chicago, with surveys being distinguished between those school systems that employ a LBS-II Transition Specialist to those who do not. Gaining information from the perspective of the parents of individuals with I/DD, specific to their transition experiences with or without the support of a LBS-II Transition Specialist, will offer insight as to how key factors associated with this specialized training impact parent confidence in anticipated successful outcomes, while investigating the role of the LBS-II Transition Specialist as the architect of the plan in achieving these specific indicators of success. The data gathered through this study can be used for special education administrators and policy makers as they consider the role of the LBS-II Transition Specialist in both hiring practices and proposal of state regulations.

Assumptions

This study is based on two primary assumptions. The first assumption is that the parents

have been active participants throughout the IEP/Transition process, more specifically the final years of school participation beyond the traditional four high school years. The second assumption is that the LBS-II Transition Specialist has received their training through one of the four Illinois universities that currently or previously offer this curriculum and holds this endorsement on their Illinois Professional Educators License.

Significance of the Study

This study is relevant and timely as policy makers explore the role and influence of the LBS-II Transition Specialist on school transition teams, while special education administrators seek to identify effective strategies to positively influence transition outcomes in their local area. Furthermore, statewide stakeholders continue to investigate how to improve transition outcomes in not just employment but also higher education, independent living, and community participation for individuals with I/DD, the population spotlighted in the Employment First legislation. Since 2011, my professional involvement in transition specific work groups, committees, and task forces has been numerous and statewide. One of these includes the Transition Workgroup, born from the Employment First legislation, which has recommended a greater availability of the LBS-II Transition Specialist. As a member of this task force, I witnessed continuous blame on school systems for unsuccessfully preparing and transitioning students with disabilities, specifically those with I/DD from school to adult life. Sharing the research data from this study with fellow administrators, committee members, task force and work group members, particularly gained insight to the role of the LBS-II Transition Specialist on transition experiences and outcomes may influence school districts when reviewing their

special education programs and services at the secondary level, specifically their hiring practices. Additionally, results from this research study may also offer recommendations to influence the work of other invested statewide stakeholders. Using parents as the subjects for this research, learning from their experiences during the transition process, will offer authentic data that will either justify and support the presence of the LBS-II as an essential team member and influence in achieving successful transition planning experiences that are rich in evidence-based practices or not.

Success is not defined similarly by each individual with I/DD or their family members. As of yet, researchers have not studied the impact that trained LBS-II Transition Specialists might have in effectuating successful outcomes across Illinois. However, across all disability communities and stakeholder groups the goal is for a greater percentage of students with disabilities to pursue post-secondary education, gain competitive employment, and have an increased presence in local communities. This study seeks to identify, through the experience of family members, the influence of the highly trained LBS-II in preparing for successful post-school outcomes as a result of the transition planning process.

The following research question will serve as the foundation in guiding this study:

- 1) How do the perceived experiences of parents differ between those having a LBS-II Transition Specialist present vs. those who did not in the follow areas?
 - a. Student focused planning
 - b. Family engagement
 - c. Student development
 - d. Interagency collaboration

- e. Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas
- f. IEP team member transition knowledge
- g. Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD

Definition of Terms

LBS-II Transition Specialist: An advanced credential for Illinois educators who have met the standards of specialization as defined in the Illinois Administrative Code and include proficiencies in all areas of transition. The Transition Specialist is competent in knowledge of history, legislation and research. They understand the implications that characteristics of disabilities might have on post-school outcomes. Additionally, they are competent in transition assessments, curriculum and instructional design with a focus on post-school options. The Transition Specialist creates learning environments that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. They also foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction among professionals, parents, paraprofessional educators, students, and community service agencies while investigating methods for increasing collaborative transition service delivery through interagency agreements and collaborative funding. The competent Transition Specialist demonstrates positive regard for the capacity and operating constraints of community organizations involved in transition-focused education services.

Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities: Per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-5), Intellectual Developmental Disorder is a disorder with onset

during the developmental period that includes both intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits in conceptual, social, and practical domains (DSM-5, 2013). The severity of Intellectual Developmental Disorders is based on adaptive functioning rather than IQ test scores alone. The population that this study targets, students with intellectual or developmental disabilities are the most vulnerable in our society. Those identified as mild to moderate in their deficits have the abilities to learn skills necessary for employment, skills for independence, community involvement and possible pursuance of advanced education. With IQs typically measuring in the range of 40-55 along with delays in adaptive or social skills, the DSM-5 suggests that independent employment in jobs that require limited conceptual and communication skills can be achieved by this group, albeit with considerable support from co-workers, supervisors, and others to manage social expectations, job complexities, and ancillary responsibilities. Those measuring within the severe to profound range of intellectual and developmental disabilities will require agency support in order to benefit from services beyond those afforded through IDEA.

Transition Plan: The Transition Plan is a specific component of the IEP and serves as the vehicle to prepare the student with a disability for post high school life in the areas of continuing or adult education, employment and or training and independent living.

Transition Services and Activities: The fourth and current legislation that defines rules and regulations for the provision of special education services, including Transition Plans and Services, was enacted in 2004 with Public Law 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). In this law Transition Services and Activities do not follow a certain set of rules. The coordinated set of activities should be unique to the individual and should consider their strengths, preferences and interests. Activities planned for and

provided should be intentional to promote growth both academically and functionally and assist the student in achieving their post high school goals for education, employment and independent living. Transition services and activities may include instruction, related services, work experiences, and community participation (23 Ill.Admin.Code §226).

Competitive Integrated Employment: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-128), describes competitive integrated employment as: part- or full-time work performed by an individual which is compensated by at least minimum wage under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Integrated employment occurs in a location allowing the person an opportunity to interact with other individuals who do not have disabilities; and provides an opportunity for advancement similar to that of nondisabled peers in similar positions (The Arc, 2015).

Evidence Based Practices: Following the 2002 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, public education was required to use their federal funds on evidence-based instructional practices to promote the yearly progress of all students. This emphasis resulted in a surge of scientific research to identify instructional practices that were evidence-based; including transition practices and programs. Practices would be defined as evidenced-based after undergoing rigorous study and having demonstrated a record of success.

Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition: Effective Transition practices that have been used to define Evidence Based Practices and include; Student Focused Planning, Student Development, Family Involvement, Program Structure, and Inter-Agency Collaboration (Kohler, 1996). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 was updated in 2016 with a shift from Family

Involvement to Family Engagement while including specific activities under each of the five practice categories for IEP teams to consider (Kohler et al., 2016).

Indicator 13 Compliance Indicators: Indicator 13 is one of 17 special education compliance areas required by the Office of Special Education Programs / U.S. Department of Education. The requirements for local and state compliance in Transition Plan development is monitored through the eight Indicator 13 compliance indicators. These eight criteria include measurable post-secondary goals for employment, education and / or training, and independent living that are updated annually, are based on age appropriate transition assessments, and are supported by annual goals. Additionally, transition services are included in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her post-secondary goals. The plan must also include a four-year course of study that is aligned to all the student's post-secondary goals. Finally, there must be evidence that the student is invited to participate in the development of the plan as well as evidence that the school invited representation of any state or adult agency if deemed appropriate, based on the student's disability.

Indicator 14 Compliance Indicators: One of the 17 special education compliance areas that requires school districts to collect data from random samples of students with disabilities after they have exited the school system. The information collected seeks to measure successful outcomes, or lack thereof, in the three outcome areas of education and or training, employment and independent living. The process of collecting Indicator 14 data has recently been revised so that feedback will be provided to school districts expeditiously and with more detail. Parents can decline being contacted by the school system.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The responsibility of creating transition programs that result in successful outcomes for all students with disabilities belongs to the special education administrators as well as the special education teachers in each Illinois school district or special education cooperative. In Illinois, special education policy and regulations provide a framework for the mandatory, yet minimal compliance standards, for all transition related planning activities and services. The knowledge of transition policy and regulations provides a framework for compliance for those responsible for delivery of such program and services. However, these measures of compliance are the same for each student regardless of their disability classification or the severity of the individual's disability. As a result, if special education administrators and educators only consider the *bureaucratic* need to meet the minimal compliance standards, they most probably will fail to address the *unique programmatic needs* of each individual with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities - a population that by definition is capable of securing competitive employment, participating in community activities and progressing in their independence, if in fact these are their goals for life beyond high school. Higher education preparation programs for either the special education teacher or the administrator do not focus on transition requirements with the same intensity as LBS-II Transition Specialist programs. Regardless of their level of transition knowledge, or lack thereof, special education administrators and teachers are accountable for these programs and services. This concern for accountability for successful

transition outcomes, especially for individuals with I/DD who are poorly represented in post-secondary education, integrated employment, and community participation, has escalated in recent years with the passage of Employment First (EF) legislation, revisions to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), and changes to the funding structures of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Knowledge of the federal IDEA policy and state regulations that exceed federal requirements are the responsibility of each special educator, however this knowledge only provides the standards for compliance. Special educators wanting to provide programs and services that offer more than mere compliance must also consider findings from transition specific due process cases, evidence-based research and scholarly articles that highlight programs and practices shown to enrich special education programs and services, specifically transition programs and services.

Federal Special Education Policy

Special educators have a responsibility to understand the IDEA requirements to ensure that students receive a free and appropriate public education. Those who have a responsibility for providing educational programs and services to transition aged youth must also understand what is required in the Transition Services section of the law for maintaining compliance. There are currently thirty-two Illinois colleges and universities that offer the LBS-I Special Education Bachelor's Degree program and three more with Master's Degree programs (<https://www.isbe.net/doap>). However, an analysis of course requirements for Bachelor's Degrees in Special Education at each of Illinois' six large universities, indicates that only four require a single 3-hour course specific to Transition, suggesting limited opportunity to acquire

the skills and understanding necessary to produce transition plans that go beyond minimal compliance (<http://findyourmajor.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/pdf/4year/2017/special-education-learning-behavior.pdf>; <http://catalog.illinois.edu/courses-of-instruction/sped/>; http://catalog.niu.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=45&poid=10348&returnto=2137; <http://ehs.siu.edu/common/documents/curriculum/cg17-18/SPED.pdf>. This trend of limited exposure to transition related content is also evident at a national level, with only 33 states and the District of Columbia having requirements for initial special education licensure that include either a required transition-related course or state professional standards as outlined by the Council for Exceptional Children (Simonsen et al., 2018). Furthermore, despite the need for transition specific knowledge to prepare students with disabilities for adult life, Michigan is the sole state that requires specialized transition-related credentials in order to be approved to serve in the role of transition coordinator or specialist. In this study of state policies specific to transition requirements for initial licensure, Simonsen and colleagues discovered that Illinois is one of 11 states with transition related professional standards for all special educators. However, Illinois is not included in the brief list of five states with policies that require at least one transition-related course for initial special education licensure. Finally, Illinois remains one of eight states to offer secondary transition credentials (Simonsen et al., 2018). Despite this limited pre-service training, special educators who work with transition aged youth are responsible for upholding the requirements for Transition services as defined in IDEA.

While special education was written into public law in 1975, preparing youth for post-secondary life through documented Transition planning was not required until the 1990 iteration of the IDEA. Since then, the IDEA has been reauthorized two additional times, first in 1997 and

then again in 2004. The current legislation IDEA 2004 Sec. 14-8.03. describes Transition services as:

(a) "Transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (i) 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; (ii) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (iii) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills, benefits planning, work incentives education, and the provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition planning must be conducted as part of the IEP process and must be governed by the procedures applicable to the development, review, and revision of the IEP, including notices to the parents and student, parent and student participation, and annual review. To appropriately assess and develop IEP Transition goals and Transition services for a child with a disability, additional participants may be necessary and may be invited by the school district, parent, or student to participate in the Transition planning process. Additional participants may include without limitation a representative from the Department of Human Services or another State agency, a case coordinator, or persons representing other public or community agencies or services, such as adult service providers or public community colleges. The IEP shall identify each person responsible for coordinating and delivering Transition services. If the IEP team determines that the student requires Transition services from a public or private entity outside of the school district, the IEP team shall identify potential outside resources, assign one or more IEP team members to contact the appropriate outside entities, make the necessary referrals, provide any information and documents necessary to complete the referral, follow up with the entity to ensure that the student has been successfully linked to the entity, and monitor the student's progress to determine if the student's IEP Transition goals and benchmarks are being met. The student's IEP shall indicate one or more specific time periods during the school year when the IEP team shall review the services provided by the outside entity and the student's progress in such activities. The public school's responsibility for delivering educational services does not extend beyond the time the

student leaves school or when the student's eligibility ends due to age under this Article.

(Source: P.A. 98-517, eff. 8-22-13.)

Measures of Compliance: Indicator 13 and Indicator 14

The U.S. Department of Education / Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has reduced compliance for Transition Services to eight required Transition Plan components collectively known as Indicator 13 which Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and special education cooperatives are expected to follow. Indicator 13 is one of 17 areas of Special Education services monitored through an annual State Performance Plan (SPP). Information for Indicator 13 is self-reported through the state's electronic student management system and required for each student age 14 ½ and older. These annual self-reports completed by each middle or junior high school, high school or unit district serving eligible students, provides an evaluation of each transition plan in the following: 1) measurable post-secondary goals for employment, education and / or training, and independent living; 2) assurances that each post-secondary goal is updated annually; 3) evidence that each post-secondary goal is based on an age appropriate Transition assessment; 4) a list of Transition services in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her post-secondary goals; 5) a course of study that is aligned to all the student's post-secondary goals; 6) for each post-secondary goal there are annual goals included in the IEP that are related to the student's Transition services' needs; 7) evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where Transition services were discussed; and 8) if appropriate, evidence that a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of

majority (<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Indicator-13.aspx>). Indicator 13 is a 100% compliance indicator, meaning the expectation is that all Transition Plans developed must address each of the eight areas, without exception, in order to be compliant. Since the standard for compliance is strictly based on quantitative data, the quality of each plan is not scrutinized as part of this reporting standard. Requirements for compliance are the same for each student with an Individual Education Program (IEP) regardless of the severity of the disability. As such, the process can often leave school personnel non-invested because they focus on compliance rather than on what a Transition Plan is truly meant to accomplish. The Illinois State Board of Education did not begin collecting compliance data specific to the mandated requirements of Transition Plans until 2009. While the majority of school districts across the state self-report 100% compliance, the ISBE utilizes a process known as ‘desk audits’ to further scrutinize Transition Plans for compliance. Districts selected for desk audits include those that self-report less than 100% compliance along with a random selection of districts statewide that do report 100% compliance. The most current results available are included in the FFY 2016 Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) state performance plan. This report indicates that 97.5% of districts across the state self-reported 100% compliance utilizing the Indicator 13 indicators for compliance (https://www.isbe.net/Documents/annual_partB.pdf). In addition to the districts not reporting 100% compliance, there were 25 districts randomly selected from those reporting 100% compliance. From these 25 districts, only 3 districts’ IEPs actually received a designation of ‘meets requirements’ for writing plans that met the standards as outlined in IDEA (http://members.iaase.org/Documents/Ctrl_Hyperlink/ISBE_11-15_Talking_Points_uid11172015346392.pdf). This disparity in self-reported compliance vs.

audited compliance suggests a disconnect between special educators' perceptions of compliance and what the ISBE expects in plans, to meet regulatory standards for Transition compliance. Representatives from other state agencies have suggested during task force and committee work activities that schools are not properly preparing students for Transition to adult life. Based on the discrepancy between educator perceptions for compliant Transition Plans and what is expected from the ISBE for compliance, these accusations appear to be accurate.

In addition to reporting the indicators for completion of the Transition Plans, states are also required to collect and report longitudinal Transition outcomes data to the U.S. Department of Education via the SPP's Indicator 14. Simplified, this collected information purports to measure successful outcomes, or lack thereof, for all graduates with disabilities in the three required outcome areas; education and/or training, employment, and independent living. In Illinois, this process requires school districts to collect data from random samples of students with disabilities one year after they have exited the school system. Districts are randomly selected from each of four types of systems; small unit districts, medium unit districts, large unit districts, and high school districts and each type only participates in the data collection activity once every four years. What this reality implies is that the information used to measure successful transition outcomes is collected randomly and very infrequently, making any type of speculation the educators may make about the correlation between their own transition programs to successful employment, education or independent living nearly impossible. Indicator 14 data seeks to identify the percentage of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were (a) enrolled in higher education within 1 year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within 1 year of

leaving high school, and (c) enrolled in higher education or in some other post-secondary education or training, or competitively employed or in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school (Grigal et al., 2011). While this information could provide valuable feedback to school districts to evaluate the quality of their transition programs, the process is not designed to have that effect. First, the selection of families to respond to the survey is random and representative of a very small percentage of former students. Second, the data collection statewide is too infrequent, in that each district is only required to participate every four years. Illinois stakeholders involved in the Employment First Task Force Workgroups have raised concern that this process is inept in providing any meaningful data for program improvement at the school system level.

Federal Case Law and Due Process Case Law

The transition plan required by the IDEA is a legal document intended to serve as the vehicle that prepares the individual with a disability for employment, post-secondary education, and skills for independent living in their adult life. Along with IDEA and state regulations guiding the development of Transition Plans and provision of services, there is also the influence of several federal legal challenges to the application of IDEA, due process cases filed on behalf of parents, and civil law suits filed on behalf of adults with I/DD. While the latter typically affects state agencies' policies and practices, the impact of these cases trickle down to the public-school system in how Transition Plans are written and how transition services are delivered so that upon exiting the school system the anticipated services and outcomes are consistent with federal and state regulations.

The most influential Supreme Court case impacting state agencies' operations specific to employment and integration of individuals with disabilities, especially those with I/DD, is the *Olmstead vs. L.C. and E.W.* case of 1999. Influencing Illinois' Employment First legislation, the *Olmstead* ruling prohibits the unjustified segregation of individuals with disabilities (527 U.S. 581 1999). Two additional federal civil suits would follow in Rhode Island's *U.S. v. Rhode Island and City of Providence* (D.R.I. 2013) and Oregon's *Lane v. Brown* (D. Or. 2012). In each of these cases the Supreme Court ruled that people with disabilities are to receive services in integrated communities rather than in segregated workshops or facilitated day programs. In Illinois, the most influential civil law suit came in 2011 from the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, *Ligas v. Hamos*, Case No. 05-4331. The class members in this case were adults with Developmental Disabilities who received services through state agencies. The litigants identified in this case wanted the opportunity to make meaningful, informed choices about whether to live in community-based settings. Illinois' compliance with the consent decree was challenged in August 2017 in *Ligas v. Norwood*, Case No. 05 CV 4331. In this latest case, the federal judge ruled that Illinois was failing to comply with the original ruling and ordered the state to develop a long-term plan to ensure people with developmental disabilities have the services necessary to live meaningful lives in the community (<http://www.equipforequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Ligas-Order-Granting-Motion-to-Enforce.pdf>).

Prior to this last suit, Illinois and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, as a recipient of federal resources, was put on notice in 2014 to comply with federal regulations by 2019. The five-year statewide transition plan ensures that individuals receiving

long-term care services and supports through federal programs have full access to benefits of community living and the opportunity to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate (IDHFS: Retrieved from <https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/MedicalClients/HCBS/Transition/Pages/default.aspx>). These rulings indirectly impact school based IEP teams as they consider post-secondary goals for employment and independent living. Knowledge of state agency policy and practices influences the educational system's ability to successfully engage in interagency collaboration, as defined in IDEA as well as being an essential factor in Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming.

In IDEA, parents have the right to lodge complaints regarding special education services and programs, including the transition plan, transition programs and services, and post-school outcomes via Due Process. Each year determinations are publicized with information identifying the basis for the complaint and the rationale behind the ruling, often citing the governing standard originated in the landmark *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982) case; that the IEP developed using the procedures of IDEA be 'reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits'. This Supreme Court ruling in 1982 affirmed the statutory definition of 'free appropriate public education', the pillar of IDEA, to mean that each child with a handicap be provided specially designed instruction, supportive services to assist a handicapped child in benefitting from special education, and be individually designed to provide educational benefit to the handicapped child 23 [458 U.S. 176, 202]. The preponderance of transition-specific hearings prior to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, generally concerned two key issues: the coordination of, and general responsibility for, providing supports and services, and the second being the appropriateness of content and construction of the Transition plan (McAfee & Greenwalt, 2001).

A more detailed analysis of Transition specific due process cases heard between the 1997 and 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, concluded that most transition cases involved issues from five prevalent categories including, agency contacts, student involvement, individualization of the Transition plan, district obligation, and appropriateness of the Transition plan (Etscheidt, 2006). In her analysis of due process cases between the IDEA 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations, Etscheidt analyzed the rulings of multiple state-level and district court rulings. Several cases under each category demonstrate violations that districts made in developing transition plans.

Agency Contacts

In a ruling found for the parents, their actions of independently obtaining services from an outside agency did not excuse the school district of their responsibility to invite agency representatives (Independent School District No. 0011, Anoka-Hennepin, 102 LRP 7054 (SEA MN 2000)). Additionally, not inviting or connecting parents with agency representatives is a violation of IDEA (Washington Township Board of Education, 102 LRP 11891 (SEA NY 1999)).

Student Involvement

Violations resulted from districts failing to involve the student as well as the parents in their transition planning (Eastern Howard School Corporation/ Kokomo Area Special Education Cooperative, 26 IDELR 811 (SEA IN 1997); Caribou School Department, 35 IDELR 115 (SEA ME 2001)). Inviting the student to the meeting is not enough. Students' interests and preferences must also be considered in the development of the transition plan (Sheridan School District, 32 IDELR 75 (SEA OR 1999)).

District Obligation

In Alabama's Marshall County (1997), the court determined that not providing the transition services written in the plan, while providing other IEP services is a denial of FAPE, (Marshall County Board of Educ., IDERL 794 (SEA AL 1997)). In Mason City, Iowa, the school district violated IDEA when they did not provide transition services at the required age nor did the plan detail the specific responsibilities of the school or the vocational rehabilitation agency (Mason City School District, 21 IDELR 248 (SEA IA 1994)). Districts are required to provide transition services while the student is still enrolled in school. In Puffer v. Reynolds (1992), the school district wrote a Transition plan prescribing services that were all post-graduation activities. The plan did not specify the obligations of the school district in preparing the student for post-school outcomes (Puffer v. Reynolds, 19 IDELR 408 (SEA MI 1992)).

Appropriateness of the Transition Plan

The court concluded that the district's failure to include a statement of services was only considered a technical defect since the school district could show that the student was provided a variety of transition services (Arlington Central School District, 28 IDELR 1130 (SEA NY 1998)). Similarly, including a transition statement that was deficient was not a violation of FAPE since the student was successfully transitioning to a day rehabilitation program (Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York, 32 IDELR 24 (SEA NY 1999)).

Individualization of the Transition Plan

A federal trial court in Connecticut determined that a student was entitled to community-

based instruction and daily living skills (J.B. v. Killingly Board of Education, 1997). A federal trial court in Pennsylvania concluded that vocational evaluations and training do not provide the services needed to prepare a student for life outside of school (East Penn School District v. Scott B., 1999), (Russo and Osborne, 2008). The importance of matching student needs to the transition plan was the issue heard in a Wisconsin court. The Appleton Area School District v. Benson, 2000, affirmed the lower court decision that school districts must provide transition services and programs that meet the individual needs of the student. In this case, the family's request for transition services to be provided in a community setting over a school setting was affirmed based on the importance of IDEA's requirement to address the student's individual needs and preferences (Appleton Area School District v. Benson, 32 IDELR 91 (ED. WI 2000)), (Etscheidt, 2006).

Case Law Subsequent IDEA 2004

Since the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, and at the time of their respective 2013 and 2014 studies, 136 due process cases specific to Transition had been heard at both state and federal levels with violations being categorized as either procedural in nature or substantive (Petcu et al., 2014; Prince et al., 2013). Substantive violations resulted mostly from family complaints for the lack of / or poorly developed post-secondary goals. While procedural violations cited included the school systems' not developing the plan in a timely manner, involving the parent in the development of the Transition Plan or errors by the school system specific to the Indicator 13 mandates (Petcu et al., 2014). These Indicator 13 oversights would include the lack of student and parent participation, not completing age appropriate assessments,

a lack of appropriate measurable post-secondary goals, among the other requirements. In a recent analysis of transition specific litigation, Zirkel (2018) re-evaluated IDEA litigation for a more thorough understanding of the judicial rulings adding implementation violations to substantive and procedural. The most glaring conclusion was that rulings during the period of 1990-2016 favored districts by a 3:1 ratio. He found that in many cases the courts used a relaxed standard, even a low standard, for measuring appropriate transition services without regard to the statutory framework of the law (Zirkel, 2018).

Several determinations beyond 2004 involve the transition programs and services of students diagnosed with I/DD. In their 2014 review of special education litigation, Petcu, Yell, Cholewicki and Plotner analyzed court cases filed on matters specific to transition planning. While issues may share commonalities, final determinations vary from state to state and individual hearing officers' or judges' interpretations of the IDEA 2004. In one such Illinois due process case, the court found that the substance of transition services and activities embedded in the student's IEP is more important than merely meeting procedural mandates prescribed in the Indicator 13 checklist. In this Illinois' 2007 case, the United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit 2007 ruling in *Bd. of Educ. of TP. High School Dist. 211 v. Ross*, Case No. 06-2060 supports the notion that the substance of the transition services outweighs the compliance mandates as prescribed in IDEA. The issue in this case involves the special education of a female student with Rett's Syndrome, a syndrome that results in both intellectual and developmental delays. The parents accused the school district of violating both their procedural and substantive obligations when developing her Individual Education Program and her Transition Plan. The school district's position was that the student's transition needs were

already included in her IEP, and that there was no material difference between her transition needs and her current basic skills needs as planned for in her IEP. The court of appeals determined that the school district and its officials did not violate their procedural responsibilities when they failed to include a Transition Plan in the IEP of this student with what was described as a moderate to severe disability. The records of this case conclude that the district's failure to include a Transition Plan, while a procedural mishap, was not a violation since the student's disability was so significant that the district determined her at a point in her education to not benefit from an elaborate transition plan (*Board of Education of Township High School District No. 211, Plaintiff-appellee, v. Michael and Diane Ross, Individually and As Next Friends of Lindsey Ross, a Minor, I Defendants-third-party Plaintiffs-appellants, v. Illinois State Board of Education, Third-party Defendant-appellee*, 486 F.3d 267 (7th Cir. 2007)).

A similar court opinion is noted in the 2011 case of *Tindell v. Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation*. The plaintiffs argued among many issues that the case conference committee (IEP team) denied this nineteen-year-old male student with Autism, Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, sensory processing disorder, migraines, asthma, GI reflux, foot pain, and food allergies, FAPE when they postponed the writing of his transition plan until his final year in school. At the due process level, the Independent Hearing Office (IHO) found in favor of the school's decision that an appropriate transition plan could not be written earlier for this student due to the severity of his anxiety and mood disorder. The District Court upheld that decision of the IHO supporting the notion that the student was not in a position to benefit from an in-depth transition plan to identify potential social and vocational support services following graduation. The Court's ruling that the school's deferral of transition

planning, while a procedural flaw, did not deny the student a FAPE during the time when he was not able to benefit from such services (*Tindell v. Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corp.*, 805 F. Supp. 2d 630 - Dist. Court, SD Indiana 2011).

Minimal compliance in transition plans, has been a controversial issue in several due process cases since the 2004 IDEA reauthorization with inconsistent outcomes for educators to learn from. In *Virginia S. & Milton v. Department of Education, State of Hawaii* (2007), the court ruled that minimal compliance or ‘generic plans’ are acceptable, forgoing IDEA’s language promoting individualization of transition plans. This case involved a sixteen-year-old girl whose transition plan was not individualized, meaning it did not consider her individual needs, strengths or interests. While the court pointed out that the plan did not comply with IDEA, they ruled the districts’ plan as a mere harmless error, that did not deny this student FAPE. In the case of *Gibson v. Forest Hills* (2013), similar complaints were determined a violation of IDEA regulations for not being individualized and resulting in substantive harm. This case heard in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the ruling of the lower court that the procedural violations made by the district resulted in substantive harm. At the time that this case advanced to the Court of Appeals, the female student was already twenty-four years of age. She received special education services for intellectual and developmental disabilities. The issues in the case included the parents’ allegations that the Forest Hills School District did not fulfill their IDEA obligations on over twenty matters, one of which included her transition plan and services. The parents alleged that the plan did not take into consideration her individual needs, preferences and interests and as a result she did not receive services to prepare her upon exiting the school system. The school district claimed that they knew what was best for the student justifying their

actions of not considering the parents' input in the development of the transition plan. The district court held that Forest Hills violated the IDEA's procedural requirements in three ways: by failing to invite the student to participate in IEP Team meetings, failing to take other meaningful steps to ensure that her transition-related interests were considered, and failing to conduct any age-appropriate transition assessments. Finding in favor of the family, the Court determined that these procedural violations resulted in substantive harm as this student suffered educational opportunities, therefor denying her FAPE (*Jim Gibson v. Forest Hills Local Sch. Dist.*, Case No. 15-3833 (6th Cir. 2013), (Petcu et al., 2014).

Strictly focusing on compliance standards result in a “woefully inadequate” transition plan was the determination in *Somberg et al., v. Utica Community Schools* (2016). The specifics of this United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan Southern Division case, which began in 2012, included an 18-year-old male student with autism. The family filed for due process on four issues of the district denying their son a FAPE, one of which was their failure to address a transition plan. The ruling for the parent included the district failing to establish programming to help their son transition into life after high school, the purpose of the transition section of IDEA. Specifically, assessments nor any results from assessments were included in the IEP. Additionally, there was no apparent connection between his post-school goals and the services that were provided. Furthermore, the court felt that the transition considerations in his IEP were nothing more than check boxes or fill in the blanks with no thought or consideration for his personal needs being given. The court commented that the transition plan provided nothing (*Somberg et al v. Utica Community Schools*, No. 2:2013cv11810 - Document 30 (E.D. Mich. 2016)).

In the recent, *S.G.W. v. Eugene School District* (2017) case, The United States District Court for The District of Oregon Eugene Division awarded the plaintiffs over \$93,000 in court fees. Among the issues of the original due process case, was the lack of individualization of transition assessments and services provided the student. The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) ruled against the school system and awarded the plaintiff among other remedies 175 hours of compensatory education. The case involved a female student eligible for special education services due to a diagnosis of autism and emotional disturbance. Among other issues presented and ruled on in this case, were two procedural violations specific to transition services and goals. On the matter of whether transition services were individually tailored to reasonably prepare this student for life after school, the court agreed with the ALJ that the lack of individualization of the services caused educational harm, thereby denying her FAPE. This determination was further substantiated by the fact that the transition plan was not based on age appropriate transition assessments. While there is no specific definition of age appropriate assessments in IDEA 2004, the court agreed that this procedural violation resulted in the transition services provided being inadequate. The court also identified that the school's failure to meet their procedural obligation of including agreed upon transition goals resulted in substantive violation due to the resulting educational harm (*S.G.W., et al v. Eugene School District*, No. 6:2016cv01612 - Document 38 (D. Or. 2017)).

Parental involvement in the transition planning process has also been the issue of several due process cases. In a Massachusetts 2009 due process case, one Hearing Officer concluded that the Dracut School Committee failed to provide the student FAPE because it provided inadequate transition services while the student was in high school. The case advanced to the

United States District Court of Massachusetts in *Dracut School Committee v. Bureau of Special Education* (2010), to argue the Hearing Officer's orders to provide compensatory services and to hire the family's experts as consultants due to the district's failure to provide adequate transition services. The case records indicated that the school system completed inadequate transition plans for each of the years the student was in high school. Transition plans were developed in the absence of age appropriate assessments despite the parent's request. Furthermore, even though Dracut provided a vocational assessment in the student's final high school year, the assessment was deemed insufficient for not addressing all areas of transition, specifically in this case, post-secondary education and independent living. The parent consistently rejected the proposed plans emphasizing the need for a transition plan that would enable her son with Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and an anxiety disorder to successfully move on to college, employment, and that would help him to function independently (including traveling) after high school. The district's failure to consider the parent's interests and preferences for her child resulted in the court's final determination that Dracut provide two years of compensatory services, provided by knowledgeable experts to be reasonably compensated. However, the District Court Judge did not require the school district to use the parent's experts (*Dracut School Committee v. Bureau of Special Educ*, 737 F. Supp. 2d 35 - Dist. Court, D. Massachusetts 2010).

While parents are essential to the development of the transition plan, they do not have the right to demand their preferred assessments or methods (*Heller v. Minnesota Dept. of Ed.*, 2010). In determining the outcome of this case, the court stated that the school provided thorough transition evaluations using appropriate tools. While parent involvement is emphasized in IDEA

specific to the development of the IEP and Transition Plan, the determination of this particular case reinforces the IDEA that a district is not required to adopt the parent's standards so long as it uses appropriate evaluation methods (Petcu et al., 2014).

Prior to 2017, special education litigation used the Rowley standard, Board of Education of *Hendrick-Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*. 458 U.S. 176 (1982), as the benchmark for whether the educational system did or did not provide a FAPE that afforded the student some educational benefit. In the Rowley case, the United States Supreme Court held that FAPE requires services that provide students with 'some educational benefit' (Johnson, S. F., 2003). Today and in the future special educators will be required to apply a more rigorous standard as the result of the 2017 Supreme Court ruling in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1*, Case No. 15-827 (Endrew F.). Because of Endrew F., the standards of educational programs, including transition services and programs, have a renewed emphasis. First, the IDEA "requires an educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." Second, a student's "educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances." Third, "the goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives" (USDOE, 2017). State and local education agencies have yet to learn how the standards of Endrew F. will be applied to transition specific special education litigation. Lessons learned thus far from transition specific case law includes a need to provide an education that is more than just compliant. The transition plan must be more than merely checking the boxes affirming that each mandatory transition requirement is met. The plan must also include goals and embedded services that will meet the appropriately ambitious standard of Endrew F. Knowledge of legal foundations and legal issues

along with gaining the necessary skills to apply the standards set by the Endrew F. case are included in the Transition Specialist Competencies determined by The Council for Exceptional Children (2000).

The due process cases presented here are representative of a miniscule number of due process filings by parents. The standards and course requirements of Illinois LBS-II training programs may equip the trained Transition Specialist with the knowledge to prevent similar litigations of procedural and substantive violations from occurring in the districts they serve, setting these districts apart from those who do not employ this type of educator. The applicability of many of these rulings supports what was previously noted; that compliance indicators only measure quantitatively what is included in the Transition Plan. If the educators who are responsible for completing the transition plan solely focus on mere compliance, they will fail to address the unique programmatic needs of each individual, especially those with greater needs such as the individual with I/DD with the goal of preparing them for successful adult lives. The Transition Specialist must also be well versed on the intent of the Transition Services section of IDEA 2004. Much of the language found in this section of the IDEA comes from theory and findings of research conducted years prior.

Existing Theory

The language included in IDEA 1990 specific to the Transition requirements appears to come in large part from one of the leading researchers during 1980's and 1990's. Paula Kohler, Ph. D., a former professor at Western Michigan University as well as a senior research associate at the Transition Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, concluded

from a review of research literature, evaluation studies, and model Transition project outcomes, that effective practices could be organized into five categories. Known as *Kohler's Taxonomy*, this theory or framework suggests that successful transition results from; 1) Student Focused Planning, 2) Student Development, 3) Family Involvement, 4) Interagency and Interdisciplinary Collaboration, and 5) Program Structure and Attributes (Kohler, 1996). This framework was recently revised and still includes these five essential elements with an enhancement from simple family involvement to family engagement (Kohler et al., 2016). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 reinforces the original theory for successful transition planning and offers transition age educators an improved model for planning activities, organizing their programs and services, and evaluating the success of their local transition services and programs. This updated framework culminates over thirty years of research since Kohler's original Transition Taxonomy of 1996, with a focus on recognized evidenced-based practices and predictors for post-school transition success for the student with a disability. Kohler and her colleagues promote a process in which five categories and a series of activities for each are linked together to ultimately result in successful outcomes. Based on their literature review and drawing from their research, this model incorporates both micro (evidence-based practices and predictors) and macro level practices (generic practices, local programs and educational systems). First, the Taxonomy suggests that Student-Focused Planning include active participation of the student in developing the education and transition program within the IEP. Next, results-oriented programs or the inner makings of the local program foster the second category, Student Development. The framework suggests that this is accomplished through a program that utilizes age-appropriate assessments, that in turn provide valuable information to develop the whole individual.

Assessment results identify students' strengths, interests, and preferences. They drive individual goals for increasing academic skills, independent living skills, social emotional skills, and employability skills while identifying needed supports and instructional strategies for the learner. The third category, Family Engagement, promotes the role of the family beyond simple involvement as was the case in the original 1996 framework. The Transition Services section of IDEA only requires that, 1) parents be invited and 2) be allowed to participate in the development of the Transition Plan. The Taxonomy for Transition 2.0 suggests that fully engaging families in the transition process not only means involving the family but also empowering them to actively engage in the process while also giving them the tools and resources to prepare the entire family for life beyond school-based services. The fourth category of Interagency Collaboration continues to be a critical element for transition success. In the revised taxonomy, recommendations are provided to encourage not only a collaborative framework, but also a collaborative service delivery model. Interagency collaboration is described as the context during the transition planning process for identifying and meeting the needs of both students and families. Recognizing that Interagency Collaboration is essential for seamless transitions, especially for students who depend on additional supports and services beyond school, The Council for Exceptional Children's research committee continues to prioritize on their platform, identification of and developing strategies that increase linkages and infuse transition education practices into other systems, such as general education, mental health and vocational rehabilitation (Shogren, 2017). The final aspect of the Transition Taxonomy 2.0, and what allows for program improvement is outlined in the Program Structure. Specifically, the framework defines program structures as program characteristics, program evaluation, strategic

planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation and school climate. Additionally, Kohler and colleagues describe Program Structure in a companion document as the infrastructure that facilitates implementation of effective transition education and services, (Kohler et al., 2016). It would take a skilled and trained individual to understand and evaluate characteristics of effective program structures, assist educational leaders in the process of strategic planning to impact local practices, policies, and procedures to impact local school climate while also identifying local needs for professional and resource development. The LBS-II training in Illinois provides targeted instruction aligned with competencies created by the Division of Career Development and Transition of Council for Exceptional Children, that align with the five areas of the Transition Taxonomy 2.0.

Evidence-Based Practices and Predictors

While Kohler may have been a pioneer in identifying necessary activities for transition success, other early researchers also sought to identify factors and practices that would positively influence transition outcomes, enough so that some of their recommendations are also woven into the newest version of the law, IDEA 2004. Johnson et al., (2002) recognized that the requirements for transition planning as outlined in IDEA 1990 and then in 1997 were not resulting in the expected outcomes policymakers had aspired for. The authors base this conclusion on their review of both state and federal data, particularly drop-out statistics and unemployment rates for people with disabilities, including the work of the National Council on Disability (2004). Their conclusions were also based on issues other researchers identified as influential in the implementation of the federal transition requirements of the IDEA 1997

amendments. Johnson and colleagues make recommendations for swifter more effective implementation based on an analysis of personal contributions to the literature, along with select reports and studies between 1987-2001 investigating the ineffective implementation of the transition requirements of IDEA. Their analysis of transition practices and outcomes suggested that progress in creating comprehensive transition programs and services was slow and inconsistent across states. Furthermore, they suggested that the lack of progress was, in part, due to additional mandates placed on public education as the result of the *Nation At Risk* report of 1983 and other disparaging reports from that era which asserted that public education was failing our nation. Like Kohler's early work, Johnson et al., recognized that effective transition models and practices existed, but the pressures of other public education mandates created barriers for effective implementation. Considering the transition mandates outlined in IDEA 1997, and other federal and state education reforms, such as the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, and the Improving America's School Act of 1994, Johnson and his colleagues considered the practices and challenges identified by fellow researchers to recommend a propulsion in special education transition programs, much of which found a place in the IDEA 2004 language along with Kohler's work. In what might be considered a call to action, Johnson and colleagues concluded that special education personnel must play a key role in making information available and assisting parents and students in accessing needed benefits. Specifically, they recommended a set of five practices for consideration in the successful transition to employment, education or community involvement. These five recommendations include; involvement by school personnel to ensure that community service agency participation systematically occurs in the development of post-school transition

plans, that schools engage in integrated service planning, that school personnel provide information to parents on essential health and income maintenance programs, that schools promote collaborative employer engagement, and that they establish partnerships with workforce development entities. In greater detail, they recommended that school personnel support students in the development of skills such as decision-making, communication, and self-advocacy, which are necessary to assume an active role in their transition/IEP meetings. Additionally, the authors suggested that each school personnel ensure parent information and training be available to support both parents and students in the IEP and transition planning process. Finally, their recommendations included improved collaboration and system linkages at all levels. They broadly identify that parents and young people with disabilities, general education teachers and administrators, community service agency staff, including those who serve youth and adults without disabilities, postsecondary education programs, and employers be involved in the transition planning process (Johnson et al., 2002). Johnson and colleagues and Kohler (1996; 2016) both outline, in theory, what transition plans should consider and what programs and services should offer, furthermore Johnson et al., and Kohler et al., are all credited for their contributions to the current iteration of IDEA. As impactful as these contributions have been to the field of special education, specifically transition planning, there remain shortcomings, explicitly details of how to achieve these expectations of improved and results oriented outcomes.

In 1999, Hasazi et al., conducted an in-depth study of nine sites, selected from three states designated as exemplars in their initial implementation of the IDEA 1997 transition mandates. Their study found that implementation successes were not attributed to evidence-

based practices but to a common caring for students and families and a strong belief in not only the necessity of collaborating within and across schools and community agencies but the power that collaboration served to enhance transition-related services for students with disabilities. This study used a qualitative research method for data gathering and analysis of the nine selected locations designated by experts as either model or representative sites for their initial implementation strategies. While it was discovered that each location encountered challenges in the implementation of their transition programs, there was evidence across each location that six factors positively influenced implementation. These included; 1) incorporating systemwide, student- and family-centered strategies, 2) fostering effective and substantive interagency collaboration, 3) facilitating systemic professional development, 4) leading in a visionary supportive and inclusive way, 5) coordinating and integrating educational reform efforts, and 6) making connections between local and federal transition initiatives. Specific to Interagency Collaboration, three of the five model sites reported increasing rates of post-school employment and attendance at post-secondary education and training institutions as a result of students participating in employment and other community programs during high school, students participating in co-funded career assessment and development opportunities, increasing rates of concurrent enrollment in high schools and community colleges, and increasing numbers of students with disabilities being referred to and served by a variety of adult service agencies following high school (Hasazi et al., 1999).

The importance of interagency collaboration was also studied by Groves and Thomas, (1995), but then would noticeably become absent from future research and an area lacking evidence-based research as concluded by the NLTS-2. In their 1995 study, Groves and Thomas

hypothesized that years of experience in special education would have a positive effect on generating agency involvement. The focus of their study was comprised of two questions; 1) do seasoned teachers utilize outside agencies at a higher rate than less experienced teachers? and 2) do vocational instructors have higher numbers of vocationally-related objectives than other teacher groups? Forty-six randomly selected secondary level teachers from the state of Georgia participated in this study, providing information from a total of 393 transition documents. Specific to the number of agencies used in these transition plans, the unexpected finding for these researchers was that years of experience in special education had a significant but inverse relationship on the involvement of outside agencies, or interagency collaboration. They reasoned these results on a presumption that teachers with more years of service were possibly more set in their ways and may only use a few select agencies (Groves & Thomas, 1995). Hasazi et al., (1999), concluded that it wasn't years of experience that resulted in successful collaboration across agencies, but the result of a mind-set of caring educators who believed in the power that successful interagency collaboration brought to students and families.

In later years, following the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, Noonan et al., (2008), conducted a study searching for strategies to improve interagency collaboration. The results of their study not only identified eleven strategies to be considered by the local education agency, but also recognized the critical role of the Transition Coordinator. Their study included 29 high performing districts from six states participating in the Transition Outcomes Project. Each participant completed a 20-item checklist, of which five items specifically related to interagency collaboration, for the purpose of identifying areas of needed improvement. Each participant also participated in a focus group using a qualitative interview protocol. A total of 112 codes were

identified and reduced to eleven strategies critical for interagency collaboration. Practices in these high performing districts did not rely on evidence-based practices, but on a strong infrastructure that valued the process. Practices include: flexible scheduling and staffing, collecting follow-up data after the students exit school, the presence of administrative support, shared funding sources with a variety of agencies, dependence on state-supported technical assistance, an ability to build relationships with multiple agency representatives, facilitation of meetings between students, families, and adult agencies, provide training to students and families, various staff attend and participate in joint trainings, participate in regularly scheduled meetings with adult agency representatives, and dissemination of information to parents and students about adult agency contacts, types of available services and strategies for securing services (Noonan et. al., 2008). In addition to these eleven strategies for effective interagency collaboration, a second finding identified the importance of the ‘Transition Coordinator’ as the contributing factor for success. Interagency collaboration continues to be recognized as an essential practice for successful transition and is covered in the training received by the LBS-II.

Despite the early efforts to improve outcomes in post-secondary education, employment, and independent living for individuals with disabilities, the evidence had not shown in national statistics and a push to identify evidenced-based practices in transition would come front and center. The reauthorization of IDEA 2004 followed another ground-breaking piece of legislation that resulted in additional implications for the special education field, specifically in identifying practices that were considered evidenced-based. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) replaced the antiquated public education legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. With a focus of raising academic achievements through greater accountabilities,

NCLB also put a special focus on ensuring that states and schools boost the performance of certain sub-groups of students, including students in special education (Klein, 2015). One key feature in this education policy required that federal grantees, including schools, use their funds on evidence-based instructional practices to promote yearly progress of all students (Browder & Duffy, 2003). This emphasis resulted in a surge of scientifically-based research to identify instructional practices that were evidence-based, including transition practices and programs. Practices would be defined as evidenced-based after undergoing rigorous study and having demonstrated a record of success. The Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education funded the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to establish these scientific standards for defining what was evidenced-based (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>). Moreover, for instructional practices or programs to be recognized as evidence-based they needed to be scientifically proven as reliable, trustworthy and valid as programs or instructional strategies that promoted annual progress. The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, a non-profit organization comprised of the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, and the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, which discontinued its efforts in 2015, provided the technical support and guidance for researchers to consider when determining whether a practice or program is evidence-based using the WWC standards. Practices were categorized as having ‘strong’ or ‘possible’ evidence of effectiveness. The coalition and the WWC determined that randomized controlled trials were the critical factor in establishing ‘strong’ evidence of an intervention's effectiveness. They further suggested that trials must also be well-designed and implemented in order to constitute a ‘strong’ evidence-based practice (Browder & Duffy, 2003).

Determining whether positive transition outcomes were the result of IDEA 2004 compliance mandates alone, or the result of evidence-based programs or practices founded in solid research practices, was the focus of the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2). In 2013, the U.S. Dept. of Education released their publication of the meta-analysis of over 10,000 transition focused studies conducted between 1991 to 2011 that sought to identify best practices in the field (Cobb et al., 2013). Using the research evidence standards of the WWC, similar to those outlined by The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, the study found that only 43 of the over 10,000 transition specific research studies were eligible for further review and analysis based on the WWC research standards. Initially, studies were eliminated due to relevance or for being clearly ineligible. The remaining studies were reviewed and determined eligible for further review only if WWC evidence standards based on the research design was met; either randomized control trials, quasi-experimental designs, or single-case designs were required. Furthermore, practices needed to be either aligned with at least one of the five areas of Kohler's Taxonomy or linked to a post-secondary outcome of employment, post-secondary education, or independent living. Using Kohler's Taxonomy, studies were organized using the five areas; (a) student focused planning (e.g., student participating in IEP development), (b) student development (e.g., teaching employment skills, teaching life skills), (c) interagency collaboration (e.g., creating frameworks for delivering services collaboratively), (d) family involvement (e.g., training families in self-determination), and (e) program structures (e.g., allocating resources to provide transition services) (Test et al., 2009). While studies may have included variables aligned with Kohler's Taxonomy or proposed to achieve any of the required IDEA transition outcomes, many were omitted for not meeting the rigorous standards for

scientific research. The meta-analysis can best be summarized as reporting a serious lack of transition practices or programs for schools to replicate in hopes of resulting in positive or successful post-school outcomes as expected in IDEA. This analysis concluded that of all the transition studies included, none met the highest rating given to well-implemented studies; that of a research design ‘without reservation’. Of the 43 transition related research studies examined for evidence-based designation, only 16 met evidence-based standards ‘with reservations’. The remaining 27 were given an evidence rating of ‘exploratory’. Exploratory studies were rated as such for not demonstrating baseline equivalence but contained desirable research design qualities. Furthermore, several studies were indicated multiple times for multiple outcome or program categories, diminishing even further the number of evidence-based practices or programs. Of the remaining 27 studies, 16 were designated both as evidence-based with reservations and included students with I/DD in the sample. Only two group studies examined practices that impacted employment outcomes for those with I/DD (Baer et al., 2011; Cimera, 2010), one group study examined post-secondary education outcomes for those with I/DD (Baer et al., 2011), while 13 pilot single case studies examined independent living outcomes for individuals with I/DD. Furthermore, a deeper look finds that each of these practices or programs include an intervention described by any of the five categories of the Transition Taxonomy. There is evidence of Student-Focused Planning by way of general education inclusion, and Student Development by way of community-based work experiences and functional life skills instruction. Interventions supporting Program Structure were found in several studies earning exploratory ratings. Concluded from the meta-analysis is that only one study which earned an

exploratory rating examined the effects of Interagency Collaboration and no studies met evidence-based standards or an exploratory rating for Family Involvement (Cobb et al., 2013).

As noted, individuals with I/DD were subjects in two studies specific to post-school employment, with one also measuring program effects on post-school education. Baer and colleagues (2011) studied the relationship between career and technical education or work-study with full time employment for students with intellectual disabilities. Using a sample size of 409 individuals with intellectual or multiple disabilities, their study showed no significant correlation, with an effect size of -0.09, between participation in work-study programs or career and technical education and post-school employment for students with intellectual disabilities. The outcomes of this study are alarming given that both types of activities, work-study programs along with career and technical education, continue to be evidence-based practices embedded in the revised Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 released in 2016. However, this study evidenced more positive results in post-secondary education outcomes. The study concluded that inclusive education for at least 80% of the time had a significant influence on individuals with I/DD enrolling in post-secondary education (Baer et al., 2011).

The second study specific to employment of individuals with I/DD was conducted by Cimera, 2010. He determined a positive correlation, $p\text{-value}=0.02$ and an effect size of $+0.45$, existed between individuals who participated in a community based high school transition program to the length of their post-school employment. The services provided to this small sample group of 42 from multiple disability types included job shadowing and sampling, career and technical assessments, work adjustment supports, payment for work and other IEP-specified community-based services. The comparison group received none of these supports due to either

not being diagnosed, being home-schooled or having been enrolled in school prior to the 1990 IDEA reauthorization (Cimera, 2010).

NLTS-2 studies that examined Independent Living accounted for the majority of those meeting the WWC standards for being evidence-based. In all, 13 studies met WWC pilot single-case design standards with reservations. A total of only 42 subjects were involved in these school based, functional life-skills development programs that used pre-, post-assessments to ascertain the influence of specific instructional interventions. Simulated or community based instructional practices identified an increase in specific life skills such as sending a fax, making an ATM withdrawal, making a debit card purchase, or using a copy machine (Cihak et al., 2004).

In a separate meta-analysis of these similar transition studies also using the WWC research standards, Test et al., (2009) identified over 12,000 transition related references, and a meager 32 transition evidence-based practices. However, due to a restructuring in the analysis process, a secondary 2013 study concluded that 64 practices met the WWC standard for evidence-based for the intervention implemented rather than the skill taught (Mazzotti et al., 2013; Test et al., 2013). Discouraging though, was that even with the renewed process, this secondary analysis identified only six secondary transition evidence-based practices with a ‘strong’ level of evidence. Five of the six practices influenced academic skills (Student Development on the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0), while only one strongly influenced the student’s participation in their IEP meetings (Student-Focused Planning). The vast majority of transition practices worthy of evidence-based designation are representative of skill instruction within the Student Development area of Kohler’s Transition Taxonomy, the area found to be most represented in the NLTS-2. Specifically, this secondary analysis aligned each of the 64

evidence-based practice to the five categories of Kohler's Transition Taxonomy, Student Focused Planning (6), Student Development (57), Family Involvement (1), and Program Structure (3). None of the 64 practices identified evidence-based practices to influence Inter-Agency Collaboration (Mazzotti et al., 2013).

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) also conducted an in-depth study of Evidence-Based Predictors for successful transition outcomes. In addition to the 64 Evidence-Based Practices, the NSTTAC also identified 17 Evidence-Based Predictors (Test et al., 2013) that correlate to each of the three post-school outcomes identified as indicators of success in IDEA; post-school education, employment and independent living. These in-school predictors include: career awareness, community experiences, high school diploma status, inclusion in general education, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, paid employment/work experiences, parent expectations, parental involvement, program of study, self-advocacy/ self-determination, self-care/independent living, social skills, student support, transition program, vocational education, and work study (Test et al., 2013). While correlational evidence exists between each of the 17 predictors and employment outcomes, 12 also correlated to education outcomes and only four to independent living. Furthermore, while parent expectations predicted both education and employment outcomes, parent involvement in the transition process only influenced employment outcomes (Test et al., 2013). While the body of transition research is plentiful, as concluded in the National Longitudinal Transition Study - 2, and separate meta-analyses, the reality from each these studies is that there is limited evidence-based research to share with educators of those with I/DD to better support or help their students' transition from school to adult life, specifically competitive employment (Cobb et al., 2013).

To identify practices that positively influence post-school employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities, Nord and colleagues (2013) conducted an employment specific literature review. Specifically, the authors analyzed the effectiveness of the current employment support system and employment-specific interventions, that effect employment outcomes for individuals with I/DD. They concluded that employment support interventions that lead to improved outcomes and enhanced career opportunities include: self-management strategies for employment, instructional strategies and practicing skills until fluent, identifying natural supports, person-centered career planning, customized employment, paid employment during transition years in school, job training in authentic work sites while in school, and vocational supports in place upon graduation. Recognizing that schools play a critical role in effecting successful employment outcomes, the authors question what schools can do to improve preparation for transition to employment noting that effective collaboration may influence employment outcomes (Nord et al., 2013).

Evidence of a paid community-based job while still in school is identified as highly correlating to post school employment success for young adults with severe disabilities (Carter et al., 2012). Carter and colleagues relied on data collected through the NLTS -2 to identify factors correlational to postschool employment outcomes. The authors investigated the in-school experiences of 450 students with primary disabilities of autism, intellectual disability or multiple disabilities, and sought to identify how their experiences related to employment status within two years of exiting the school system. Criteria considered for potentially influencing post school outcomes for employment included demographics, student skills, family factors and school programs. It was discovered that variables associated with work status after school included first

and foremost paid work experiences while enrolled in school. Males are more likely to work compared to their female counterparts. Also, family expectations while the student was in school positively influenced work outcomes for the individuals with I/DD included in this study. Specifically, their desire for their young adult to obtain work with the purpose of being self-supporting influenced their employment status within the two years of leaving school. Finally, hands-on work experiences for this population is more influential in post-school employment compared to indirect experiences commonly found in vocational courses (Carter et al., 2012). This study is one of 13 included in a current literature review identifying predictors of post-secondary competitive employment. While these 13 studies did not solely focus on individuals with I/DD, they recognize that the highest predictors for competitive employment for adults with disabilities include paid work experience while attending school, closely followed by participation in vocational education. The remaining five predictors correlating with post-secondary competitive employment include; family expectations, high school completion, having an IEP goal for competitive employment, self-determination, and post-secondary education (Southward & Kyzar, 2017).

Specific to the practice of providing work experiences while in school, Hart Barnett and Crippen (2014) studied an Arizona High School system's design of an in-school model restaurant. The model incorporated eight-research based practical steps for high quality employment training for youth with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder. Using an employment preparedness study, they found this in-school model considered eight essential steps for in-school vocational training success; observe and collaborate with peers, align program with state standards, meaningfully involve students in planning, make connections between the

program and real world experiences, mimic a real world process by creating training materials, use research based training methods, integrate the program into the school community and use authentic real world reinforcement, (Hart Barnett & Crippen, 2014). In a recent research project including Illinois middle and high schools, Pinter and colleagues (2018) concluded that Illinois schools are not providing sufficient opportunities for vocational training, job training, and work-related experiences while students are in school. This current research included an on-line survey shared with 1,321 middle and high school principals yet completed by 124 or 9.4% of the targeted research population. The results identified that the majority of participating schools (86.1%) conduct career interest assessments. Additional transition activities performed with greater frequency include career counseling (67.4%) and holding career fairs (60.%). Job carving (i.e., working with employers to create jobs for students based on student's individual interests/skills) was reported as the least provided activity (5.0%). While this study included all disability types and the years prior to post-high school, it contributes to the concern that Illinois schools are lagging behind in provision of evidence-based transition predictors for students with disabilities (Pinter et al., 2018).

The correlation between IEP / Transition goals and employment outcomes is the focus of multiple studies. Steele, Konrad and Test (2005) measured the correlation between the mandated IEP / transition components and actual outcomes for students from two high schools. The locations for this study were selected because each school was recognized by their states for their model transition programs, specifically their comprehensive and coordinated programs. These schools not only emphasized instruction in self-determination but also aligned their programs to the areas of Kohler's 1996 Transition Taxonomy. Furthermore, each school included in the

study had a locally designed mechanism to evaluate the impact of their services to post-school outcomes (Kohler's Program Structure), a process similar to Indicator 14 and one that requires the keen eye of a knowledgeable educator. The study concluded that these two high school programs had encouraging outcomes for employment, however they did not reach the same level of successful outcomes for the other transition areas of education and independent living. The results of this study challenge whether successful outcomes are the result of completing the requirements of the IEP prescribed by IDEA or the unique programs that individual schools may offer (Steele et al., 2005). In a secondary analysis of the NLTS -2 findings, it was determined that alignment existed between students' IEP goals for employment and their actual post-school employment status. This secondary analysis of the NLTS – 2 included data collected from over 29,000 individuals identified as having a mild intellectual disability (MID). The authors concluded that the majority of those with MID, 93% had at some time been employed within two years after leaving school and that 98.4% of those individuals had a competitive employment goal in their IEP / Transition Plan (Bouck & Joshi, 2016).

While employment after school only represents one third of the expected transition outcomes for individuals with disabilities as prescribed in IDEA, the heightened concern for policy change in large part stems from employment statistics and an understanding that an individual cannot do much with his / her life if they do not have money to support living, social activities and health needs. Prior to the IDEA 2004 reauthorization, only 32% of persons with disabilities, ages 18 to 64, worked full- or part-time, compared to 81% of the nondisabled population, a 49% gap (National Organization on Disability, 2000). However, despite the language enhancements included in the latest reauthorization of IDEA, outcomes have continued

to be dismal, specifically in employment outcomes. According to the United States Department of Labor / Office of Disability Employment Policy website, the May 2016 Disability Employment Statistics reported the percentage of people with disabilities over the age of 16 included in the labor force as 20.5% (an increase from 20.1% in 2014) compared to 68.4% of people without disabilities. Furthermore, the unemployment rate reported for people with disabilities measured 9.7% compared to 4.3% for people without disabilities (www.dol.gov/odep). The statistics are even more alarming for individuals with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). In Illinois only 6% of people with I/DD are employed in an integrated setting while nationwide that percentage increases to 18.4% (Jansen et al, 2014). These statistics are the basis for the claim noted previously by non-education stakeholders that schools are inadequately preparing individuals with I/DD for successful adult life, specifically in the area of integrated competitive employment. This data reinforces the reality that the higher expectations prescribed in the latest version of law aiming for results-oriented Transition Plans is not translating into results-oriented Transition Plans developed by special educators. Furthermore, educator training in Illinois, specifically those entering the field of special education, cannot rely on university programs to provide them the knowledge necessary to create evidence-based transition rich IEPs that result in successful outcomes.

Educator Competencies and Knowledge

Following the passage of IDEA 1990, DeFur & Taymans (1995) sought to identify key competencies from practitioners in the field directly involved with transition of students with disabilities. IDEA 1990 presented the need for a specific professional, that of Transition

Specialist. The results of their study summarized a set of important skills needed for the role of transition specialist, whether that person serves in special education, vocational education, or vocational rehabilitation. DeFur and Taymans collected recommended names of high performing practitioners from state level administrators across the country. Beginning with a possible number of 196 subjects, the results of this study were drawn from 134 responders from 41 states and the District of Columbia. The instrument designed to identify and prioritize necessary competencies for those working in the field of transition included a list of 116 competencies within 12 categorical domains. These 12 competencies differ slightly from the eight knowledge and skills competencies of a beginning Transition Specialist recognized in the future work of The Council for Exceptional Children, (2000). These 12 competency domains in rank ordered include: 1) Knowledge of Agencies and Systems Change, 2) Development and Management of Individualized Transition Plans, 3) Working with Others in the Transition Process, 4) Vocational Assessment and Job Development, 5) Professionalism, Advocacy, and Legal Issues in Transition, 6) Job Training and Support, 7) Assessment, 8) Transition Administrative Functions, 9) Philosophical and Historical Considerations, 10) Career Counseling and Vocational Theory, 11) Program Evaluation and Research, and 12) Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning Theory. Competencies 1-7 were either rated as ‘very important’ or ‘critical’ in their role (DeFur & Taymans, 1995).

Following the IDEA 1997 Amendments, The Council for Exceptional Children, (2000), identified a set of eight competencies necessary for a Transition Specialist based on the work of the Division of Career Development and Transition Research Committee and the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services’

Transition-Related Competencies Project. The eight competencies in order include: 1) Philosophical, Historical, and Legal Foundations in Special Education, 2) Characteristics of Learners, 3) Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation, 4) Instructional Content and Practice, 5) Planning and Managing the Teaching and Learning Environment, 6) Managing Student Behavior and Social Interaction Skills, 7) Communication and Collaborative Partnerships, and 8) Professional and Ethical Practices, (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). This work would be simultaneously published with their recommendations for transition-related planning, instruction, and service responsibilities aligned with Kohler's Transition Taxonomy (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). In 2003, Blalock et. al., released a position statement on behalf of the CEC's Division on Career Development and Transition (CEC-DCDT). In this statement, the need for prepared transition personnel is highlighted with a description of core content to be taught, recommendations to preparation programs and potential implications on policy and practice. Kohler's contribution on this position statement is evident in that the five areas of the Transition Taxonomy are embedded in the authors' recommendations for core content to be taught. Specifically, their recommendations include: knowledge of IDEA's transition planning requirements, knowledge of the content of the IEP relative to transition planning, skills needed to involve students in the IEP process, and knowledge of proven best practices in transition (Blalock et al., 2003). In comparing their recommendations for personnel preparation to the courses included in the four Illinois programs, it would appear that the Illinois programs considered the position statement when creating their course requirements for the programs endorsed by the ISBE in 2003.

While several factors contribute to unsuccessful transitions, poorly trained transition professionals may help to explain some of the unsuccessful experiences of students with I/DD and their families. Understanding the law, the theory behind the law and applying the law are essential for the educator responsible for transition services to possess. However, over the past two decades, studies such as those conducted by Benitez et al., (2009); Flannery et al., (2013); Li et al., (2009); McMahan & Baer, (2001); Plotner et al., (2016); and Williams-Diehm & Lynch, (2007) have proven repeatedly that this knowledge along with knowledge of evidence-based practices is lacking. The consequence of this lack of knowledge results in undesirable life outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Educators, specifically teachers and administrators responsible for writing compliant transition plans that identify post high-school goals for employment, education / training and independent living, lack sufficient training in the area of transition and evidence-based practices. For example, Plotner et al., (2016) studied the perceptions of special educators and direct-service transition personnel from five states including Illinois. Using a snowball sampling technique to recruit targeted responders, researchers were able to use the responses of 483 of the 592 completed surveys. The survey design included 46 questions within 5 categories; demographics, training on secondary transition evidence-based practices, implementation of secondary transition evidence-based practices, program evaluation, and interagency collaboration. As a result of their investigation, researchers concluded that the majority of the participants perceived themselves as lacking sufficient knowledge as gained through their higher education program. Seventy-three percent of the transition group in this quantitative study either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they gained sufficient knowledge regarding transition evidence-based practices through their university preparation program. This

study included but did not identify whether participants participated in a LBS-II Transition Specialist program. While this study appears to be one of the most recently published on the matter, research conducted prior to and since the passage of IDEA 2004 also suggest that teachers perceive themselves as not having the knowledge or pre-service training necessary to influence results oriented post-school outcomes.

Prior to the 2004 IDEA reauthorization, McMahan and Baer (2001) surveyed 186 transition stakeholders, including educators, to understand perceptions and knowledge of transition compliance and best practice. Their findings identified that the strongest predictor of policy compliance and best practice was the existence of a school-based interagency transition team. However, and contradictory to studies that preceded or followed theirs, they concluded that transition specific training was a weaker predictor of best practice (McMahan & Baer, 2001). “The primary step in creating effective transition planning is to fully educate teachers on the transition process” (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007 p. 20). The researchers surveyed 103 special education students with mild to moderate disabilities and analyzed a small random sampling of transition plans from a single high school in Texas. The survey included ten questions read orally to the students and responses transcribed. While this study does not reference Kohler’s Transition Taxonomy, the ten questions targeted each of the five categories to evaluate the students’ understanding of the transition process. Questions measured student involvement in the transition process, knowledge of transition as a tool for developing the student and their personal goals, parent involvement, and interagency collaboration. The researchers concluded from this small-scale study that teachers need to understand the legal requirements of transition planning, must value the importance of the process, and promote self-

determination to be effective in ensuring their students receive maximum benefits from the transition plan (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Similarly, Li and colleagues (2009) also concluded that pre-service and in-service training positively affected the educator's involvement in areas of transition assessment and goal writing, however teacher preparation programs provide minimal training in the area of transition.

In 2012, Landmark and Zhang conducted a study in the state of Texas analyzing the contents of transition plans for not only compliance indicators but also for evidence of transition practices recognized as influential in successful transition outcomes. Their study included 212 IEPs and Transition Plans written for students with I/DD (37.26%), Emotional Disability (24.06%), and Learning Disabilities (38.68%). Their research tool included 24 questions specific to IDEA 2004 compliance and 12 questions specific to transition practices. Of the 212 IEPs and Transition Plans analyzed, none identified all 36 areas questioned with 100%. Items recognized least as being included in the plans included all annual goals in the IEP to be measurable (30.7%), agency representatives contributing to the development of the transition components (11.3%), and evidence that the student either received training in self-determination or had appropriate self-determination skills (25.9%). The mean composite compliance score was 2.03 on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 meaning that all the areas mandated were evident. Evidence of transition practices in the IEPs reviewed measured a mean of 4.89 on a scale of 0 to 8, with a score of 8 being evidence of all practices included in the questionnaire found in the IEP. Furthermore, the study identified a positive correlation between evidence of compliance and inclusion of transition practices, meaning that as the level of compliance increased, so did evidence of transition practices. They summarized that the low rate of compliance was in part

attributed to educators' lack of fully understanding transition planning policies. They concluded that there is an apparent need for educators to have an adequate understanding of IDEA and its intent, specifically to transition (Landmark & Zhang, 2012).

Understanding the perceptions of teacher competence to plan and deliver effective transition plans and programs was the focus of a larger scale study conducted by Benitez, Morningstar & Frey (2009). In their survey of 500 + educators, training and professional development opportunities for those working with transition age youth were measured as "minimal". For example, the mean number of transition related courses taken by the respondents was 1.07 and the average hours of transition related staff development was 27.6. Additionally, respondents rated their overall perceptions of their participation in these trainings. Participant responses ranged from becoming 'somewhat unprepared to somewhat prepared' in training and feeling 'somewhat unsatisfied' with the training received. When responding to their level of engagement in transition activities, the participant responses ranged from 'rarely' to "occasionally" involved (Benitez et al., 2009).

While their study raises concern that isolated transition related professional development opportunities may not sufficiently raise educator knowledge, Finn and Kohler, (2010) concluded that ongoing and targeted professional development had a positive influence on the improvement in staffs' understanding of the IDEA transition plan requirements. This improved understanding was the result of one state's participation in the Transition Outcomes Project (TOP). Transition focused staff development lead to increased knowledge of the IDEA transition requirements resulting in increased student participation and ownership of their transition plans, while improving collaboration between school staff and agency representatives (Finn & Kohler, 2010).

As of 2008, 32 states (not including Illinois), participated in TOP. The TOP model was created to assist local districts in meeting the transition service requirements of IDEA 2004, to evaluate the effectiveness of providing and delivering transition services to students and families through the IEP process, to provide training and resource materials on the transition process for educators, administrators, adult agency personnel, parents and others, and to improve graduation rates and post school outcomes of students with disabilities (O’Leary, 2007). As a result of their analysis of one state’s participation in the TOP, Finn and Kohler concluded that while targeted professional development was encouraging in influencing transition outcomes for students with disabilities and their families, these types of practices should not be new to novice teachers. Moreover, teacher-training institutions should provide an increased attention to successful transition for students with disabilities, as well as compliance with IDEA. Specifically, they should focus on effective collaboration with school staff, outside agencies, parents, and the students. In addition, they should educate future teachers about transition best practices and writing effective and compliant transition plans for students with disabilities (Finn & Kohler, 2010).

Teacher knowledge and the effects of professional development was the focus in a more recent 2013 study questioning to what extent professional development impacted the inclusion of the required transition components in the IEP as well as measuring to what extent the professional development improved the quality of the transition components. Flannery and colleagues (2013) discovered that teachers lacked essential knowledge for the transition requirements yet providing them targeted training improved their practice. However, the study stopped short of determining whether the increased knowledge subsequent of the professional

development had a positive impact on student outcomes (Flannery et al., 2013). In a study measuring the effects of professional development, educators revealed that interagency collaboration along with job development were areas that they were least involved with during the transition process (Li et al., 2009).

Interagency collaboration and studies specific to the potential influence of interagency collaboration continues to be an area of much needed examination (Mazzotti et al., 2014). Effective transitioning of youth with disabilities, especially those with I/DD, to successful adult life is largely contingent on effective interagency collaboration. Kohler (1996) recognized the significance of interagency collaboration and program structure in her taxonomy of transition practices, yet lack of teacher knowledge and effectiveness to actualize these practices continues. Lack of teacher knowledge may account for teachers perceiving that issues related to interagency collaboration lie outside their locus of control. Furthermore, teacher preparation programs and professional development are pivotal in enhancing teacher skills for the transition process (Meadows, Davies & Beamish, 2014). While this study was conducted in Queensland Australia, the results resonate with studies conducted across the United States. In this quantitative study of 103 educators, it was concluded that three interconnected strategies must be considered. First, braiding of funds needs to be available to support student involvement in post-school services while still in school. Second, administrators should be provided professional development in the area of transition-focused education. Finally, teachers need to be able access training to build a skill set to coordinate the post school transition process and to more confidently advocate upwards to improve systemic support. Their hypothesis is that if all three strategies are put in

place, schools will improve their connections with post-school services, teachers will enhance their practice and students will achieve improved post-school outcomes (Meadows et al., 2014).

In 2003, Illinois institutions of higher education began offering programs for the advanced degree of LBS-II, Transition Specialist. Course design for the approved programs appears to be consistent with the recommendations made by DeFur and Taymans (1995) and CEC, (2000). However, in an effort to promote transition knowledge for all special educators, the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Career Development and Transition issued a set of standards for all special education teachers. Similar to the earlier competencies, these standards slightly differ in content and include; a) use of valid and reliable assessments; b) making sure that knowledge from generalized and specialized curricula is used to develop and improve programs and services; c) continually facilitate and improve general and special education programs; d) conduct, evaluate, and use inquiry to guide practice; e) provide leadership, advocacy and create positive environment; f) use foundational knowledge of ethics and practice; and g) collaborate with stakeholders, (CEC, 2013). Even with this push by the CEC-DCDT to enhance teacher preparation programs, there continues to be lack of evidence that it is occurring. The idea that special education teachers continue to be unprepared in transition services is also at the forefront of the minds of many researchers. So much so, that the focus of the most recent edition of the journal, *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* was devoted entirely to Transition. For example, Morningstar and colleagues (2018) discuss how higher education has not changed in response to earlier studies underlining a lack of educator knowledge, specifically in the inclusion of transition specific courses. This current study sought to obtain information from 694 educator preparation programs with accreditation

from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. The results from their study is based on responses from only 145 responders, a 23.5% response rate, representing 43 states, District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Most importantly, the authors discovered that less than half of programs (46%) included in this study offered a sole course specifically dedicated to transition. The study also sought to discover how these programs prioritized the teachings of broadly defined transition concepts consistent with the CEC competencies. They concluded that all were deemed equally important to cover in classes and were most highly accounted for either through readings or lectures. The results of this study confirm that individuals pursuing degrees in special education are most prepared in areas addressing the student and instructional planning but continue to lack knowledge in evidence-based transition practices (Morningstar et al., 2018). Williams-Diehm et al., (2018), also conducted a study to identify how the transition competencies that were updated in 2013 were addressed in special education licensure programs. The initial pool of programs selected for this study included 143 Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) recognized as highly ranked. Following elimination of programs for not meeting the initial criteria of the research question, 107 IHEs were further studied for their special education programs. From this grouping, only 39 programs were identified as having a stand-alone credit bearing course addressing secondary transition which was a required course for licensure. The response rate along with further elimination for replication of syllabi, a remaining 22 programs were included in the study sample. The researchers analyzed a total of 24 syllabi from the included sample during the spring 2015 through the fall 2016 semesters. Similar to the Morningstar et al., (2018) study, Williams-Diehm and colleagues looked for how content was delivered, while also looking specifically for what topics were included in the syllabi drawn from

the five areas of the Transition Taxonomy 2.0 framework. The authors identified that the two most common areas covered in the syllabi were Student Development and Student Focused Planning. Furthermore, each of the five areas were most prominently specified in the learning outcomes for the course, with limited opportunities for students to display acquisition of the concepts through quizzes, projects, field study or structured interviews with knowledgeable professionals. The results from this study echo the concerns of Morningstar et al., that special education teacher preparation programs are deficient in including transition related content (Williams-Diehm et al., 2018).

The results from these studies, specific to educator knowledge, reinforce the need for a knowledgeable and well-trained Transition Specialist, specifically the LBS-II. The LBS-II Transition Specialist, a post bachelor's degree credential established years after early research studies, was designed to provide training necessary for the professional to actualize recommended practices necessary for successful transition experiences and post-school outcomes, using evidence-based practices grounded in the theoretical framework that the IDEA is built upon. The specialized and targeted program to prepare the LBS-II Transition Specialist provides advanced training to the educator on seven essential standards that focus on more than mere compliance. These include an understanding of the philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of special education, characteristics of learners, transition assessment, instructional planning, creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation, the ability to build collaborative relationships with professionals, families, community partners and agencies, and the knowledge to maintain standards of professional conduct, while providing leadership to improve student learning and

well-being (<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/28ark.pdf>). One might hypothesize that the LBS-II is trained to look at individual needs and anticipate services, while also creating exposure and opportunities for the youth and families they serve. Their ability to assist families and students, especially those with I/DD is unique compared to the untrained educator. If true, the LBS-II stands to make a significant difference in the lives of individuals with I/DD and their families.

Family Involvement and Transition Experiences

Higher education has responded to the expectation of involving families by training special educators at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In Illinois, coursework specific to parent involvement and collaboration is not only embedded in the training of the LBS-II, but is also required for all approved LBS-I Bachelors Degree programs at Illinois public institutions of higher education (23 Ill. Adm. Code 28).

Prior to the 2004 IDEA reauthorization, the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, identified barriers for effective service coordination or interagency collaboration. Their recommendations for addressing these barriers mirrors the training programs for the LBS-II, including; establishing local partnerships, developing mechanisms for information sharing across agencies, identify and develop services to address gaps and build student, family and professional partnerships (Hart et al., 2002). The knowledge possessed by the LBS-II and their preparedness to individualize transition plans that move beyond compliance and focus on transition rich plans, along with their inherent view of control of external factors as a result of their training, is only speculative for the potential influence they may have on successful transition outcomes. Parents desire to have a knowledgeable transition team member has long

been the focus of transition studies as their experiences have offered insight to implications for policy and practice.

Efforts ensued following the 1990 reauthorization of IDEA to improve transition outcomes for individuals with disabilities with recommendations including essential components for planning, development of transition teams, and checklists for thorough transition planning (CEC, 2000; CEC, 2000; Kilburn & Critchlow, 1998). Kohler's taxonomy for transition programming along with the best practices prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education, identify a series of activities requiring collaboration between educator, families and community agencies. Family involvement in all areas of the educational arena gained attention as a result of the NCLB act. While the push for family involvement focused predominantly on students without disabilities, those who had children with disabilities were also highly encouraged to be involved. In their studies on the influence of family involvement on student progress and outcomes, Wandry and Pleet (2003) identified three factors as being most influential; effectiveness of school programs, extent of family influences, and impact of socioeconomic community conditions. However, their study was inconclusive in identifying which of these three factors had the greatest influence (Wandry & Pleet, 2003). While the effectiveness of transition programs or practices within schools has been an important focus of research as previously described, family involvement and participation has also been recommended as a critical influence for successful transition outcomes. Kohler's taxonomy suggests that family involvement is evidenced as a result of the special educator 1) providing pre-IEP planning activities for the parents, 2) identifying and providing information about transition services and programs and / or curriculum options, 3) facilitating parent attendance at IEP planning activities,

and 4) actively including parents and family members in planning and decision making (CEC, 2000). However, the guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, the Council for Exceptional Children and researchers that have consistently cited Dr. Kohler's work, provide guidance that only "someone needs to" complete these tasks (CEC, 2000). The ambiguity of the educator qualifications to complete these essential components for successful transition planning has been identified as troublesome and stressful (Brotherson et al., 1988; Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994; Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1995). In a qualitative study conducted prior to the regulations mandating transition planning and services, parents reported that professionals responsible were unhelpful, insensitive, and lacked knowledge about options or alternatives (Brotherson et al., 1988). The researchers involved in this early study recommended a greater emphasis in training professionals in effectively communicating with families while also understanding community alternatives. In a qualitative study conducted shortly after the 1990 reauthorization, Gallivan-Fenlon studied the experiences of all parties involved in the transition of 11 youth with I/DD during their last year of school and within the six months immediately following their exit. The study concluded that a lack of knowledge for the transition process was shared by all participants including school personnel, the transition coordinator, adult agency personnel and families. The qualitative data collected in this study suggested that transition coordinators "didn't have much experience transitioning kids out", were "just getting a sense of (it) as we're going through the school year", "he (transition coordinator) doesn't know much about adult agencies", and the transition coordinator had "never been to a day treatment center", (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994). The families expressed frustration with their students' outcomes; five of the eleven participants in this study were sitting at home after exiting school, while other participants were either involved

in supported employment, sheltered workshops or day treatment programs. The researcher concluded that the transition coordinators in this study were not prepared for their role as a systems' change agent and that transition would be better accomplished within a framework where there were better trained transition coordinators, where there was increased participation by families and improvement in interagency collaboration. Conversely, when the 'someone' was overtly invested and somewhat knowledgeable in the transition process while also building relationships with families, the parents' experiences were described more positively. Teachers were described as "saviors who went above and beyond their job duties to assist students" in this qualitative study that investigated the meaning of transition and the needs of parents of individuals with cognitive disabilities (I/DD), (Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1995). This qualitative study, using a purposeful sampling of parents of I/DD children, concluded that parents' frustrations resulted from challenges accessing adult services and not the lack of quality support and services provided them by the school teams. In fact, the parents expressed desire in this study for schools to be allowed to follow students beyond the age of mandated discontinuation and be allowed to use their own judgement for when the student is ready to transition from school services to adulthood.

Prior to the most recent IDEA reauthorization, researchers identified the challenges and barriers impeding youth with disabilities from successfully transitioning from school to post-school life (Johnson et al., 2002). While navigating the complexities of the adult service agencies has been consistently identified as a barrier, parent participation, while a requirement since the original P.L. 94-142, is also identified as a challenge. Parents and students are to be 'strongly' encouraged by school IEP teams to fully participate in the transition process, however

it is unclear how successful any strategies have been in creating meaningful and valued roles for parents (Johnson et al., 2002). Parents' expectations, experiences and perspectives have been the source of both national and international studies when measuring influential factors on the post-school outcomes for students with I/DD (Bianco et al., 2009; Blustein et al., 2016; Cawthon & Caemmerer, 2014; Davies & Beamish, 2009; Doren et al., 2012; Henninger & Taylor, 2014; Maxwell et al., 1995; Neece et al., 2009; Newman, 2005; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). One study targeted the deaf and hard of hearing population. Results from this study concluded that demographics and parent expectations influenced the post high school outcomes for students with hearing impairments (Cawthon & Caemmerer, 2014). Other researchers have analyzed the studies of the NLTS-2 for what they conclude to be best practices, even though not evidence-based. In their report, Papay and Bambara concluded that parent expectations for employment were among the strongest predictors for post high school success (Papay & Bambara, 2014). Likewise, another study outcome from the NLTS-2 concluded that a lack of commensurate expectations of parents that their adolescent with a disability will accomplish critical post-school outcomes may diminish the potential positive effects of the transition program that they participate in (Doren et al., 2012). Additionally, parents of youth with I/DD had much lower expectations for success in life when compared to those of other disabilities (Newman, 2005). Shogren and Plotner (2012) also conducted a secondary analysis of NLTS-2 data specifically targeting experiences and outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. This two-prong study included a teacher survey measuring perspectives of transition planning, instruction, goals and progress for each disability group and a qualitative analysis of parents' perspectives of student and family involvement in the IEP / Transition Plan

and the usefulness of planning for life after high school. Phone interviews were completed with 730 parents of individuals with I/DD, 830 with autism and 6080 with other disabilities. The results from their study, specific to those identifying with children with I/DD and autism found that youth with autism were less likely to attend their last IEP meeting (56.3%) compared to those with I/DD (67.9%). Parents of youth with autism had a greater attendance rate at the final IEP meeting (93.2%) compared to the other groups in the study. Each of the three groups reported that the school teams were most likely to develop the transition goals with approximately one-third of each groups responders indicating goal development was a collaborative process. When asked about their feelings of family involvement in the IEP decisions, each group overwhelmingly reported (>50%) that they were involved the right amount, with approximately one-third of the responders in each group wanting to be involved more. Finally, all parents in the study reported their perspective that the usefulness of the process for planning for life after high school to be 'somewhat useful' or 'very useful' (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). In one of the largest parent focused studies specific to post-school employment expectations, Blustein et al., (2016) studied the expectations of over 1000 parents of children and adolescents with I/DD across the state of Tennessee. Their quantitative study explored work related expectations, priorities, and concerns of participating parents; those with children ages birth through 21 with I/DD. The study design questioned parent expectations for life after school, employment priorities and potential concerns, previous career-related experiences, roles of the school, and familiarity with and desire for transition related resources. The results from their study specific to importance of and likelihood of employment found the highest rating of importance to be part-time (over full-time) community employment as an

outcome. While 79.7% of the parents indicated part-time community employment an important expectation for them, 63% rated full-time employment either 'very' or 'somewhat' important to them. Conversely, only 61.7% indicated part-time community employment was a 'likely' outcome. Full-time community employment was perceived as less likely to occur as indicated by 44.4% responding with 'somewhat' to 'very likely' to occur. The study also investigated parents' views for the types of job features most important to them. They identified their child's personal satisfaction in the work as most important, 80.6%. Lesser important job features of included a high pay rate, 35.8% and weekly work hours, 15.9% (Blustein et al., 2016).

Competitive employment has recently been identified as the highest indicator of successful transition for individuals with I/DD (Henninger & Taylor, 2014). In their survey of 198 parents of youth with I/DD, it was discovered that two of the three Transition Plan goals; employment and independent living, were most important in measuring successful outcomes. Rounding out the top three criteria for success was social relationships. This study concluded that family perspectives for successful transition for individuals with I/DD is subjective and includes much more than the three mandated areas for compliance as outlined in IDEA, including daily functioning skills, continuing academics, relationships within their community, accessibility and transportation, psychological well-being, romantic relationships, physical health and safety.

While early or in-school work experience has been concluded as a high correlate to employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (Hart Barnett & Crippen, 2014; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Carter et al., 2012; Nord et al., 2013; & Samuels, 2015), only 14.9% of parents studied indicated having knowledge of their child's participation in job training at school (Blustein et al., 2016). An Australian study conducted by Davies and Beamish in 2009

sought to collect an understanding of the actual experiences of families with a young adult, who recently transitioned to post-school life. The 218 respondents, representing a response rate of only 27%, were heavily represented by those identified with intellectual disability or with high support needs. The results from this combined fixed-response and open-ended questionnaire, specific to employment preparedness, found that two-thirds (n=147) of the subjects participated in work experiences, most had two experiences while in school. Of those, only 25% were community employed while 18% were either involved in supported or sheltered employment. Similar to the Blustein et al., 2016 study, wage was not as important to the family as the worthiness and purpose of being employed had on the young adult. Parent views of their preparation for post-school employment was neither more positively or negatively represented. Their positive experiences were associated with preparation for community participation and daily living activities. Preparation for employment was not perceived as positively, noting inconsistent work experiences provided during school. Responses to open ended questions ranged from high regard to teachers as being contributory to employment outcomes, to parents' low expectations for employment as a goal due to the severity of their child's disability. Also, not all respondents were as positive with the satisfaction that being employed brought. Responses also indicated dissatisfaction for wages, as some barely made one dollar per hour and the limited employment opportunities that were available for their young adults was causing stagnation (Davies & Beamish, 2009). This study suggests that employment outcomes for individuals with I/DD is not just a national problem but an international problem. In another parent focused study, Bianco et al., (2009) conducted a qualitative study of parent's perceptions of post-school years for their young adults with I/DD. The nine families included in this

purposeful sampling represented parents whose youth had exited the school system between two and five years prior. The purpose of the study was to better understand the parents' experiences and perception of their roles following graduation / exit from school. While each young adult was employed in a vocational facility with sheltered or supported employment options available, parents indicated an overwhelming sense of burden to be the teacher of job related skills, train and monitor service providers, and responsible for making daily decisions for what their child's day would look like. Feelings of stress, anxiety and fear were prevalent among parent responses. Parents indicated few opportunities to learn about their pending roles while their child was still in school (Bianco et al., 2009). While there is limited research to support the effects of parent training, informing parents of individuals with disabilities of transition services and supports by providing them structured training in addition to providing printed-based transition information proved to have a significant impact on parent knowledge (Young et al, 2016).

As evidenced in much of the Transition related studies, there are innumerable barriers that exist for individuals with I/DD as they seek satisfaction with life after leaving school. Much of the research has targeted employment outcomes, as labor reports have been the driving force behind additional legislation, specifically WIOA and Employment First. However, from the parent's perspective, satisfaction may result from either competitive community-integrated employment, living independently, attending college or being actively involved in one's community. Isolated studies have attempted to define success from the perspectives of parents with I/DD young adults who have successfully transitioned from school. In an early qualitative study, shortly following the transition mandate, researchers investigated the meaning of transition and parental needs of those whose children had cognitive disabilities. Using a purposive

sampling method to their data collection, the results identified a vision for their child that included a safe and happy residential situation that included strong social networks and included constructive spending of their free time. Most parents in this study indicated that they would be more comfortable if their child had friends, a secure job, leisure activities similar to those that they engaged in while growing up, a reliable transportation system and a safe place to live. While most of the parents involved in this study reported that no amount of service or preparation for transition would ever be enough, there were ‘savior teachers’ that supported them and their child through advocacy, training and coordination (Henley-Maxwell et al., 1995). Parent satisfaction with their involvement in transition planning is a key variable related to overall transition satisfaction (Neece et al., 2009). This study investigated variables influencing parent satisfaction in the transition of their young adult with I/DD. Using information collected from 128 parents, the authors concluded that parental satisfaction was indicated by the presence of diversified and stimulating services or activities for the young adult, a well-executed transition plan, competent and sensitive service providers, and parents explicitly stating their satisfaction with transition. Likewise, parent dissatisfaction was the result of a lack of transition preparation and/or plan, poor quality of services, an inability of the young adult to maintain his/her placement in a job or day program, and explicit reporting of dissatisfaction by the parent.

While Illinois special education teacher preparation programs have advanced in preparing the novice teacher to collaborate with families by including one required course on the topic, it has not transformed to parent satisfaction specifically to their experiences in the transition planning. The special training of the LBS-II not only includes emphasis on family engagement,

but their transition specific knowledge may promote successful experiences, from the parents' perspectives.

My Experiential Knowledge

In August 2011, after serving for six years as a Director of Special Education for a large unit school district in the Chicago suburbs, I was hired as the Assistant Director of a Special Education Cooperative. The population of students served in this Chicago south suburban special education cooperative range in ages 3-22 with the majority of students served being identified as either having mild to profound intellectual / developmental disabilities or significant social-emotional disabilities. These disability characteristics are similar to that of populations served by other special education cooperatives in the Chicago metropolitan region. Since 2011, I have been involved in several statewide transition committees and work groups that include multiple state agency stakeholders focused on improving employment, education and training along with independent living and community integrated opportunities for the I/DD population. The impetus of these work groups and the increased attention to transition outcomes spawned from the signing of the Employment First Act. While IDEA is the regulatory law for special educators, there is an additional piece of key legislation which has given greater weight to the Transition Plan mandate embedded in IDEA. On July 16, 2013, almost 38 years after the special education legislation was enacted, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed into law the Employment First Act. House Bill 2591, known as The Employment First Act, requires all state agencies to work together to make competitive employment for people with disabilities a priority. Employment is one of three transition goals, along with education and independent living that

must be included in the development of Transition Plans. Professionals that have been involved in strategizing plans for the realization of the Employment First Act share a common value that all disabled individuals are employable when there is early and appropriate planning. Such a goal is achievable for individuals with I/DD, however, only if the educator thoroughly and correctly understands the intended purpose of the Transition mandates; those outlined in IDEA, as well as the Workforce and Innovative Opportunity Act 2015, and the policies of state agencies including the Departments of Human Services, Rehabilitation Services, and Developmental Disabilities, that when coordinated with IDEA, will generate equally positive outcomes in the form of competitive integrated employment. The systems are complex, so much so that the idea of seamless transition and interagency collaboration is foreign to most in the educational system and requires ongoing and specialized training to support educators, families and individuals with disabilities.

As a special education administrator who has worked with high school and post high school students with disabilities since 2003, I am knowledgeable of the mandates and requirements that drive the transition planning process in public education. In the seven school years since my employment at the cooperative, more than 50 students have exited the cooperative's programs specifically designed for those with moderate intellectual and/or developmental disabilities upon turning age 22. Of those students, several have secured part-time competitive employment in integrated settings as defined by WIOA. Several have been awarded Medicaid waiver funds, allowing them to live in community-based settings. A handful have been successful in attending community college none-credit courses. The statistics are encouraging in that successful outcomes are being recognized by families and by school

personnel. It is hypothesized that the LBS-II employed in the special education cooperative has been an instrumental variable by providing training to staff, business owners and parents of these students with I/DD. Parent experiences during the post high school years, specific to transition planning has been a valuable source to the transition literature to date. Studying the effects of the LBS-II may provide the evidence needed to evaluate teacher training programs or to effect policy change to require the LBS-II endorsed professional on teams serving students ages 18-22.

Research Question

This study used a quantitative survey design to answer the question: *How do the perceived experiences of parents differ between those having a LBS-II Transition Specialist present vs. those who did not in the follow areas? a) Student focused planning; b) Family engagement; c) Student development; d) Interagency collaboration; e) Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas; f) IEP team member transition knowledge; and g) Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD.* My research answered the primary question of how the LBS-II Transition Specialist influenced four of the five areas of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming; Student Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, and Family Engagement. Programs Structures was not part of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for my study included a quantitative study of a two-group comparative type. A comparison design was selected to determine if the involvement of the LBS-II Transition Specialist makes a difference in parental perceptions of the transition planning process. The participants in this study were asked to complete an on-line survey designed to evaluate their experiences during the transition process of the students' final years of school services, specifically the extended years of service beyond the traditional four years, likely between ages 18-22.

Participant Selection

The target population for my study included purposive sampling. Participants comprised parents of Intellectually / Developmentally Disabled students residing in the Chicago Metropolitan area, including Cook, DuPage and Lake Counties, who had children enrolled in a Post-High School or Special Education Cooperative program specifically designed for students ages 18-22. These counties were selected due to their urban and suburban commonalities. Predominantly rural areas were not the target of my study and were excluded from sampling. Parents of this targeted group of students were selected to offer valuable insight into their

experiences as they journeyed through the Transition process with their child. Furthermore, selecting parents as participants provided insight from the lens of the only constant in the child's life throughout their schooling. There were several reasons for purposive sampling within the Chicago Metro region. First, my experiential knowledge has been drawn in large part from my work and collaboration with other special education administrators in the Chicago Metro area. While there are similarities in programs for students with I/DD, school systems in the Chicago Metro area are governed independently of each other and therefore each provides unique programs and services to the population that information was gathered from. Second, through my committee work, I have found discrepancies in available resources across the state, with rural areas facing different challenges than urban / suburban communities. Among these differences are the available resources from, and variability between, state funded programs through the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the Department of Human Services. These agency offices offer similar supports and resources statewide, however availability differs based on location. In Illinois, there are seventeen Department of Human Services offices to assist families of individuals with development disabilities in securing Day Services including skill training and job coaching, disability determination services, in-home supports and residential living services. Four (23%) of these offices are located in the survey area. Furthermore, there are forty-seven offices statewide that provide rehabilitation services. Fifteen (32%) of these offices that provide vocational support and personal support services for individuals with disabilities are located in the survey area.

It can be presumed that the concentration of offices in this region leaves the remaining regions of the state with uneasy access to these supports. In many cases families in rural parts of

the state must travel to other counties to access services provided through the Illinois Department of Human Services, the agency responsible for providing adult services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/>). Conversely, there are commonalities existing across the Chicago Metropolitan area. Along with the greater availability of state resources, the latest census data indicates that Cook, Lake and DuPage counties, with a population over 6,837,000, account for over half of Illinois' population of just over 12.8 million (<http://www.indexmundi.com/>). These three counties also represent the three highest for population by square mile, ranging from 1585 to 5495 people per square mile. Furthermore, more than one-quarter (26%) of the special education cooperatives in Illinois are located in this region. Additionally, the counties beyond the three in the proposed survey area include large areas of farmland and unpopulated regions creating challenges for families to access a variety of opportunities readily available in Cook, Lake and DuPage counties. It can be deduced that given these statistics there would be greater opportunity across these geographic areas to access post-high school programs offering greater local community opportunities, including the services required in the transition plan due to what would be assumed to be easy access, compared to Illinois residents residing in less populace areas.

Procedure

To select qualified participants, I contacted special education directors from all possible school districts and cooperatives in the Chicago Metropolitan area to identify those with programs serving students in my targeted population, i.e. ages 18-22 with Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities. The process of identifying High Schools and Special Education

Cooperatives in the target region required the use of the Illinois State Board of Education's Division of Funding and Disbursement Services FY'18 Part B Flow Through – Final Allocations document. This resource provided existing information about schools offering special education services at the time of preparation for the survey. After identifying High Schools, Unit Districts and Special Education Cooperatives from the list within the selected region, I compiled a contact list of Special Education Directors from each district / cooperative's website, supported by the ISBE Directory Listing of Special Education Service Administrators, (https://www.isbe.net/Documents/sped_admin_directory.pdf#search=high%20school%20districts%20in%20cook%20county). (refer to Appendix B). Once the list of administrators was compiled, I sent an email to them with a detailed explanation of my proposed study. The email requested responses to a set of questions to identify eligibility and interest to participate: 1) Does the agency provide a program to the proposed population? 2) Does the agency employ an ISBE endorsed LBS-II Transition Specialist? 3) Would the agency be willing to assist in my research by affixing mailing labels on stamped, sealed envelopes containing parent letters and mail to parents within 7 days of receipt? If the special education administrator's responses met the criteria for the study and he or she agreed to assist in the distribution of parent letters, they were asked to provide the number of students currently enrolled in the program. This was the quantity of sealed letters sent (refer to Appendix C). The original email to the special education administrators was met with confusion by several recipients, believing they did not qualify for the study because they did not employ an LBS-II Transition Specialist. The email was revised to offer greater clarity and resent to those administrators who had yet to respond (refer to Appendix

D). Over a period of five weeks, weekly emails were sent in an effort to obtain additional participants.

During the discovery phase of identifying potential participants, three agencies informed me that their Transition Specialists completed either one of the four ISBE approved programs and did not take the endorsement examination or were certified as Transition Specialists through the Department of Rehabilitative Services. Upon reviewing the Transition Specialist Procedures Manual on the Department of Human Services website (<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32767>), it was determined that the agency employing this specialist and the remaining in question would be identified with the agencies employing highly qualified transition personnel due to their specialized training.

Table 1 represents a summary of the distribution of the 72 agencies. Based on their responses to the email, each of the 72 agencies were placed in one of four categories: 1) Programs available for individuals with I/DD ages 18-22 and employing a LBS-II Transition Specialist; 2) Programs available for individuals with I/DD ages 18-22 not employing a LBS-II Transition Specialist; 3) Programs not available for individuals with I/DD ages 18-22; 4) Agencies unwilling to participate; and 5) No response.

Table 1. *Distribution of School Agencies in Target Region*

Counties	Number of Agencies	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Cook	37	7	4	12	3	11
DuPage	16	2	2	2	3	7
Lake	19	1	3	4	1	10
Total	72	10	9	18	7	28

Once willing agencies were identified, one of two prepared letters (i.e., stamped and sealed), were sent to the special education administrator for mailing in the quantities reported, Table 2. Administrators were provided a copy of the parent letter along with instructions to mail within seven business days after affixing mailing labels to the parents of enrolled students. A total of 836 letters were mailed to parents throughout the 19 participating agencies. The parent letters were identical with one exception: Online survey links differed for those whose child's program employed a LBS-II Transition Specialist from those who did not. The surveys were identical in every way, but the use of two links allowed the researcher to differentiate the two groups on interest. The content of the letter also included a required completion date for the survey (refer to Appendix E and Appendix F).

Table 2. *Distribution of Mailed Letters by County and Sample Group*

Counties	Group 1 LBS - II	Letters Mailed	Group 2 No LBS – II	Letters Mailed	Total by County
Cook	7	436	4	107	543
DuPage	2	76	2	39	115
Lake	1	105	3	73	178
Totals	10	617	9	219	836

Instrumentation

Participants were asked to complete a researcher-created survey. The survey design included a 6-point Likert-type numerical rating scale with the following anchor end points; *Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree*. This type of rating provides two features: first, it provides graduated choices in either direction and second, while odd numbered numerical rating scales are

preferred, not providing a neutral or mid-point forces the respondent to lean one way or the other, providing less ambiguous data, (Johnson & Christensen, 2014 p. 203).

The survey included six blocks, or subscales. Block, or subscale one requested parent consent. If participants did not affirm consent, they were exited from the survey. Blocks, or subscales two through five comprised of four themes, consistent with four of Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition; Student Focused Planning (18 questions), Family Engagement (14 questions), Student Development (21 questions) and Interagency Collaboration (11 questions). Block, or subscale six contained demographic questions. Questions regarding Program Structure were not included as it is unlikely parents would possess information regarding the specifics of policies and procedures, strategic planning, resources development and allocation, or the remaining features of this domain.

Survey questions were written to include a comprehensive representation of compliance mandates, evidence-based practices and predictors as recommended in the works of Kohler et al., Johnson et al., and NSTTAC, along with recommended Transition Specialist competencies first identified in the work of Defur and Taymans (1995) and supported by the Council for Exceptional Children.

Additionally, for targeted questions, an importance scale was also included using a similar 6-point numerical rating scale with the following anchor end point ratings; *Extremely Important, Not At All Important*. These specific questions were included to assess parents' perceptions of the importance of mandates as prescribed by Indicator 13. Furthermore, several open-ended questions were included to gain further insight to parents' personal experiences aligned to the unique skills expected to be acquired in the specialized training received by the

LBS-II as determined by course descriptions of the four Illinois University programs. Finally, a two-part question was included to assess whether the parent perceived the presence of a LBS-II, and if so they were asked to provide details for how that individual added value to the transition planning process.

No study had been documented that compared experiences of parents with the variable of the LBS-II Transition Specialist, as proposed in my study. As such no validated, available survey existed. With no previous or available surveys to use, a researcher designed survey was created, framed on the work of Kohler et al., (2016), Johnson et al., (2002), NSTTAC's 17 evidence-based practices and predictors (2013), Indicator 13 compliance indicators and Transition Specialist competencies (DeFur & Taymans, 1995; CEC, 2000; CEC 2013). These works were used for their contributions to practices and predictors of successful transition programs, necessary educator knowledge, and policy compliance.

The Taxonomy for Transition 2.0 is comprised of five categories, each enriched with strategies demonstrated to positively influence post-school outcomes in employment, education and / or training and independent living. Program structure is not considered in this survey design.

Taxonomy for Transition 2.0 (Kohler, et al., 1996, 2016)

1) Student Focused Planning, 2) Student Development, 3) Interagency Collaboration, and 4)

Family Engagement

Prior to the current IDEA 2004 reauthorization, researchers identified challenges in successful transition planning. Johnson and colleagues outlined recommendations for educators to consider for successful transition planning.

Addressing challenges in transition services (Johnson, et al., 2002)

- 1) Participation of community service agencies systematically occurs in the development of the postschool transition plan,
- 2) Integrated service planning,
- 3) Information provided to parents on essential health and income maintenance programs,
- 4) Collaborative employer engagement,
- 5) Partnerships with workforce development entities,
- 6) Support for students in the development of decision-making, communication, and self-advocacy skills necessary to assume a leadership role in transition/IEP meetings,
- 7) Parent training and information to support parents and students in the IEP and transition planning process,
- 8) General education and special education collaboration,
- 9) Cross-agency evaluation and accountability systems,
- 10) Developed innovative interagency financing strategies, and
- 11) Collaborative staff development programs

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified 17 evidence-based predictors for which research has found correlational evidence between each and the three post-school outcome areas.

Evidence Based Practices and Predictors, National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, (Test et al., 2013)

- 1) Career awareness,
- 2) Community experiences,
- 3) High School diploma status,
- 4) General education inclusion,
- 5) Interagency collaboration,
- 6) Occupational courses,
- 7) Paid employment / work experiences,
- 8) Parent expectations,
- 9) Parent involvement,
- 10) Course of study,
- 11) Self-advocacy / self-determination,
- 12) Self-care / independent living,
- 13) Social skills,
- 14) Student support,
- 15) Transition program,
- 16) Vocational education,
- 17) Work study.

The Council for Exceptional children provides a framework for IHEs to consider in special education teacher preparation programs. These Transition Specialist Competencies serve as the framework for the program requirements of the LBS-II Transition Specialist.

Transition Specialist Competencies (DeFur & Taymans, 1995; CEC, 2000; CEC 2013)

- 1) Assessment, 2) Curricular Content Knowledge, 3) Programs, Services, and Outcomes, 4) Research and Inquiry, 5) Leadership and Policy, 6) Professional and Ethical Practice, 7) Collaboration

The Office of Special Education Programs requires each state educational agency to report compliance on various program indicators. Indicator 13 contains eight mandated compliance indicators for transition plans. Compliance indicators are the same for each student with a disability regardless of the severity.

Indicator 13 compliance indicators, Illinois State Board of Education

- 1) Evidence of measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of employment, education and/or training and independent living, 2) Postsecondary goals are updated annually, 3) Postsecondary goals are based on age appropriate transition assessments, with information on the student's strengths, preferences and interests taken into consideration, 4) There are transition services in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet their postsecondary goals, 5) The IEP includes a course of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet their postsecondary goals, 6) There are annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs, 7) There is evidence that the student was invited to the IEP meeting where transition services are discussed, 8) There is evidence that a representative of

any participating agency responsible for providing or paying for transition services was invited to the IEP meeting with prior consent of the parent or student age 18 or older.

The researcher-created survey is listed in its entirety in Appendix A. Please note, to the left of each question is a label identifying which of the five areas were considered in its design. Many questions are hypothesized to cover several of the five areas. The key to understanding each question and which area is being considered is also located below and in the appendix.

K – Kohler’s Taxonomy (46 questions)

J – Johnson (22 questions)

N – NSTTAC (32 questions)

C – CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist competencies (54 questions)

M – Indicator 13 mandates (20 questions)

Open ended questions – (6 questions)

Feedback from Subject Matter Experts

Subject Matter Experts

The Qualtrics link to the researcher-designed survey was sent to a purposeful selection of ten subject matter experts (SMEs). The experts included three parents of young adults with I/DD who recently exited a transition program, two special education administrators, an LBS-II Transition Specialist, an adult agency representative, two special educators and one representative from an Illinois Higher Education teacher preparation program.

SME Procedure

The three parents selected were those with whom I had professional relations while their sons were attending school. Each of their children with I/DD exited their transition program within the previous 12 months. These three parents were selected because they were consistently active participants in the IEP and Transition planning process. It is assumed that if they were active participants then the survey content should be somewhat familiar to each of them. Each of the three parents were contacted by phone and each gave verbal consent for me to forward the survey link via their personal email address, which was available in my cooperative's inactive student information system. The education professionals were either contacted via email or in person, explaining the purpose of the pilot study was to obtain information regarding content and usability of the survey. These participants were purposefully selected because of the content expertise they possess and subject matter expertise important for the refinement of my survey. Each person was sent the link to the survey after responding affirmatively to assist.

SME Materials

The construction of the original survey included six blocks, or subscales with a total of 80 questions. Block, or subscale one included the Informed Consent Form. Blocks, or subscales two through five included questions specific to the five themes of Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development and Interagency Collaboration. Block, or subscale six contained a set of demographic questions. Block, or subscale six also provided the pilot study surveyors an opportunity to provide feedback. Respondents in the pilot study were asked to think about the usability and ease of understanding for each of the items and block, or subscale

of items. They were provided an opportunity for written feedback in the last section of the survey.

SME Findings

Overall, the feedback regarding the survey design was positive. The subject matter experts responded positively to the blocking of questions by common themes. They also reported that the survey flowed nicely and was easy to complete. The subject matter experts also thought the questions were good for parents who had students in transition programs and may assist them in future planning.

Constructive feedback included recommendations to provide examples to certain terminology. Both parents and professional subject matter experts made this recommendation. As a result, examples for certain terminology which may be unfamiliar to the parent like Age Appropriate Assessments, Integration, and Transition Services were added to several questions. One parent suggested that some questions were difficult to understand. All questions were reviewed, and some were reworded if written too technically. Questions that appeared repetitive were omitted from the final survey. There was also a recommendation to consider bold formatting of certain key words in series of questions that only differ by a word or phrase. It was suggested that doing so would assist the survey participant in recognizing the difference between these series of questions by making key words stand out. Finally, it was reported by one subject matter expert that completing the survey via smart phone was not possible. I addressed this by including a statement in the parent letter that the survey is best accessed using a computer.

Study Participants

Survey data were collected from parents via Qualtrics Survey Software. This was a preferred approach compared to observations or field studies as the results from those approaches would not specifically answer the research question. A total of 836 letters with the survey links were mailed via USPS with the assistance of the educational agencies that agreed to assist. A total of 45 possible participants accessed the survey link. Eight surveys were eliminated due to either declining to participate or not completing at least one full block, or subscale of questions. This resulted in a total of 37 usable returned surveys for data analysis, including 27 responders with the LBS-II present and 10 responders from agencies that did not employ the LBS-II equally a 4.4% return rate. Additionally, of the 27 responders with the LBS-II present, 22 completed the entire survey while nine of the 10 from those not including an LBS-II completed the survey. The average completion time was 22 minutes.

Specific demographic data was collected for gender, age, disability and educational environment with results summarized in Tables 3 through 6. Six responders included in the final sample of 37 did not complete the demographic block, or subscale of questions, resulting in missing data for 16.2% of the survey sample.

Parents of male students were represented with a frequency of 56.8%, more than twice that of female students 27.0% from those who responded (Table 3).

Table 3. *Frequencies and Percentages of Student Gender*

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	21	56.8
Female	10	27.0
Total	31	83.8
Missing Data	6	16.2
Grand Total	37	100.0

The age of students represented in the sample varied from 18-21, with the average age equaling 20 years one month. The greatest frequency of responders was those whose child was age 21 (Table 4). Participants were also asked to identify how many years their child was enrolled in their current program. Thirty-two parents responded, identifying a range of years from one to four years, with the mean years of enrollment equaling 2.72.

Table 4. *Frequencies and Percentages of Student Age*

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
Age in Years		
18	3	8.1
19	4	10.8
20	11	29.7
21	13	35.1
Total	31	83.7
Missing Data	6	16.2
Grand Total	37	100.0

Participants were asked to select the educational environment that best matched the setting their child was currently enrolled in. Options ranged from least restrictive to most restrictive settings, including options for community-based settings. Frequencies ranged from one enrolled in a special education cooperative operated community-based setting, to 14 enrolled in a special education cooperative separate school or facility (Table 5).

Table 5. *Frequencies and Percentages of Educational Setting*

Educational Environment	<i>N</i>	%
District High School	6	16.2
District High School program in community-based setting	3	8.1
Special Education Cooperative program in High School setting	7	18.9
Special Education Cooperative community-based setting	1	2.7
Special Education Cooperative separate school or facility	14	37.8
Total	31	83.8
Missing Data	6	16.2
Grand Total	37	100.0

Participants were asked to identify the disability category best representing their child. The options provided considered the DSM-5 definition that I/DD includes both intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits and that the severity of I/DD is based on adaptive functioning rather than IQ test scores alone. Unlike the remaining demographic questions, parent selections may have been based on their perception of their child's abilities (Table 6).

Table 6. *Frequencies and Percentages of Disability*

Disability Type	<i>N</i>	%
Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disability	11	29.7
Severe Intellectual Disability	2	5.4
Autism	6	16.2
Autism and Intellectual Disability	9	24.3
Multiple Disability	3	8.1
Missing Data	6	16.2
Grand Total	37	100.0

Data Analysis Plan

Quantitative Data

The research question and the corresponding analysis plan is outlined below. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS®) was used to retrieve, manage and manipulate the data. Each item was examined for skew and kurtosis, and inter-item correlations, and no items were removed from final analysis.

It was determined that the best analysis approach would include using mean scores for each block, or subscale of questions, 2 through 5, and to compare the results between the two groups. The approach of using mean scores for comparison of each thematic block, or subscale of questions was preferred due to the variability of the number of questions in each set. Mean scores were used to answer questions related to each of the seven areas specified as dependent variables in the research question.

Qualitative Data

The survey contained six open ended questions aligned to the specialized training received by the LBS-II as suggested by their course descriptions and the CEC Advanced Preparation Standards. Qualitative data collected from these questions were used to support quantitative data. The qualitative data was used to either reinforce or reject results collected from the remaining survey questions. These open-ended questions also provided parents the opportunity to more fully share their opinions on the support of the educator. Responses were analyzed for common themes for each individual question. Themes were then compared between groups based on the independent variable, disability and educational environment. Due to the response rate of the survey, the qualitative data served purpose in answering the research question.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

As a reminder, the research question for the study was:

How do the perceived experiences of parents differ between those having a LBS-II Transition Specialist present vs. those who did not in the follow areas? a) Student focused planning; b) Family engagement; c) Student development; d) Interagency collaboration; e) Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas; f) IEP team member transition knowledge; and g) Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD?

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting analyses on group differences, each item in the survey was examined for range, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis to ensure the proposed subscales (Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development, Intra-agency Collaboration, IEP Team Member Transition Knowledge, Vision, etc.) evidenced acceptable reliability so that they could be used as dependent variables in subsequent analyses. Descriptive level statistics for all items are presented in Table 7. Respondents used the positive end of the scale much more frequently, as evidenced by the higher mean scores for most items. Because all items were skewed toward the positive, it was determined to retain all items on each of the five subscales. Each subscale that was created was examined for inter-item correlations and internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Each subscale's internal consistency measured as high. Please see Tables 8 through 12 for a visual display of this information.

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics for all survey items*

	Skewness				Kurtosis				Skewness				Kurtosis		
	N	Mean	s.d.	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error		N	Mean	s.d.	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Q1	37	5.65	1.06	-3.37	0.39	11.47	0.76	Q34	32	5.09	1.28	-1.67	0.41	2.69	0.81
Q2	37	4.97	1.62	-1.64	0.39	1.64	0.76	Q35	32	5.09	1.33	-1.50	0.41	1.90	0.81
Q3	37	4.81	1.79	-1.17	0.39	-0.25	0.76	Q36	32	5.81	0.54	-2.87	0.41	7.43	0.81
Q4	37	4.62	1.55	-1.11	0.39	0.37	0.76	Q37	32	5.34	1.26	-2.25	0.41	4.79	0.81
Q5	37	4.81	1.41	-1.03	0.39	0.17	0.76	Q38	32	5.84	0.45	-3.05	0.41	9.43	0.81
Q6	37	5.46	0.93	-1.51	0.39	1.03	0.76	Q39	32	4.88	1.29	-1.30	0.41	1.55	0.81
Q7	37	4.73	1.64	-1.24	0.39	0.33	0.76	Q40	32	5.19	1.28	-1.85	0.41	3.23	0.81
Q8	36	4.67	1.51	-1.18	0.39	0.43	0.77	Q41	32	5.00	1.34	-1.53	0.41	1.97	0.81
Q9	37	4.65	1.53	-1.08	0.39	0.14	0.76	Q42	32	4.75	1.32	-1.03	0.41	0.75	0.81
Q11	37	5.54	1.07	-2.99	0.39	9.52	0.76	Q43	32	4.94	1.54	-1.29	0.41	0.67	0.81
Q12	37	4.95	1.20	-1.21	0.39	1.65	0.76	Q44	32	5.06	1.39	-1.81	0.41	2.96	0.81
Q13	37	4.65	1.30	-0.83	0.39	0.28	0.76	Q45	32	4.59	1.52	-0.95	0.41	0.04	0.81
Q14	37	4.65	1.27	-0.82	0.39	0.44	0.76	Q46	32	4.44	1.58	-0.94	0.41	-0.01	0.81
Q15	37	4.70	1.54	-1.20	0.39	0.68	0.76	Q47	32	4.97	1.28	-1.51	0.41	2.12	0.81
Q16	37	5.03	1.28	-1.40	0.39	1.69	0.76	Q48	32	5.81	0.47	-2.61	0.41	6.69	0.81
Q17	36	5.11	1.12	-1.80	0.39	4.20	0.77	Q49	32	4.88	1.41	-1.24	0.41	0.80	0.81
Q19	34	5.24	1.23	-2.03	0.40	4.12	0.79	Q50	32	4.56	1.61	-1.27	0.41	0.80	0.81
Q20	34	5.24	1.21	-2.02	0.40	4.40	0.79	Q51	32	5.00	1.44	-1.53	0.41	1.90	0.81
Q21	34	5.18	1.34	-2.04	0.40	4.09	0.79	Q54	31	4.55	1.61	-1.15	0.42	0.38	0.82
Q22	34	5.06	1.37	-1.69	0.40	2.75	0.79	Q55	31	3.94	1.79	-0.42	0.42	-1.01	0.82
Q23	34	4.68	1.59	-1.06	0.40	0.02	0.79	Q56	31	5.00	1.51	-1.63	0.42	1.78	0.82
Q24	34	4.79	1.51	-1.30	0.40	0.80	0.79	Q57	30	5.00	1.53	-1.61	0.43	1.63	0.83
Q25	34	4.71	1.55	-1.30	0.40	0.94	0.79	Q58	31	4.94	1.50	-1.52	0.42	1.49	0.82
Q26	34	4.65	1.55	-0.96	0.40	-0.02	0.79	Q59	31	4.29	1.62	-0.61	0.42	-0.72	0.82
Q27	34	5.09	1.36	-1.64	0.40	2.06	0.79	Q60	31	4.26	1.61	-0.45	0.42	-1.11	0.82
Q28	34	4.88	1.51	-1.52	0.40	1.74	0.79	Q61	31	4.39	1.45	-0.53	0.42	-0.51	0.82
Q29	34	4.85	1.54	-1.33	0.40	0.77	0.79	Q62	31	4.23	1.73	-0.71	0.42	-0.63	0.82
Q30	34	5.50	0.90	-1.74	0.40	2.07	0.79	Q63	31	4.29	1.81	-0.64	0.42	-1.07	0.82
Q31	34	5.18	1.24	-1.87	0.40	3.49	0.79	Q65	31	4.94	1.48	-1.39	0.42	1.30	0.82
Q33	32	5.13	1.26	-1.58	0.41	2.33	0.81								

Table 8. *Inter-item correlation matrix for the Interagency Collaboration Subscale*

	Q54	Q55	Q56	Q57	Q58	Q59	Q60	Q61	Q62	Q63
Q54	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q55	0.746	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q56	0.007	0.126	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q57	0.502	0.647	0.282	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q58	0.486	0.635	0.073	0.267	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
Q59	0.696	0.770	0.031	0.545	0.771	1.000	—	—	—	—
Q60	0.639	0.783	0.158	0.603	0.815	0.914	1.000	—	—	—
Q61	0.754	0.729	-0.010	0.607	0.692	0.882	0.861	1.000	—	—
Q62	0.676	0.672	0.134	0.431	0.758	0.842	0.847	0.890	1.000	—
Q63	0.689	0.792	0.015	0.683	0.736	0.913	0.907	0.890	0.859	1.000

Note. Cronbach's Alpha = .94 for this subscale

Table 9. *Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for the Student Focused Planning Subscale*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17
Q1	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q2	0.624	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q3	0.564	0.742	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q4	0.086	0.536	0.702	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q5	0.103	0.107	0.370	0.436	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q6	0.196	0.505	0.520	0.489	0.343	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q7	0.056	0.392	0.680	0.797	0.516	0.519	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q8	0.129	0.313	0.634	0.715	0.559	0.539	0.928	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q9	0.179	0.432	0.623	0.620	0.521	0.506	0.866	0.869	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q11	0.074	0.648	0.533	0.411	-0.059	0.581	0.464	0.373	0.526	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q12	0.159	0.056	0.318	0.347	0.715	0.271	0.499	0.558	0.639	-0.106	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
Q13	0.049	0.127	0.377	0.333	0.586	0.345	0.580	0.664	0.748	0.221	0.737	1.000	—	—	—	—
Q14	0.091	0.076	0.347	0.380	0.534	0.210	0.577	0.658	0.732	0.123	0.641	0.748	1.000	—	—	—
Q15	0.053	0.019	0.351	0.416	0.637	0.407	0.668	0.688	0.636	-0.001	0.711	0.585	0.652	1.000	—	—
Q16	0.028	0.014	0.353	0.537	0.618	0.106	0.716	0.704	0.685	-0.092	0.724	0.542	0.653	0.736	1.000	—
Q17	0.152	0.164	0.556	0.601	0.604	0.338	0.740	0.828	0.782	0.133	0.684	0.682	0.845	0.680	0.752	1.000

Note. Cronbach's Alpha for this subscale = .93

Table 10. *Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for the Family Engagement Subscale*

	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31	Q33
Q19	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q20	0.938	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q21	0.929	0.910	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q22	0.942	0.886	0.902	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q23	0.744	0.743	0.777	0.766	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q24	0.852	0.767	0.792	0.880	0.860	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q25	0.893	0.794	0.842	0.921	0.827	0.928	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q26	0.798	0.732	0.783	0.874	0.904	0.931	0.908	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q27	0.872	0.814	0.874	0.874	0.764	0.861	0.845	0.814	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
Q28	0.873	0.823	0.830	0.832	0.834	0.857	0.859	0.785	0.872	1.000	—	—	—	—
Q29	0.845	0.812	0.772	0.832	0.840	0.906	0.893	0.819	0.798	0.926	1.000	—	—	—
Q30	0.735	0.665	0.676	0.709	0.705	0.789	0.759	0.689	0.704	0.777	0.820	1.000	—	—
Q31	0.818	0.794	0.740	0.752	0.742	0.820	0.777	0.714	0.831	0.845	0.865	0.868	1.000	—
Q33	0.859	0.773	0.834	0.844	0.806	0.837	0.842	0.844	0.868	0.845	0.783	0.784	0.838	1.000

Note: Cronbach's Alpha for this subscale = .98

Table 11. *Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for the Student Development Subscale*

	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	Q37	Q38	Q39	Q40	Q41	Q42	Q43	Q44	Q45	Q45	Q47	Q48	Q49	Q50	Q51
Q33	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q34	0.871	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q35	0.896	0.906	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q36	0.227	0.074	0.116	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q37	0.823	0.860	0.867	0.051	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q38	0.150	0.083	0.188	0.681	0.155	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q39	0.723	0.731	0.742	0.058	0.663	0.077	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q40	0.862	0.894	0.823	0.100	0.798	0.053	0.757	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q41	0.855	0.863	0.795	0.090	0.762	0.054	0.763	0.955	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q42	0.696	0.836	0.750	0.069	0.713	-0.068	0.683	0.811	0.746	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q43	0.814	0.853	0.774	0.259	0.758	0.172	0.466	0.740	0.731	0.705	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q44	0.840	0.886	0.800	0.233	0.853	0.068	0.635	0.863	0.794	0.818	0.874	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q45	0.783	0.750	0.690	0.181	0.631	-0.049	0.599	0.669	0.647	0.671	0.799	0.791	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q46	0.664	0.616	0.577	0.252	0.536	-0.037	0.533	0.657	0.636	0.702	0.723	0.734	0.799	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
Q47	0.819	0.867	0.778	0.132	0.825	0.047	0.661	0.868	0.824	0.796	0.863	0.924	0.853	0.785	1.000	—	—	—	—
Q48	0.203	0.137	0.235	0.752	0.221	0.774	0.226	0.114	0.153	0.026	0.250	0.216	0.115	0.157	0.150	1.000	—	—	—
Q49	0.716	0.777	0.679	0.054	0.752	0.070	0.489	0.675	0.682	0.677	0.872	0.746	0.834	0.690	0.873	0.109	1.000	—	—
Q50	0.775	0.680	0.625	0.315	0.539	0.081	0.534	0.763	0.733	0.601	0.705	0.779	0.625	0.648	0.698	0.229	0.503	1.000	—
Q51	0.124	0.140	0.220	0.210	-0.089	0.301	0.261	0.140	0.217	-0.017	-0.029	-0.097	-0.162	-0.184	-0.123	0.286	-0.207	0.210	1.000

Note: Cronbach's Alpha for this subscale = .96

Table 12. *Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for Mandates*

	Q1	Q5	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q35	Q37	Q43	Q44	Q45	Q46	Q47	Q50	Q55
Q1	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q5	0.323	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q7	0.316	0.713	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q8	0.281	0.717	0.967	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q9	0.373	0.681	0.848	0.835	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q35	0.338	0.741	0.805	0.785	0.757	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q37	0.222	0.673	0.744	0.709	0.748	0.865	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q43	0.283	0.663	0.827	0.815	0.923	0.770	0.755	1.000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Q44	0.162	0.753	0.750	0.745	0.800	0.797	0.852	0.872	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
Q45	0.124	0.665	0.759	0.778	0.805	0.684	0.626	0.796	0.787	1.000	—	—	—	—
Q46	0.166	0.621	0.675	0.681	0.696	0.569	0.530	0.718	0.729	0.792	1.000	—	—	—
Q47	0.150	0.664	0.772	0.739	0.802	0.774	0.824	0.860	0.923	0.850	0.779	1.000	—	—
Q50	0.164	0.668	0.702	0.704	0.631	0.618	0.533	0.699	0.775	0.614	0.638	0.691	1.000	—
Q55	0.108	0.658	0.684	0.701	0.629	0.600	0.594	0.549	0.653	0.699	0.433	0.591	0.661	1.000

Note: Cronbach's Alpha for this subscale = .97

Upon completion of the preliminary analyses, the sub-parts of the research question were examined. Each part and its corresponding analysis is presented to answer the research question. In order to examine if there were differences in perceptions for parents who had a Transition Specialist on the IEP team during the transition planning process compared to those who did not have a Transition Specialist present a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. For all analyses, the IV was the two-level grouping variable of Transition Specialist Present vs. Not Present. The DVs varied by analyses and included; a) Student focused planning; b) Family engagement; c) Student development; d) Interagency collaboration; e) IEP team member transition knowledge. None of the t-tests were significant, indicating there were no group differences. More specifically, there was no difference in the parental perceptions of Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, or IEP team member transition knowledge, between those who had a transition specialist present during the IEP process compared to those who did not have a transition specialist present during the IEP process. Results of these t-tests are presented in Tables 13 through 17.

Table 13. *T-Test Results for Student Focused Planning* (subpart a)

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Specialist Not Present	10	4.94	.84	.27	.04	.97
Specialist Present	27	4.93	1.04	.20		

Table 14. *T-Test Results for Family Engagement* (subpart b)

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Specialist <u>Not Present</u>	9	4.63	1.09	.37	-1.02	.31
Specialist Present	25	5.13	1.31	.26		

Table 15. *T-Test Results for Student Development* (subpart c)

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Specialist <u>Not Present</u>	9	5.17	1.31	.28	.35	.73
Specialist Present	23	5.03	.83	.22		

Table 16. *T-Test Results for Interagency Collaboration* (subpart d)

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Specialist <u>Not Present</u>	9	4.14	1.13	.38	-.94	.35
Specialist Present	23	4.63	1.36	.29		

In order to examine subpart e) Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. First, two scores were calculated. The first set of scores included parent responses to the frequency with which the federal mandates were being implemented during their child's IEP. The second set of scores calculated included parental perceptions of the importance of the implementation of the federally

mandated areas. Each participant responded to both sets of questions, hence the use of a repeated measures ANOVA.

The results comparing the frequency vs. importance of the mandates (within-subjects effect) was significant, Wilks lambda = .846, $F(1,35) = 6.35$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .15. An examination of means indicates that parents rated the importance ($m=5.23$ s.d.=.98) greater than the frequency, ($m=4.79$, s.d.=1.17). The interaction effect (LBS-II * mandates) was not significant, indicating that the frequency and importance did not differ based upon if an LBS-II was present on the IEP team or not.

Table 17. *T-Test Results for IEP team member transition knowledge* (subpart f)

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Specialist Not Present	9	5.11	1.16	.39	.42	.68
Specialist Present	22	4.86	1.61	.34		

Subpart g) Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD, is answered below in the qualitative analysis section. First, exploratory quantitative analyses are presented.

Exploratory Analyses

Using the data reported in Block, or subscale 6, the demographic portion of the survey, several exploratory research questions were analyzed. These analyses did not use the independent variable of the LBS-II, but rather, compared the five (dependent) variables of Student Development, Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Interagency

Collaboration and federal transition mandates using the (independent) variables of; 1) severity of their child's disability, and 2) educational environment of the program their child was attending at the time of the survey.

Because the educational environment has been indicated as influential in transition outcomes, a series of MANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in perceptions in the dependent variables based upon where the child received services. Due to the overall low response rate, analysis was best completed by collapsing categories and comparing least to most restrictive settings, and district operated programs to special education cooperative operated programs for the five dependent variables. The first MANOVA conducted examined restrictiveness of program (Less Restrictive Environment, $N = 16$ compared to Separate Facility, $N = 14$). Results of the overall MANOVA were not significant, (Wilks' Lambda = 0.14, $F(5, 24) = 1.70$, $p = .17$). Because the overall MANOVA was not significant, follow-up univariate tests are not reported, with one exception. The ANOVA for student development approached significance, with a p value of .11. An examination of means shows that students in less restrictive environments had better student development opportunities ($M=5.31$, $s.d. = .66$) compared to students in separate facilities ($M=4.74$, $s.d. = 1.22$), as reported by their parents. Perhaps if there were a larger sample size, this finding would have been significant.

Next, a MANOVA was conducted that examined the IV of disability type. While the literature does not differentiate between the severity of the Intellectual or Developmental Disability, responses were analyzed to assess whether the perceived experiences differed between parents using disability categories. Due to the overall low response rate, two groups were formed based on combined responses of mild to moderate or severe intellectual disability

($N = 13$), and combined responses of autism and autism and intellectual disability ($N = 15$). (Table 6). Responses for those who selected multiple disabilities or none of the above were not used in this analysis. Results of the overall MANOVA were not significant, (Wilks' Lambda = 0.787, $F(5, 22) = 1.19$, $p = .34$). Because the overall MANOVA was not significant, follow-up univariate tests are not reported.

Qualitative Analyses

The survey also contained several open-ended questions to allow responders to provide descriptive commentary to the opportunities provided to their child. The open-ended questions aligned to the assumed expertise of the LBS-II, based on their specialized training aligned to Kohler's Taxonomy. Specifically, at the end of each block, or subscale of questions parents were asked to give examples of transition activities specific to the themes of Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development and Interagency Collaboration. For the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, and the 10 respondents without the LBS-II, responses for each open-ended question aligned to Student Focused Planning, Family Engagement, and Student Development were coded as; no response, responses rich in evidence-based practices, vague response, or negative / lack of experience response. For the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, and the 10 respondents without the LBS-II, responses for the open-ended question aligned to Interagency Collaboration were coded as; no response, responses rich in evidence-based practices, compliance with mandate, information provided, and not supported.

Student-Focused Planning (Research question - subpart a)

The questions in Block, or subscale 2 concluded with the opportunity for the parent to explain opportunities that reinforced Student-Focused Planning as evidenced by opportunities which promote self-determination, self-management and student-directed activities. Of the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, nine did not provide a response, nine respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, five respondents provided only vague details of how the transition services reinforced Student-Focused Planning, and four respondents provided details of negative or a lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

They are able to openly advocate for themselves. Putting them in different activities to help figure out for themselves what the steps they think they should take yet help them if they need it. –Respondent Seven

My son with Down Syndrome was allowed to pick the job he would participate in as part of the transition program at his high school. He was able to learn to have a daily routine and follow it with minimum problems. –Respondent Ten

Students have an opportunity to complete surveys after a community outing, identifying what they liked/didn't like, and what were some challenges they may have experienced. -Respondent Twenty-five

She prepares a presentation on what she has done in since the last IEP meeting. -Respondent Fifteen

Participation in IEP, variety of experiences in the community and work sites. -Respondent Nineteen

Examples of Student Focus Planning activities that are vague in detail include:

The Transition Team did a lot to promote self-management. However, our child did not use these techniques when she was left on her own. - Respondent Seventeen

Self-management is an important part of her social work and classroom activities. -Respondent Twelve

Examples of negative experiences or the lack of Student Focus Planning include:

Little jobs during school. -Respondent Eleven

None. -Respondent Sixteen

All of my son's transition skills were taught and practiced at my son's private transition school. We were only able to obtain just two years of transition services after a very long legal battle with our district. Our district provided no transition services to my son, who has autism. They decided that since he was able to get good grades in classes, he didn't need any services and tried to graduate him after senior year. After two years of transition school, my son still has a long way to go to be able to achieve competitive employment, pursue a degree, and live independently. We were one of the lucky ones. Most students like my son get absolutely nothing in our very wealthy district. -Respondent Fourteen

Responders from schools without the LBS-II were similarly coded. Of the ten responders in this group, three did not provide a response, three respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, two respondents provided only vague details of how the transition services reinforced Student-Focused Planning, and two respondents provided details of negative or a lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of evidence-based Student Focused Planning activities include:

Shopping for groceries, planning lunch meals. – Respondent Thirty-Four

Hands on internships in community, shopping excursions to assist in day to day independent living, kitchen/cleaning exercises in class. -Respondent Thirty-Eight

Examples of Student Focus Planning activities that are vague in detail include:

He is given the opportunity to demonstrate the skills that he is learning at the school and they allow him the ability to transition to activities independently. -Respondent Thirty-Seven

He takes part in a focus group for people with speech difficulties. -
Respondent Thirty-Nine

Examples of negative experiences or the lack of Student Focus Planning include:

Can't think of any. -Respondent Thirty-Five

Not many, to be honest. -Respondent Forty-One

Family Engagement (Research question – subpart b)

The questions in Block, or subscale 3 inquired as to how the IEP team engaged the families in the transition planning process and concluded with the opportunity for parents to explain opportunities that reinforced Family Engagement as evidenced by how the school involved the family in the transition planning process. Of the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, eight did not provide a response, twelve respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, four respondents provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced Family Engagement, and three respondents provided details of negative or lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

They are always available to answer questions. They set up tours to post transition sites. They set up Next Step seminars, that has specific information. If anyone from transition has a concern they are in touch with the guardian/parent. -Respondent Seven

From the beginning the Transition program personnel have been in contact with me, providing me with updates regarding the goals that we have selected. Monthly updates, not only via mail but also via phone. They are always willing and available to answer questions and help with guidance. - Respondent Ten

Quarterly progress reports sent home, identifying status of annual goals/objectives. Phone conferences between case manager and parents

occur prior to annual meetings, discussing direction of new goals/objectives, based on previous year's performance. -Respondent Twenty-Five

I was consulted every step of the way and included in all meetings and IEP planning. -Respondent Twenty-Six

Examples of Family Engagement activities that are vague in detail include:

Keeps us involved. -Respondent Eleven

Great communication from most staff. -Respondent Twenty-Four

Examples of negative experiences or the lack of Family Engagement include:

Our district never asked us, the parents, about our opinions or listened to any information we tried to share regarding our observations regarding our son's abilities in the home and community. All of the assessments that were completed were only completed by school staff. -Respondent Fourteen

Transition (post high school) is solely the responsibility of the parent/guardian. -Respondent Sixteen

Responses from the non-LBS-II participants were similarly coded. Of the ten respondents, without the presence of the LBS-II, seven did not provide a response, one respondent gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, one respondent provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced Family Engagement, and one respondent provided details of negative or a lack of experiences for this area. The one example of rich evidence-based experiences includes:

We are provided regular seminars and opportunities from inside and outside sources for special needs topics. Our main contact is very hands on with calling us directly to discuss our needs and our daughter's and is an advocate. – Respondent Thirty-Eight

The one example of Family Engagement vague in detail include:

We go to IEP meetings. -Respondent Thirty-Five

The one example of negative experiences or the lack of Family Engagement include:
 Though it would be helpful, transition planning has never been discussed
 with our family. -Respondent Forty-One

Student Development (Research question - subpart c)

After completing the Block, or subscale 4 questions specific to Student Development activities, participants were given two open-ended questions to provide examples of how their child's post high-school program has enhanced Student Development. First, they were asked to give examples of social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills. Second, they were asked to give examples of how the transition plan provided opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program. Like the expanded responses in Blocks, or subscales 2 and 3, responses from the LBS-II group included more specific examples of Student Development activities compared to the other group. However, the non-LBS-II group provided more detailed examples of evidence-based practices compared to their previous responses for Student Focused Planning or Family Engagement. Responses were coded similarly to those in Blocks, or subscales 2 and 3. Specific to the first question of giving examples of social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills, of the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, twelve did not provide a response, eight respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, four respondents provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced Student Development, and three respondents provided details of negative or lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

My son learned about safety and is very aware. He helps around the house with chores such as sweeping, wiping table and windows and putting his clothes away. He is able to participate in small and large parties and behave properly, enjoys going with me shopping and helps gather items from our shopping list. -Respondent Ten

They allowed my child to walk around the downtown area of town. She went to the library, coffee shop, Dollar General and sometimes to the park for leisure opportunities. The independent living skills were bare minimum. She made very basic recipes that were microwaved and not healthy. They brought them to the store to buy these items. Social opportunities were not really presented except for an improv program and going to a movie that my child really did not want to see and had to pay for it. -Respondent Twenty-Three

Field trips, dances, electives, cooking, personal hygiene, clubs. - Respondent Seven

Quarterly electives are offered to the students, spanning a variety of interests, i.e. art, sports/fitness, cooking, trivia, photography, etc. This provides both an opportunity to enjoy the activity, as well as meeting peers with a shared interest. -Respondent Twenty-Five

Examples of social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills, that are vague in detail include:

Better behaviors. -Respondent Three

The Transition Program provided resources for obtaining opportunities in these areas, however our child has not taken advantage of these. - Respondent Seventeen

Examples for a lack of or negative experiences for promoting social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills, include:

Our district provided no opportunities. All the opportunities my son had were from our private transition school. -Respondent Fourteen

Social opportunities are available through job practice and field trips. I don't think there is enough done to promote leisure and independent living skills. -Respondent Twelve

The second part of the Student Development open ended question asked respondents to give examples of how the transition plan provided opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program. Of the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, twelve did not provide a response, seven respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, two respondents provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced this part of Student Development, and six respondents provided details of negative or lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

My child is currently learning basic office skills. -Respondent Twelve

Found Project Search and got her in. -Respondent Fifteen

They have been able to provide work opportunities with a job coach at various sites. -Respondent Nineteen

Examples of how the transition plan provided opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program that are vague in detail include:

The Transition Program suggested resources. -Respondent Seventeen

She works hard, she likes being independent. -Respondent Six

Examples for a lack of or negative experiences for providing opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program include:

Haven't come to that yet. -Respondent Three

None. -Respondent Eight

He participated in job training at High School but currently does not have a job outside of school. -Respondent Ten

There has been NO employment opportunities given even though we requested many times for help with this. My child found a job on her own

but because she did not have support with DRS she was not able to handle it. This entire program provided the opportunity for my child to continue with a consistent schedule of waking up and going somewhere each day. She hated working for free in the work force program. -Respondent Twenty-Three

In my young adult's case there have been no opportunities definitely provided, only suggestions. -Respondent Twenty-Four

Responses from the non-LBS-II participants were similarly coded for each of the open-ended questions specific to Student Development. Specific to the first question of giving examples of social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills, of the 10 respondents without the presence of the LBS-II, five did not provide a response, three respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, no respondents provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced Student Development, and two respondents provided details of negative or lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

They take them out to eat, cook together, play games together, go to the movies together. -Respondent Thirty-Four

Real-life work experiences in a variety of settings promote all of the above skills. There are visits and activities offered with other transition programs in the county for the social aspect. -Respondent Thirty-Eight

Examples for a lack of or negative experiences for promoting social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills, include:

It has helped only moderately. -Respondent Thirty-Five

My child got more school work and socialization in grade school, than they do now. The expectations seem lower, after a child turns 18. Sad. -Respondent Forty-One

The second part of the Student Development question asked respondents to give examples of how the transition plan provided opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program. Of the 10 respondents without the LBS-II, five did not respond, four respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, no respondents provided positive yet vague details of how the transition services reinforced this part of Student Development, and one respondent provided details of negative or lack of experiences for this area. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

Set up for student to volunteer in laundry department in a nursing home. - Respondent Thirty-Four

She does only basic work at a restaurant. -Respondent Thirty-Five

She is now working/volunteering this summer at the Lake County Independent Living Center. -Respondent Thirty-Eight

He has a permanent job at Walgreens. He gained permanent employment. -Respondent Thirty-Nine

An example for a lack of or negative experiences for promoting employment / volunteering beyond their school program include:

My child does not have a transition program. -Respondent Forty-One

Interagency Collaboration (Research question - subpart d)

Block, or subscale 5 questions queried the parents' perceptions of the programs' collaboration with local and state agency representatives. Following the questions, parents were asked to give examples of how the school provides opportunities for agency collaboration to discuss potential supports for their child's life after school. Different coding was used from the

previous questions. Responses were coded as no response, respondents providing specific Interagency Collaboration practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, respondents that solely indicated the mandate of inviting agency representatives, respondents that were provided information only, and respondents who were not supported. Of the 27 respondents with the presence of the LBS-II, twelve did not provide a response, six respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, four respondents affirmed the school's compliance with the mandate of inviting agency representatives, four respondents provided vague details of being provided information, and one respondent provided details of negative or lack of Interagency Collaboration. Some examples of rich evidence-based experiences include:

Next Steps, Site visits, Set ups with different agencies while at conferences, discussions in IEP meetings or conferences. -Respondent Seven

The Transition Team has helped in providing contacts to outside agencies such as IDHS. -Respondent Seventeen

Parent information workshops are provided on a regular basis, covering a wide variety of topics related to adult services. -Respondent Twenty-Five

The only agency that collaborates is DRS. -Respondent Twelve

Examples of responses only affirming the mandated compliance of inviting an agency representative include:

Providers, and agencies for post-school were invited to final IEP. - Respondent Nineteen

They are invited to IEP meetings. -Respondent Ten

(Cooperative) is invited to IEP meetings. -Respondent Fifteen

I had to do all this on my OWN!!!! At one of the last IEP meetings the staff introduces me to a DRS person who states she will help us and she did not. I am so very disappointed, and I am so worried about what will

happen to our child when she finishes school and when we are no longer alive. -Respondent Twenty-Three

Examples of responses showing information was provided, but no evidence of true collaboration include:

Gave us info. -Respondent Eleven

The extent of our help with agency supports was merely statements of some agencies we can contact. -Respondent Fourteen

An example of a lack of Interagency Collaboration includes:

Did not really offer services outside of the school district. It's up to the parents. -Respondent Sixteen

Of the 10 respondents without the presence of the LBS-II, seven did not provide a response or gave an irrelevant response, no respondents gave specific details of evidence-based practices aligned with the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0, no respondents affirmed the school's compliance with the mandate of inviting agency representatives, two respondents provided vague details of being provided information, and one respondent provided details of negative or lack of Interagency Collaboration.

Examples of responses showing information was provided, but no evidence of true collaboration include:

They mail us invitations to some events. -Respondent Thirty-Five

We do receive emails that detail opportunities and sometimes flyers come home from school via student. -Respondent Thirty-Eight

An example of a lack of Interagency Collaboration includes:

Minimal. -Respondent Forty-One

Confidence in Successful Transition to Adult Life (Research question - subpart g)

To respond to (subpart g) of the research question, *Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD*, participants were asked (subpart f) to what degree they perceive the presence of minimally one team member who is knowledgeable in strategies for effective transition planning which includes collaboration between family, school, adult agencies and community services in order for your child to achieve his /her transition goals, followed by an open-ended question to provide commentary to how the person(s) has added value to the transition planning process. While there is no significant difference in the mean of the responses between the two groups, the comments supporting the rating varied in particulars for how confident each are that this staff member has added value to the transition planning process to result in a successful transition to adult life. Given the elevated scores from the non-LBS-II parents, it is striking how little they had to say to support to their high rating of confidence for successful transition to adult life.

Examples from the LBS-II group include:

The Transition Team has been very helpful throughout the process. We just wish our child had more motivation to take advantage of the resources. -Respondent Seventeen

They have a dedicated person making sure that families are knowledgeable and following through to be connected. -Respondent Nineteen

I believe that the Transition staff has done a very good job preparing our family for our student's transition to adult life. Unfortunately, the role of the state in providing adult services may hamper success in the future. This does not, however, reflect on the Transition staff. The reality is that regardless of preparation in educational programs families are at the mercy of the state's ability/willingness to provide services. This leads many of us to feel somewhat pessimistic about our students' futures. -Respondent Twenty-Five

My son has been given the tools necessary to transition to adult life. He has been exposed to the work force, learned hygiene, self-help skills, and safety among all. -Respondent Ten

So much information! Don't know where we would be without them! Very grateful for all of their work to make our kids successful. -Respondent Seven

In all honesty I believe a new staff approach needs to be taken when it comes to transitioning of the multi needs young adult. A true communication between local agencies, both private and public, regarding what they have to offer, since the standard facilities and programs have no room or true desire to serve the multi-needs young adult. There is a most serious lack of post school opportunities for the multi-needs individual. - Respondent Twenty-Four

The responses from the LBS-II group were generally positive, but negative perceptions were also provided. Examples include:

I have no clue who this person is! I am very upset and disappointed with the school district and the transition program. -Respondent Twenty-Three
Minimal engagement. -Respondent Sixteen

Responses from the non-LBS-II group did not provide in-depth insight to why the parents were confident that the transition plan would lead to success. Examples of their responses include:

Very -Respondent Thirty-Two

There is a good social worker and case worker. -Respondent Thirty-Four

We are fairly confident, but our daughter rarely tries hard enough to benefit from what she has learned. -Respondent Thirty-Five

They have provided him life work skills. -Respondent Thirty-Nine

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a review of the purpose and procedures of the study as well as an analysis of my findings and conclusions. The chapter concludes with study limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

There is plenty of transition related research and scholarly articles that suggest what activities, programs or events positively influence post-school outcomes for individuals with disabilities. However, there are numerous limitations in this body of literature, most important being the limited quantity of evidence-based practices for educators to employ in preparing their students with disabilities as they transition from school services to adult life. More specifically, evidence-based practices or programs to share with educators of individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities is sparse. Schools play a critical role in preparing all students with disabilities for adult life, yet research suggests that educators lack the knowledge necessary to positively influence the postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, especially those with I/DD (Morningstar et al., 2018; Williams-Diehm et al., 2018). Parents are the only constant throughout the process and their experiences and perceptions are invaluable for educators who strive to improve transition outcomes for their graduates, specifically in the areas of integrated employment, adult training and education, independent living skills and community participation.

More than a decade ago, and before the current version of the IDEA law was reauthorized, Wandry and Pleet (2003) offered guidance and recommendations in the context of the parent involvement movement at that time. They concluded that the purpose of special education was to prepare the individual for employment and independent living. To achieve these goals, the school could not do it alone, but that parents and educators together could improve post-school success for youth with disabilities (Wandry & Pleet, 2003).

The convergence of national policies during this time, including the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEA 2004, not only gave way to the heightened importance of family involvement in all areas of education but also required states to ensure their teachers were “highly qualified” to teach the subject matter assigned them. However, there is no requirement in IDEA that the person responsible for Transition Plans be highly qualified. Illinois’ Institutions for Higher Education include one required course in special education teacher preparation programs to prepare novice teachers in collaborating with families, but no required courses are consistently included to prepare them for the transition planning requirements mandated in the IDEA. The LBS-II Transition Specialist advanced degree not only emphasizes skills necessary to promote family involvement and engagement but also skills identified by the Council for Exceptional Children for successful transition outcomes. Building off of this idea, my quantitative study investigated, from the perspective of the parents, if and to what extent the participation of a specially trained LBS-II Transition Specialist influences the transition planning process.

Purpose and Procedures

The purpose of my study was to compare experiences between two groups of parents;

those who had the trained expertise of the LBS-II Transition Specialist as a member of the IEP team and those who did not, during the later transition planning years for their child with Intellectual and / or Developmental Disabilities ages 18-21. Since 2003, four Illinois universities have offered the LBS-II Transition Specialist endorsement program to train special educators on both evidence-based practices and standards aligned to the Transition Specialist. Even though this advanced training has been available for some time, the number of reported LBS-II Transition Specialists continues to pale in comparison to the number of Illinois public schools and special education cooperatives responsible for educating special education students in transition-aged programs. Specifically, as of March 2017, the Illinois State Board of Education reported only 76 endorsed LBS-II Transition Specialists employed in Illinois schools compared to the over 500 schools serving students in transition aged programs for youth ages 14 ½ and older.

My study used a two-group comparative type design to analyze the transition experiences of parents whose children ages 18-21 were both identified as having Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities and currently enrolled in a special education program. A researcher designed survey was used to gather insight to their experiences. The survey was designed considering the works of Kohler et al., Johnson et al., and NSTTAC, along with recommended Transition Specialist competencies first identified in the work of Defur and Taymans (1995) and supported by the Council for Exceptional Children.

Participants who agreed to participate in the survey were asked to respond to questions in four themed blocks, or subscales as well as a series of demographic questions. The themes aligned with four of the five categories of the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0 including Student

Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development and Interagency Collaboration (Kohler, et al., 2016). There were no questions included for Program Structure. The survey design included a 6-point Likert-type numerical rating scale with the anchor end points of *Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree* to measure the presence of specific transition practices and activities in each area. Each themed block, or subscale of questions also included open-ended questions to allow participants an opportunity to provide commentary of their unique experiences aligned with each theme. The survey design also included several Importance questions using a similar 6-point Likert-type numerical rating scale with the anchor end points of *Extremely Important and Not Important At All*. These types of questions followed questions that were specific to transition mandated activities with intent of gathering information from parents as to how important each compliance area is specific to individuals with I/DD. The findings from this researcher designed survey sought to answer the research question:

How do the perceived experiences of parents differ between those having a LBS-II Transition Specialist present vs. those who did not in the follow areas? a) Student focused planning; b) Family engagement; c) Student development; d) Interagency collaboration; e) Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas; f) IEP team member transition knowledge; and g) Confidence that the transition planning process will result in successful post-school outcomes for their child with I/DD?

Review of Findings

Student-Focused Planning (Research question - subpart a)

The survey questions included in Block, or subscale 2 Student-Focused Planning, focused on practices in the areas of IEP development, student participation in transition planning, and transition planning strategies. This block, or subscale of questions queried the perception of

parents that the Transition Plan focused on the individual child and their goals for the future through opportunities promoting self-determination, self-management and student-directed activities. Such opportunities should have included active participation by the child with consideration of their individual strengths, interests and preferences in their post-secondary goals for each area of employment, education or training, and independent living skills being identified through the use of age-appropriate transition assessments (Kohler et al., 2016).

Research has identified six evidence-based practices promoting Student-Focused Planning, with the objective of each practice being to teach students to participate in their IEP / transition plan meeting (Mazzotti et al., 2013). Despite the limited availability of evidence-based practices, a list of in-school predictors for success (Test et al., 2013) and the Council for Exceptional Children's Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist's Competencies (CEC, 2013) provide added educational practices and skills that promote Student-Focused Planning. Test et al., 2013 identified self-determination and self-advocacy as two predictors of post-school success in all three areas of employment, education, and independent living. Schools recognized as model schools emphasized self-determination instruction (Steele et al., 2005). Southward and Kyzar, 2017, also concluded instruction in self-determination as one of seven predictors for successful employment outcomes. In addition to the emphasis on self-determination and self-advocacy in this category of the Taxonomy for Transition, Student-Focused Planning also relies on the use of age-appropriate transition assessments with results used to identify the student's strengths, interests and preferences in identifying their goals for the future. Instruction in age-appropriate transition assessments and curricular knowledge emphasizing self-determination and self-advocacy are included in the LBS-II training.

Results of my study revealed no difference in parent's perception of Student-Focused experiences when an LBS-II was present vs. not-present as part of the IEP team. Both groups' quantitative survey responses equally provide supporting evidence that the development of transition plans are student focused whether there is a specially trained educator on the team or not. Moreover, neither groups' quantitative responses suggest a 'strong agreement' that these in-school activities are occurring.

However, a comparison of the parents' responses to the open-ended question for Student-Focused Planning identifies a striking difference in the details regarding the specific nature of the student-focused activities in which their child participated. Parents from the LBS-II present group gave specific examples of in-school activities that support Student-Focused Planning such as teaching self-advocacy skills, problem solving, work training based on interests and preferences, self-evaluating likes and dislikes in community experiences, and student led IEPs. Conversely, parent comments from the non-LBS-II group did not include signs of rich practices as evidenced in their examples which included shopping, planning meals, and hands on internships in the community.

The disparity in written responses between the two groups suggests there is greater evidence of, and increased parent awareness of, Student-Focused Planning with the presence of the LBS-II, even if the parent doesn't recognize it when rating quantitative survey items. The IDEA requires only that there is evidence that the student is invited to their IEP meeting when transition planning is being discussed, it does not specifically indicate that the student actively participate. However, the advanced competencies for Transition Specialists recognize that including and preparing the student for the transition planning process as an essential skill for the

Transition Specialist (CEC, 2013). Within this block, or subscale of questions parents were also asked two questions regarding their children's involvement in the IEP / transition planning; first whether their child was invited to their IEP meeting and second whether the school prepared their child to actively participate in their meeting. Both groups indicated a higher level of agreement that their child was invited (LBS-II present = 5.74 and LBS-II not present = 5.4) compared to their perception of active participation in the IEP meeting (LBS-II present = 4.81 and LBS-II not present = 4.8). The disparity of mean scores between these two questions suggests there is still work to be done to not only promote active student participation and involvement in the IEP and transition planning process, but also and concurrently educating families of its importance and the specific activities including transition assessments and instruction that promote Student-Focused Planning.

Studies identifying positive correlations to successful post-school outcomes, including those conducted by Steele et al., 2005 and Southward & Kyzar, 2017, support the belief that instruction in self-advocacy and self-determination are strong predictors of success. Instruction is envisioned to improve the students' problem-solving, communication, decision making and assertiveness skills; essential skills for the student with a disability, especially I/DD, to actively participate in their IEP / Transition Plan. Using the Block, or subscale 2 mean scores from my research specific to activities promoting Student-Focused Planning, refutes the theory that the LBS-II is equipped with greater knowledge to promote and encourage Student-Focused Planning activities within the transition planning process. However, the qualitative data collected suggests otherwise with responders identifying instruction and opportunities aligned with the Taxonomy's Student-Focused Planning features including, IEP development, planning strategies and student

participation (Kohler et al., 2016). Further research of a larger sampling may provide the details necessary to support, or refute, that the LBS-II training promotes increased activities that encourage a transition planning process that is Student-Focused.

Family Engagement (Research question – subpart b)

The use of training modules has been identified as the sole evidence-based practice that promotes Family (Involvement) Engagement in transition planning (Mazzotti et al., 2013). The NSTTAC and the Taxonomy for Transition 2.0 suggest that fully engaging families in the transition process not only means involving the family but also empowering them to actively engage in the process while also giving them the tools and resources to prepare the entire family for life beyond school-based services (Test et al., 2013; Kohler et al., 2016). In Illinois, Institutions for Higher Education have included one required course on collaboration with families in teacher preparation courses, however, it is not specific to IEP / Transition Planning. The result is the assumption that many parents experience a transition planning process led by an educator that has no formal training in transition, and no formal training on how to engage the family in the educational process. Nurturing parent involvement through respectful, consistent, and repeated communication by educators is necessary for parents to get and feel that the transition to adult life was successful (Ankeny et al., 2009). Ankeny and colleagues (2009), determined from their qualitative study of four highly involved mothers of young adults with I/DD that the transition journey does not end when the students leave school and that it becomes the role of the parent to make important decisions regarding matters like living, medical, financial, and employment. Activities fostering Family Engagement while students are in school

are necessary to make that bridge for families when they leave the comfort of supports they have depended on for years leading up to their child's exit from school. These skills are embedded in the CEC Advanced Preparations Standards for the Transition Specialist.

In my study, the survey questions in Block, or subscale 3, Family Engagement, investigated the perception of parents as to how well they were informed, involved, engaged and collaborated with during various stages and activities in the transition planning process. The comparison of mean scores from my study revealed that the difference in parent's perception of experiences reinforcing family engagement was not statistically significant between the LBS-II present vs. not present groups.

A comparison of the qualitative data, specific to the parent's perception of being informed, involved, engaged and collaborated with during the process, finds a striking difference in the details provided in individual commentaries between the two groups. The results from the qualitative data of the LBS-II present group provides evidence of several of the LBS-II's acquired knowledge aligned with the CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist Standards specific to those promoting family engagement, including providing information and resources on self-advocacy and self-determination, include and prepare family members for the transition planning process, and promote active involvement of families throughout the transition decision-making and implementation process (CEC, 2013). Evidence of the CEC standards emerged in the rich and positive examples of Family Engagement activities reported by the LBS-II group and include; they set up tours to sites, they set up seminars, if there is a concern they contact the parent, they provide updates regarding goals that we have selected, they provide monthly updates, we are being consulted every step of the way, and we are included in all IEP

and planning meetings. Conversely, the details provided by parents without the LBS-II lack evidence and are vague, few, and less positive, including; we go to IEP meetings, we are provided regular seminars, and transition planning has not been discussed with our family. In their contributing work to the transition services language of IDEA 2004, Johnson et al., 2002 concluded that it is unclear how successful any strategies have been in creating meaningful and valued roles for parents. However, based on the quality of the parents' responses in my study, it is possible that the specialized training of the LBS-II not only enhances the educator's knowledge but that this knowledge translates into the skills necessary to meaningfully engage the families in the transition planning process.

My study also evidenced extreme variations in parent satisfaction among responders in the LBS-II group with results likening those from the studies conducted by Hanley-Maxwell and colleagues (1995) and Neece and colleagues (2009). Hanley-Maxwell et al., (1995), concluded from their qualitative study including parents of students with I/DD, that parents' experiences were described more positively when someone was overtly invested and somewhat knowledgeable in the transition process while concurrently building relationships with families. Comparably, Neece and colleagues (2009) concluded from their study of 128 parents of young adults with I/DD, that parent involvement in transition planning is a key variable related to overall transition satisfaction. Specifically, parental satisfaction was indicated by the presence of diversified and stimulating services or activities for the young adult, a well-executed transition plan, competent and sensitive service providers, and parents explicitly stating their satisfaction with transition. Likewise, parent dissatisfaction was the result of a lack of transition preparation and/or plan, poor quality of services, and explicitly reported as dissatisfied by the parent (Neece

et al., 2009). The parents in my study who reported being involved and engaged in the transition process also reported satisfaction and confidence that the transition planning services provided would result in positive outcomes for their child. A small representation of the responders in the LBS-II present group perceived their experiences specific to Family Engagement to be negative, with details included in their open-ended responses to suggest the lack of collaboration and of a knowledgeable educator to meet their needs in preparing their child for adult life. It is important to note that the responders with the most persistent negative perceptions of their experiences in Family Engagement were parents of students with Autism who were enrolled in a Special Education Cooperative separate school or facility. My study did not allow for discovery of how the LBS-II Transition Specialists were utilized in each participating agency, only that they were employed there. Further research would be needed to analyze the relationships between the parent, LBS-II and the IEP team members to gain a better understanding of this small groups negative experiences specific to engagement.

Student Development (Research question - subpart c)

Activities that foster Student Development represent the largest number of evidence-based practices according to the NLTS-2 (Mazzotti et al., 2013) and represent the majority of transition plan compliance mandates. Special educators need to look no further than what is written in the IDEA for specific examples of the laws intent, or at least minimal compliance specific to student development. Section 14-8.03 of IDEA indicates that transition services means a set of activities that include among other features instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, acquisition of

daily living skills, benefit planning, work incentives education, etc. (P.A. 98-517, eff. 8-22-13).

It is assumed that including some or all these activities that intend to promote student development into the transition plan would result in a plan meeting minimal compliance.

However, meeting minimal compliance does not always mean successful transition outcomes. In fact, the results from the Steele et al., (2005) study challenged whether successful outcomes for their subject pool of individuals with I/DD was the result of completing the requirements of the IEP prescribed by IDEA or the unique programs that individual schools offered, beyond minimal compliance. Recent case law has supported the notion that mere compliance is not acceptable. Strictly focusing on compliance standards result in a “woefully inadequate” transition plan was the determination in Somberg et al., v. Utica Community Schools (2016). Educators responsible for developing transition plans must also take into consideration the individual needs, interests and preferences of the student. Transition plans and programs cannot be one size fits all and meet that expectation.

Block, or subscale 4 of my study included the greatest number of questions in the survey and sought to gain insight to specific student development activities included in the students’ transition plans as perceived by the parent responders. Parents offered their perspective to the presence of Student Development activities promoting leisure and recreation, social skills, academic training, community integration and employment training. My study revealed using the mean score for the block, or subscale of questions specific to Student Development, that there was no significant difference in parent’s perception of experiences between those with the LBS-II present vs. not present. Like the previous two, Block, or subscale 4 included two open-ended questions allowing parents to provide commentary on opportunities fostering development

of independent living skills and employment/training skills. First and specific to activities promoting independent living skills, both groups gave specific examples that align with the suggestions written in IDEA and recognized as evidence based practices in the NLTS-2 (Cobb et al., 2013) including; community outings, job practice, community volunteering, cooking, high interest classes such as art, sports and fitness, learning laundry skills, work in a restaurant, and various opportunities to be social. However, responses from the LBS-II group evidenced a greater variety of positive student development opportunities inclusive of the Student Development practices identified in the Taxonomy. For those parents who selected to provide commentary on this question, their positive experiences were mostly associated with preparation for community participation and daily living activities. These rich experiences are encouraging in light of the recommendations of Henninger & Taylor (2014) in that parents of youth with I/DD perceive successful transition to include preparatory activities fostering independent living and social relationships. The second question specific to activities to promote employment / training skills, found less evidence of specific employment type activities, if at all. Responses varied from limited evidence of business partnerships such as Project Search, volunteering in nursing homes, or working with a job coach, to a complete lack of employment readiness opportunities. Of the sixteen LBS-II present respondents who completed this open-ended question, six indicated that their child had no opportunities for employment or volunteering in school. While these anecdotes do not align with the elevated mean scores specific to the question, *Employment skill development is provided in authentic (natural) settings, including school-based work and on-site structured work experiences*, they raise concern that despite the training received by the LBS-II to promote work experiences, they appear to be unsuccessful in

arranging a variety of work related experiences or inadequately informing families of the work training experiences being provided. Early or in-school work experience has been concluded as a high correlate to employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (Hart Barnett & Crippen, 2014; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Carter et al., 2012; Nord et al., 2013; & Samuels, 2015). Additionally, competitive employment has been identified as the highest indicator of successful transition for individuals with I/DD (Henninger & Taylor, 2014). The results of my study raise concern that even with the presence of the LBS-II that employment and occupational skill training is not consistently addressed in the transition plan. My study only considered the variable of the LBS-II and their influence on work experiences in the transition plan. Further research would be necessary to determine if the LBS-II training has a positive influence on employment experiences of individuals with I/DD during school, while also considering other variables identified in research as influential, including parent expectations and community perceptions. A larger study sample would be needed before concluding that schools are in part responsible for the disheartening employment trends of Individuals with I/DD, as supported in the research leading up to the signing of the Employment First legislation in Illinois.

An exploratory analysis comparing student development activities based on educational environments was also conducted. The results, based on parent reports of their child's inclusion in less restrictive educational environments vs. separate restrictive education environments, identified the variance of student development activities as approaching significance. Specifically, parents of students in more restrictive education environments did not agree that their child was included in student development activities to the same level as their peers in less restrictive environments. A Boolean search using keywords; educational environment,

intellectual disability and transition planning resulted in no peer-reviewed studies. A larger scale study would be necessary to support or refute these findings that a restrictive educational environment may have a negative impact on student development activities, regardless of educator training. However, despite the level of the educator's training, there are variables that remain out of their control when planning for such activities, specifically local resources available and the openness of local communities to include individuals with I/DD. LBS-II Transition Specialists also receive training in Program Structures. While the Taxonomy category of Program Structures was not included in my study, the results from this analysis suggest that educators, knowledgeable in activities that promote Students Development, be involved in the design and evaluation of all programs especially those provided in restrictive educational environments to ensure rich opportunities for successful transition planning. Future research to study the impact of the LBS-II in Program Structures across educational environments may support the early findings of McMahan & Baer (2001) that the strongest predictor of policy compliance and best practice is the existence of a school-based interagency transition team and refute or support their findings that transition specific training is a weaker predictor of best practice (McMahan & Baer, 2001).

Interagency Collaboration (Research question - subpart d)

Prior to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the importance of Interagency Collaboration was recognized as a key factor in successful transition planning. It is described as the context during the transition planning process for identifying and meeting the needs of both student and families (Hasazi et al., 1999). Johnson and colleagues (2002) concluded that special education

personnel must play a key role in making information available and assisting parents and students in accessing needed benefits. Specifically, they recommended a set of five practices for consideration in the successful transition to employment, education or community involvement. These five recommendations include; involvement by school personnel to ensure that community service agency participation systematically occurs in the development of post-school transition plans, that schools engage in integrated service planning, that school personnel provide information to parents on essential health and income maintenance programs, that schools promote collaborative employer engagement, and that they establish partnerships with workforce development entities. (Johnson et al., 2002). Not only is there evidence of these recommendations in the current IDEA, but these practices are captured in the CEC Standard of Collaboration in which the expected outcome for the special education specialist is to collaborate with stakeholders to improve programs, services, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families (CEC, 2013). Since there are no evidence-based practices identified as influencing Inter-Agency Collaboration (Mazzotti et al., 2013), educators and families alike have only one recourse and that is to rely on the person with the specialized knowledge for including inter-agency collaboration in the transition planning process. Noonan et al., (2008), identified strategies to improve interagency collaboration that did not rely on evidence-based practices, but on a strong infrastructure that valued the process. In addition to the eleven strategies they identified for promoting effective interagency collaboration, they also identified the importance of the ‘Transition Coordinator’ as the contributing factor for success.

The questions included in Block, or subscale 5 of my study investigated parents’ perceptions of how well their child’s transition program is supported through partnerships with

community-based program providers, state agencies or other representatives that could be responsible for supporting them upon exiting school. My study revealed using the mean score for the block, or subscale of questions specific to Interagency Collaboration, that there was no difference in parent's perception of experiences between those with the LBS-II present vs. not present. More importantly the mean scores for both groups was the lowest of the four blocks, or subscales with the LBS-II not present group's score nearing the neutral point on the 6-point scale. Like the previous three blocks, or subscales parents were given the opportunity to explain in greater detail the specific activities of the school that fostered interagency collaboration. The details provided by the LBS-II present group offered greater specificity for these activities that included knowledge of Illinois' two largest state agencies, in addition to the state's parent training program among other practices included in the skills defined in the CEC standards for the Transition Specialist. The richness in their narrative responses is strikingly more detailed than that of the LBS-II not present group, in which the common response was that information was mailed / emailed to them but without any detail of what was included. It was evident in the results of my study that a few parents had negative perceptions of their transition experiences. While their comments took a negative tone, they included specific evidence of attempts at agency involvement. However, these respondents also indicated that they did not give consent to the IEP team to invite outside agencies. The IDEA states, "To the extent appropriate, *with the consent of the parents or a child who has reached the age of majority*, in implementing the requirements of paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the public agency must invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services" (<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/comparison.pdf>). Without their prior consent to

invite potentially responsible agency representatives, the team would have no other recourse than to simply provide information about how to contact specific agencies.

In my professional experiences, I have discovered that the state and local agencies or systems in Illinois are complex, so much so that the idea of seamless transition and interagency collaboration is foreign to most in the educational system and requires ongoing and specialized training to support educators, families and individuals with disabilities. While the quantitative results of my study offer no evidence that the training of the LBS-II positively effects activities to foster interagency collaboration, the qualitative data does. My study supports that of Noonan et. al. (2008), that the ‘Transition Coordinator’ is the contributing factor for success in actualizing what they identified as the eleven strategies for effective interagency collaboration. While not all strategies were reported by my research participants, several activities were reported by the LBS-II group including, relationship building with multiple agency representatives, providing information to parents about adult agency contacts, types of available services and strategies for securing services.

Indicator 13 Transition Plan Compliance Mandates (Research question - subpart e)

Transition planning is embedded in the student’s IEP, it is not intended to be a stand-alone document. Indicator 13 is one indicator in the states’ Performance Plan and includes eight criteria to ensure that educators responsible for developing the plan address all required components. Data collected by ISBE suggests that the majority of Illinois school agencies, 97.5% in 2016, responsible for transition plan development believe that they are writing compliant plans. This is not the case though as evident through the ISBE’s audit of randomly

selected individual transition plans. Illinois Special Education Teacher preparation programs do not train potential teachers on how to write transition plans that include evidence-based practices or predictors. As a result, they are left to grapple with minimally addressing the eight areas of the Indicator 13 rubric.

My study included a series of questions embedded in the four main blocks, or subscales specifically addressing the activities of the Indicator 13 rubric. Parents were asked to respond to the level of agreement they perceived the specific activities occurring, and also to indicate how important they believed that each of these areas be included in their child's IEP/ITP. The interaction effect was not significant, indicating that the frequency and importance did not differ based upon the presence of the LBS-II on the IEP team or not. However, the results comparing the frequency vs. importance of the mandates (within-subjects effect) was significant. An examination of means indicates that parents rated the importance of including these required activities as greater than the frequency for which they perceived they were actually occurring. The results of my research question specific to *Vision for successful post-school outcomes based on federally required areas*, raises concern liken to those reported by the ISBE in their last publicized state performance plan in which only 8% of the districts' IEPs audited actually met the standards as outlined in IDEA for transition plans and services. The results of my study support their findings that required activities are not happening at the rate that they should be, or that educators believe they are. The Landmark & Zhang (2012) study identified a positive correlation between evidence of compliance and inclusion of transition practices, meaning that as the level of compliance increased, so did evidence of transition practices. They summarized that the low rate of compliance was in part attributed to educators' lack of fully understanding

transition planning policies. They concluded that all special educators need to have an adequate understanding of IDEA and its intent, specifically to transition. In a current scholarly article, Greene (2018) reaffirms this finding that transition plans lack quality and miss the standard of compliance. The findings from my study reinforce the notion that compliance matters, from the perspective of parents, and that educators whether they have received the specialized training for the LBS-II Transition Specialist endorsement or not continue to struggle in effectuating plans that rise above minimal compliance. While the LBS-II is better trained to be the architect of the transition plan, the responsibilities for actualizing the transition activities written in the IEP and the Transition Plan are shared by the entire IEP team. Continued professional development is necessary for all members of the IEP team, not only to maintain critical and current knowledge for developing the transition plan, but also to develop an understanding of the entire process that is more than simply checking off a list of required tasks, if the parents vision for successful post-school outcomes based on the intent of the IDEA can be realized.

Educator Knowledge in Transition Planning (Research question - subpart f)

Over a decade ago, and shortly after the passage of the current IDEA, researchers concluded that teachers need to understand the legal requirements of transition planning and must value the importance of the process to be effective in ensuring their students receive maximum benefits from the transition plan (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Similarly, Li and colleagues (2009) concluded that pre-service and in-service training positively affected the educator's involvement in areas of transition assessment and goal writing, yet teacher preparation programs provide minimal training in the area of transition. Research has

continuously reinforced the belief that educators perceive themselves as lacking transition knowledge. In a recent survey, responses from 483 educators concluded that the majority perceived themselves as lacking sufficient transition knowledge as gained through their higher education program (Plotner et al., 2016). Current research indicates that special education teacher preparation programs are deficient in including transition related content (Morningstar et al., 2018; Williams-Diehm et al., 2018). However, Illinois educators endorsed as LBS-II Transition Specialists have received the necessary training that should result in confident transition knowledge, influencing transition services planning and deliver, thereby resulting in positive parent perceptions.

My research hypothesis was that parents in the LBS-II present group would perceive their experiences in the areas of Student-Focused Planning, Family Engagement, Student Development, and Interagency Collaboration as richer in evidence-based practices as a result of having a specially trained IEP team member compared to the comparative group. While the mean results from each of the four blocks, or subscales of questions do not provide statistically significant data to support this hypothesis, the qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions provides some evidence that this hypothesis is true. To further gain insight as to whether the parents perceived a knowledgeable educator on their IEP team they were presented with a sole question asking if they agreed that the team included a presence of such a person. The mean results from the question specifically measuring parent perceptions of having one educator knowledgeable in strategies for effective transition planning including collaboration between family, school, adult agencies and community services in order for your child to achieve his /her transition goals was not significant. Furthermore, while not significant the mean results

from this question measured higher for the LBS-II not-present group compared to the LBS-II present group. The cause for the inversed results of this question could be the result of several factors, one being the unknown variable of the amount of transition related professional development received by IEP team members in the LBS-II not-present districts. Additionally, the parents' responses may compare to those from the Hasazi et al. (1999) study in which they found successful transition services implementation the result of caring educators and not evidence-based practices. While the parents of the LBS-II not-present group responded with a high level of agreement to the question, their comments to support their responses were weak as reported in subpart g.

Confidence in Successful Transition to Adult Life (Research question - subpart g)

A final open-ended question was included in my study to measure the parents' perception of how confident they are that the 'person' responsible for the transition plan, has added value to the transition planning process to result in a successful transition to adult life. Parents from both study groups who selected to respond to this final question and perceive the presence of a person knowledgeable in transition planning, express confidence in their child's successful transition from school to adult life. Conversely, those who responded negatively to the previous question provided supporting comments similar to those in earlier research including Bianco et al., 2009, in which parents expressed fear and anxiety associated with uncertainty for the future, and an unmet desire for a knowledgeable school team member to support them and their child in navigating the complex statewide systems. However, several respondents who identified with having a knowledgeable educator while also responding positively with their transition

experiences, still expressed concern for the future. Specifically, their responses indicate a lack of faith in both locally and state level resources available to them as they transition from school. This lack of faith as indicated by some participating parents is to no fault of the personnel responsible for writing the transition plan. These parents' responses resonate the fear and anxiety experienced by many, especially from parents of individuals with I/DD, and the presence of the trained LBS-II Transition Specialist does not completely decrease that anxiety from their perceptions of what has been identified as successful transition planning experiences throughout my study.

Intended Audience and Implications for Practice

The intended audience for my study includes Special Education Administrators responsible for hiring staff held accountable for the development of transition plans, and for policy makers in control of teacher preparation programs in Illinois.

The recently published edition (2018) of *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Children*, included a timely series of research studies specific to the preparation of special educators and transition. The collection of studies identified the lack of progress made in teacher preparation programs since the 2013 CEC approved the Advanced Preparation Standards for Transition Specialists (Morningstar et al., 2018). Furthermore, educator credentials and certifications required for ensuring compliance of transition plans has changed little since the original analysis conducted in 2001. Illinois remains one of eight states offering a specialized credential, the LBS-II Transition Specialist. Yet, Illinois does not require special educators responsible for writing transition plans to be credentialed to do so, nor does Illinois require IHEs

to include any transition related courses in the sequence leading to the LBS-I, special educator teaching degree (Simonsen et al., 2018).

Special education administrators, especially those providing programs and services for students ages 14 1/2 through 22 should be aware of these conditions and who they hold responsible for developing transition plans. In light of the recent Endrew F. (2017) Supreme Court ruling, administrators should consider the qualifications of the educator responsible for the plan to ensure transition goals and embedded services meet the appropriately ambitious standard of Endrew F. Special education administrators should consider, with caution, the findings of my study. Specifically, that parents of individuals with I/DD enrolled in post high school programs have richer knowledge of practices aligned to the Taxonomy for Transition, specifically Student Focused Planning, Student Development activities, increased Family Engagement, and Interagency Collaboration. They additionally should consider with caution the significance in my study specific to the comparison of compliance mandates versus actual provision of services, especially those provided in restrictive settings. Considering the necessary skills to create a compliant plan, provide family support, collaborate with stakeholders, and consistently evaluate local programs and services, administrators might consider ways to incentivize more teachers, especially those working in secondary through age 22 programs, to receive the LBS-II endorsement from the Illinois universities still offering the program.

Illinois policy makers and the Illinois State Board of Education might also consider my studies contribution to the body of research specific to educator knowledge. The parents in my study that receive the support of the knowledgeable LBS-II provided commentary in the qualitative data to suggest their knowledge increased as a result of the LBS-II. While the sample

is small, the data is meaningful to consider in light of the EEOPD Task Force recommendations. As previously noted, the four workgroups of the EEOPD Task Force presented at a Joint Committee Hearing in Springfield, IL in February 2018. The representatives presented the Transition Workgroup's recommendations to address the mission of the EEOPD including: 1) make LBS-II Transition Specialist training more widely available in Illinois and, 2) require each school district have available to them the services of at least one LBS-II Transition Specialist. Policy makers should consider these recommendations or reconsider the required course sequence for the LBS-I to require transition related courses aligned to the CEC Advanced Standards with consideration of the Taxonomy for Transition. Furthermore, it is evident based on the ISBE's Indicator 13 desk audits that special educators in Illinois lack the necessary skills and knowledge to not only meet the compliance indicators required by IDEA, but to also include rich transition practices and services that are results-oriented. Policy makers should consider the need for a knowledgeable educator to be responsible for this requirement while promoting parent satisfaction and positive post-school outcomes. ISBE should give additional consideration to standardized parent training. Parent responses suggest frustration from their lack of knowledge specific to what is required and what should be expected in the transition process.

From the perspective of this small group of parents, there is reason to suggest that the LBS-II is valuable in developing plans, providing transition services that go beyond minimal compliance and arming parents with necessary knowledge. Parents of individuals with disabilities should expect the same level of high qualifications required for all teachers in Illinois in designing their child's plan for future success.

Study Limitations

Findings from my study should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the number of parent participants was small with my recruitment method of mailing letters leaving no opportunity to obtain a larger sample. One of the greatest challenges in completing this study was identifying potential qualifying participants. Securing commitment from school districts and special education cooperatives to assist in my research required multiple follow-up attempts, with several agencies either not responding or lacking interest. However, there remained enough commitment from the remaining agencies to provide a large enough sampling of potential parent participants, (N=836). Unfortunately, the lack of parent response in addition to final usable surveys, resulted in an extremely small sample size, (N=37). Due to the small sample size my study results should be interpreted with caution. Because the mode of communication with potential parent participants was via one mailed letter, there was no means for follow-up.

Additional limitations in my study include the demographics selected, including the specific geographic area and disability categories. The geographic area used for my study was intentional in that it represents a region of Illinois rich in resources, both locally and from state agencies. Opportunities for individuals with I/DD vary based on the resources available to them. Selecting participants from only Illinois and only from this region of the state limits how the results can be generalized across the state and to other states. Using purposive sampling and restricting potential participants to only those whose child is identified as I/DD while residing in this region of Illinois limits the ability to generalize the results to a greater population. Moreover, due to the small sample size, my study should also not be generalized to within this disability group.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should consider altering the method of recruiting participants to email communication between participating agencies and parents via their student information system, thereby allowing for repeating reminders to complete the survey. Emailing the parent letter requesting them to participate would include an accessible survey link. This type of methodology in recruiting participants would eliminate the work imposed on the district / cooperative staff to address and mail letters, while also removing the burden from parents to type in the URL for the survey on-line.

Valuable information collected from the study emerged from the qualitative data. Future researchers interested in measuring the value of the LBS-II Transition Specialist, specific to their influence in effectuating positive transition experiences resulting in positive post-school outcomes might consider solely a qualitative methodology as the best way to measure this construct or a mixed method research design, while still approaching the study as a comparative type. The importance of mixed methods in special education research has been recognized as enriching the researcher's ability to answer questions that cannot be answered in any other way. Additionally, using both quantitative and qualitative data provides a complete picture of experiences that allow the researcher to more quickly understand and achieve their research goals (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004 p. 113).

There is a large body of transition focused research that includes all disability types (Cobb et al., 2013) while a gap in the research exists specifically to effective practices for successful post-school outcomes for the disability group of I/DD. Secondary analyses of the

NLTS-2 have included studies to identify practices during school that positively influence post-school outcomes. Yet, additional research is still needed to identify effective practices that result in successful post-school outcomes for this disability category. In effort to collect data from a larger sample, future research might include a larger scale comparative study to measure the effectiveness of the LBS-II in diverse geographic regions across the state. Additional dependent variables to consider might include rural vs. suburban communities. Furthermore, and similar to the secondary analysis studies conducted using results of the NLTS-2, future research may also consider using the LBS-II independent variable while collecting longitudinal data from parents of individuals with I/DD during and following school, potentially giving greater insight to the value of the LBS-II Transition Specialist.

My researcher designed survey did not include Program Structure due to the unlikeliness of parents possessing information regarding the specifics of policies and procedures, strategic planning, resource development and allocation, or the remaining features of this domain. The survey questions offer valuable insight to program characteristics and could be useful in evaluating local transition programs. Future practical use of the survey with modifications in identifying the target responder could be beneficial to special education administrators in evaluating local programs and identifying transition planning and service gaps.

Concluding Remarks

Measures of compliance in transition planning are the same for each student regardless of their disability classification or the severity of the individual's disability. As a result, if special education administrators and educators only consider the *bureaucratic* need to meet the minimal

compliance standards, they most probably will fail to address the *unique programmatic needs* of each individual with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. My study sought to identify whether the specialized training of the LBS-II added value to the unique programmatic needs and the transition experiences of individuals with I/DD from the perception of their parents. While my study sample was small there is evidence to suggest that the knowledge possessed by the LBS-II does in fact provide richer transition experiences that the parents can specifically identify.

Research has repeatedly confirmed that special educators and direct-service transition personnel lack knowledge as a result of their university preparation programs to effectively plan for and deliver transition services (Plotner et al., 2016; Benitez et al., 2009). Additionally, targeted and isolated professional development opportunities for those working with transition age youth have been measured as “minimal”, (Benitez et al.), or insufficiently raising educator knowledge, (Finn & Kohler, 2010). While being a caring educator is an essential quality, parents should not have to rely on a caring ‘savior’ teacher (Henley-Maxwell et al., 1995) that lacks knowledge, to be responsible for their child’s transition plan and services.

Whether institutions for higher education adjust teacher preparation programs to include additional coursework specific to transition planning for all future special educators, or policy makers heed to the recommendations of the Transition Work Group and require a greater presence of the specialized endorsement, there is evidence from my study to suggest that the knowledge of the LBS-II Transition Specialist makes a difference. The Employment First legislation is a call to action to close the employment gap for individuals with disabilities. While employment outcomes only represent one-third of the transition post-school outcomes it is the

outcome that has gained the most attention both locally and nationally. Schools have a legal obligation to prepare the student with a disability for employment through the transition plan. Yet, special education teacher preparation programs provide no training on how to accomplish this task or for providing instruction to improve skills for independent living.

Research has proven repeatedly that educators are cognizant of what they don't know specific to transition planning. However, parents don't always know what they don't know or what they need to know to successfully transition their child from the school supports they have become accustomed to, to the complexities of our state systems and adult life. What is clear from the responses of the parents who participated in my study is that they appreciate having the knowledge of a transition specialist on their IEP team when planning for transition to adult life for their child with I/DD or they are in need of someone knowledgeable to assist in creating plans that focus on their child, that understand what activities will promote the student's development, that possesses the knowledge and skills to effectively collaborate with all stakeholders and has the flexibility to efficiently and effectively engage the family throughout the process. Parents don't know what they don't know or what they need to know to assist their child with an intellectual and / or development disability to successfully transition to adult life. Parents should not be left to figure it out on their own.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCHER DESIGNED SURVEY

Researcher Designed Survey

Key:

K	J	N	C	M
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K – Kohler’s Taxonomy (46 questions)

J – Johnson (23 questions)

N – NSTTAC (32 questions)

C – CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist competencies (54 questions)

M – Indicator 13 mandates (20 questions)

Open ended questions – (6 questions)

Directions: Parents will be asked to respond to the questions using the following rating scale:

Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
6	5	4	3	2		1

Questions designated with a * are aligned with Indicator 13 mandates. These questions will use the following rating scale:

Extremely Important						Not at All Important
6	5	4	3	2		1

Questions designated with a ** are open ended questions aligned to the unique knowledge of the LBS-II and parents will be asked to provide qualitative responses in a text box.

Student Focused Planning

				M
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1) *Your child is invited to his or her IEP / Transition meetings.

				M
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2) *How important is it to you that your child is invited to his / her IEP
/Transition meeting?

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

- 3) The school prepares your child to not only attend but to actively participate in the IEP / Transition meeting.

K			C	
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- 4) Transition goals and objectives result from your child's wishes for adult life.

K			C	M
---	--	--	---	---

- 5) *Age appropriate transition assessments (e.g., student or parent surveys, interest inventories, questionnaires) are used for transition planning.

				M
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- 6) *How important is it that these types of transition assessments are used to identify your child's strengths, interests and preferences for your child's transition plan?

K			C	M
---	--	--	---	---

- 7) *Your child's strengths, interests and preferences are identified and inspire the planning strategies to achieve their post-school goal in the area of **employment**.

K			C	M
---	--	--	---	---

- 8) *Your child's strengths, interests and preferences are identified and inspire the planning strategies to achieve their post-school goal in the area of **education and / or training**.

K			C	M
---	--	--	---	---

- 9) *Your child's strengths, interests and preferences are identified and inspire the planning strategies to achieve their post-school goal in the area of **independent living**.

K			C	M
---	--	--	---	---

- 10) *Your child's IEP is individualized to his/her needs, and learning outcomes focus on **their** goals for employment, education and /or training, and independent living.

				M
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11) *How important is it that post-school goals are included for all three areas of employment, education and/or training and independent living?

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

12) Goals for how your child will participate and live in the community are discussed and based on yours and your child's choice.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

13) Recreation and leisure goals are discussed and based on yours and your child's choice.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

14) The transition plan considers your child's future needs within integrated settings (e.g., park district programs).

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

15) The transition plan addresses your child's personal needs in financial, medical and guardianship planning.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

16) The responsibilities of the IEP team, the family and any agency representatives are discussed as part of the Transition Plan.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

17) Transition planning at your child's school focuses on teaching self-determination, self-management, and student-directed activities that will prepare your child for life after school.

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

18) **Please explain opportunities your child has had to promote self-determination, self-management and student-directed activities.

Family Engagement

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

19) Transition planning has been a true partnership, meaning both family and school participate in developing the transition plan and there is commitment from all parties.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

20) Transition planning continuously considers your wishes as a parent.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

21) As the parent, you are supported by the IEP / Transition team in identifying high yet reasonable expectations for your child.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

22) Transition goals are jointly developed between the family and school.

K			C	
---	--	--	---	--

23) School personnel engage in pre-IEP transition planning activities with you or other family members.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

24) School personnel supports ~~to~~ the family by increasing your knowledge and skills so that you can continue in a support role after your child completes school.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

25) Your family's needs have been identified and school personnel have assisted you in connecting with support networks and service providers.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

26) School personnel have provided parent training and transition specific information to support you and your child through the transition process.

	J		C	
--	---	--	---	--

27) There is minimally one person from the school who effectively consults and collaborates with you, your child and other professionals.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

28) As the parent, you have been actively involved in the entire transition planning process **including transition assessment**.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

29) As the parent, you have been actively involved in the entire transition planning process **including evaluation of your child's transition program**.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

30) As the parent, you have been actively involved in the entire transition planning process **including being present at IEP and other planning meetings.**

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

31) As the parent, you have been actively involved in the entire transition planning process **including being involved in decision making for your child.**

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

32) ****Please explain in greater detail how the school has involved the family in the transition planning process.**

Student Development

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

33) The school supports your child in the development of decision making, communication, and self-advocacy skills.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

34) Instruction and transition services are provided in an integrated or community based setting, at least part-time.

				M
--	--	--	--	---

35) ***Post-secondary goals in all areas** of employment, education and/or training and independent living are updated annually.

				M
--	--	--	--	---

36) ***How important is it that the school annually reviews** and updates your child's post high-school goals in **all areas** of employment, education and/or training and independent living?

			C	M
--	--	--	---	---

37) ***Annual IEP goals are written that relate to your child's need for Transition Services (e.g., academic coursework, skills for independence, employment skills).**

				M
--	--	--	--	---

38) *How important is it that the school annually updates IEP goals related to the transition services in the IEP?

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

39) Your child's transition program provides opportunities for career exploration and career awareness.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

40) Employment skill development is provided in authentic (natural) settings, including school-based work and on-site structured work experiences.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

41) Transition practices at your child's school promotes employment outcomes as noted in their practices to include career development opportunities and employment readiness through a vocational program model.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

42) Local businesses provide opportunities for work related experiences, including volunteering.

K		N	C	M
---	--	---	---	---

43) *The transition plan and services provide opportunities to strengthen **independent living skills** (e.g., safety, cooking, first aid and financial management).

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

44) The transition plan and services provide opportunities to strengthen **interpersonal skills**.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

45) The transition plan and services provide opportunities to strengthen **leisure skills**.

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

46) The transition plan and services provide opportunities to strengthen **transportation skills.**

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

47) The transition plan and services provide opportunities to strengthen **social skills.**

				M
--	--	--	--	---

48) *How important is it that the IEP contains transition services (e.g., leisure and recreation, social skills, academic training, community integration) that will enable your child to meet his or her post-high school goals?

K		N	C	
---	--	---	---	--

49) The transition plan includes environmental adaptations, accommodations, and natural supports necessary for your child to be successful in school and community settings.

K		N	C	M
---	--	---	---	---

50) *There is a course of study, (i.e., academic classes and electives) included in the IEP that will help your child to meet their post high-school goals.

				M
--	--	--	--	---

51) *How important is it that the IEP contain a four-year course of study?

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

52) **Please give examples for how your child's post high-school program has enhanced social opportunities, leisure opportunities, and opportunities to promote independent living skills.

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

53) **Please give examples of how your child's transition plan has provided opportunities for employment / volunteering beyond their school program.

Interagency Collaboration

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

54) Your child's transition program is supported through partnerships established with community-based program providers (e.g., Independent Service Coordinator Agencies (formerly PAS agencies), social service agencies, Department of Rehabilitative Services).

K	J	N	C	M
---	---	---	---	---

55) *Representative(s) of any participating agency potentially responsible for providing or paying for transition services are invited to the IEP meeting.

				M
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56) *How important is it that agency representatives be invited to the IEP meeting where transition services are discussed?

				M
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57) *As the parent, you have provided signed consent authorizing the school to share information regarding your child to relevant service providers.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

58) School personnel have fully explained information necessary for guardianship, DRS services, DHS supports and application to PUNS.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

59) School personnel have made you aware of what adult service agencies are available for your student after school and what each agency provides.

K	J		C	
---	---	--	---	--

60) School personnel have provided support and assistance in understanding the complexities of state agency operating systems.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

61) School personnel have assisted with linkages to adult service providers, offering assistance for site visits.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

62) Participation from representatives of vocational rehabilitation, community service agencies and adult service providers systematically occurs in the development of the Transition Plan.

K	J	N	C	
---	---	---	---	--

63) The school personnel assist with making connections to assist with financial planning, navigating health care services, adult disability services and supported employment opportunities.

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

64) **Please give examples of how the school provides opportunities for agency collaboration to discuss potential supports for your child's life after school.

			C	
--	--	--	---	--

65) The school team minimally has one person who is knowledgeable in strategies for effective transition planning which includes collaboration between family, school, adult agencies and community services in order for your child to achieve his /her transition goals.

66) **If you Agree or Strongly Agree with this question, please explain how confident you are that this staff has added value to the transition planning process to result in a successful transition to adult life.

Demographic information

67) Is your child

a. Male

b. Female

68) How old is your child?

- a.18
- b.19
- c.20
- d.21

69) Which of the following best describes the type of educational setting your child attends.

- a.District High School
- b.District High School program in community-based setting
- c.Special Education Cooperative program in High School setting
- d.Special Education Cooperative community-based setting
- e.Special Education Cooperative separate school or facility

70) How long has your child been attending their current program?

- a.Less than 1 year
- b.1 to 2 years
- c.2 to 3 years
- d.More than 3 years

71) What disability best describes your child?

- a.Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disability
- b.Severe Intellectual Disability
- c.Autism
- d.Autism and Intellectual Disability

- e. Multiple Disabilities (ie: 3 or more disabilities that may include Intellectual Disability, Autism, Orthopedic Impairment, Health Impairment, Vision Impairment, hearing Impairment)
- f. None of the above

APPENDIX B

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVES

IN RESEARCH REGION, BY COUNTY

DISTRICT NAME	COUNTY
TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 211	COOK
TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 214	COOK
NW SUBURBAN SP ED ORG-NSSEO DISTRICT 805	COOK
NEW TRIER TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203	COOK
NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 225	COOK
MAINE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 207	COOK
NILES TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 219	COOK
EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 202	COOK
OAK PARK & RIVER FOREST DISTRICT 200	COOK
J S MORTON HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 201	COOK
LEYDEN COMM HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 212	COOK
RIDGEWOOD COMM HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 234	COOK
ELMWOOD PARK COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 401	COOK
LEYDEN AREA SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE DISTRICT 83	COOK
PROVISO TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 209	COOK
PROVISO AREA EXCE CHILD-PAEC DISTRICT 803	COOK
LYONS TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 204	COOK
RIVERSIDE BROOKFIELD TOWNSHIP DISTRICT 208	COOK
LAGRANGE AREA DEPT SP ED-LADSE DISTRICT 204	COOK

ARGO COMM HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 217	COOK
REAVIS TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 220	COOK
OAK LAWN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 229	COOK
EVERGREEN PARK COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 231	COOK
AERO SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE DISTRICT 806	COOK
COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 218	COOK
EISENHOWER COOPERATIVE DISTRICT 127.5	COOK
THORNTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 205	COOK
THORNTON FRACTIONAL TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 215	COOK
EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN HAVE OPPORTUNITIES - ECHO DISTRICT 150	COOK
LEMONT TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 210	COOK
BREMEN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 228	COOK
CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 230	COOK
SOUTHWEST COOK COUNTY COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION DISTRICT 142	COOK
BLOOM TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 206	COOK
RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227	COOK
HOMEWOOD FLOSSMOOR COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 233	COOK
SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE OF SOUTH COOK COUNTY (SPEED) DISTRICT 802	COOK
HINSDALE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 86	DUPAGE
DU PAGE HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 88	DUPAGE

COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 94	DUPAGE
COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 99	DUPAGE
WESTMONT COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 201	DUPAGE
LISLE COMMUNITY UNIT SCH DISTRICT 202	DUPAGE
ELMHURST SCHOOL DISTRICT 205	DUPAGE
THE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION DUPAGE-SASED DISTRICT 803	DUPAGE
GLENBARD TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 87	DUPAGE
COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION- CASE DISTRICT 15	DUPAGE
NAPERVILLE COMMUNITY UNIT DISTRICT 203	DUPAGE
INDIAN PRAIRIE COMMUNITY UNIT SCH DISTRICT 204	DUPAGE
FENTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 100	DUPAGE
LAKE PARK COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 108	DUPAGE
NORTH DUPAGE SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE DISTRICT 802	DUPAGE
COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 200	DUPAGE
ROUND LAKE AREA SCHOOLS - DISTRICT 116	LAKE
ANTIOCH COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 117	LAKE
WAUCONDA COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 118	LAKE
MUNDELEIN CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 120	LAKE
WARREN TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 121	LAKE
GRANT COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 124	LAKE

ZION-BENTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 126	LAKE
GRAYSLAKE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 127	LAKE
LIBERTYVILLE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 128	LAKE
NORTH CHICAGO SCHOOL DISTRICT 187	LAKE
SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT OF LAKE COUNTY-SEDOL DISTRICT 825	LAKE
ADLAI E STEVENSON DISTRICT 125	LAKE
EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS' COLLABORATIVE DISTRICT 801	LAKE
WAUKEGAN COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 60	LAKE
BARRINGTON COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 220	LAKE
TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 113	LAKE
LAKE FOREST COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 115	LAKE
NORTHERN SUBURBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT, DISTRICT 804	LAKE
LAKE ZURICH COMMUNITY UNIT SCH DISTRICT 95	LAKE

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

Christine Putlak, Assistant Director
 A.E.R.O. Special Education Cooperative
 7600 S. Mason Avenue
 Burbank, Il. 60459

Dear Fellow Special Education Administrators:

My name is Christine Putlak and I am currently completing my doctoral degree at Northern Illinois University. My research project is titled “The Effects of a Highly Qualified Transition Specialist on Successful Transition Planning for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities”. I am in the process of identifying potential participants for my study and need your assistance. My study will include parents of students with disabilities that are currently enrolled in post high school programs for students ages 18-21. More specifically, students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) currently enrolled in programs in Cook, DuPage, or Lake Counties, Illinois.

The intent of my study is to compare the transition experiences of parents whose children are enrolled in programs that have an ISBE endorsed LBS-II Transition Specialist as a member of the IEP team versus those that do not include this specially trained LBS-II. All High School Districts, Unit School Districts and Special Education Cooperatives in Cook, DuPage and Lake counties (excluding Chicago Public Schools) are being asked to participate in my study. Please reply to this email with responses to this brief questionnaire by **April 20, 2018** to determine if your district / cooperative would have likely participants and whether or not your district / cooperative is willing to assist in my research.

- 1) Does your district / cooperative provide special education programs to students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities ages 18-21? Yes or No
 (If NO, thank you for your time. You do not need to respond to the remaining questions.)
- 2) If yes, would you be willing to assist in my research study? Yes or No
- 3) If yes, does your district / cooperative employ at least one staff member with the ISBE endorsement of LBS-II Transition Specialist included on their Professional Educator License? Yes or No
- 4) If willing to participate, would you affix mailing labels on parent letters that will be provided you in stamped, sealed envelopes? Yes or No

- 5) Upon receipt of the parent letters, you agree to affix mailing labels and mail via USPS within 5 business days. Yes or No
- 6) If willing to participate, please indicate how many students are currently enrolled in your post high school / transition program? ____ (this is the number of letters that will be sent to you for mailing)
- 7) Please include the following information for where parent letters should be sent.
 - a. District Name
 - b. District Address
 - c. Please indicate to whose attention the letters should be sent.

I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this research project. If you have any additional questions regarding this letter or the process, please feel free to call me at 708-496-5616.

Respectfully,

Christine Putlak
Doctoral Candidate, Northern Illinois University

APPENDIX D

EMAIL TO SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS: REVISED

Dear Fellow Special Education Administrators:

My name is Christine Putlak and I am currently completing my doctoral degree at Northern Illinois University. My research project is titled "*The Effects of a Highly Qualified Transition Specialist on Successful Transition Planning for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*". I am in the process of identifying potential participants for my study and need your assistance. My study will include **parents of students with Intellectual/Developmental disabilities** that are currently enrolled in post high school programs for students ages 18-21.

The intent of my study is to compare the transition experiences of parents whose children are enrolled in programs that have an ISBE endorsed LBS-II Transition Specialist as a member of the IEP team versus those that do not have an LBS-II. **All High School Districts, Unit School Districts and Special Education Cooperatives in Cook, DuPage and Lake counties (excluding Chicago Public Schools) are being asked to respond to this brief set of questions to determine eligibility for my study.** Please reply to this brief questionnaire by **April 27, 2018** to determine if your district / cooperative would have likely parent participants and whether or not your district / cooperative is willing to assist in my research.

- 1) Does your district / cooperative provide special education programs to students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities ages 18-21? Yes or No
(If NO, thank you for your time. You do not need to respond to the remaining questions.)
- 2) If yes, would you be willing to assist in my research study? **This would only require you to address and mail within 5 days of receipt, pre-stamped parent letters that I will provide you.** Yes or No
- 3) If you are willing to participate, please indicate how many students are currently enrolled in your post high school / transition program? ____ (this is the number of letters that will be sent to you for mailing)
- 4) Please include the following information for where parent letters should be sent.
 - a. District Name
 - b. District Address
 - c. Please indicate to whose attention the letters should be sent.
- 5) Does your district / cooperative employ at least one staff member with the ISBE endorsement of LBS-II Transition Specialist included on their Professional Educator License? Yes or No

I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this research project. If you have any additional questions regarding this letter or the process, please feel free to call me at 708-496-5616.

Respectfully,
Christine Putlak, Doctoral Candidate, Northern Illinois University

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO PARENTS WITHOUT AN LBS-II TRANSITION SPECIALIST

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Parent,

My name is Christine Putlak and I am currently completing my doctoral degree at Northern Illinois University. You have received this letter with the assistance of the special education administrator at your school district or special education cooperative, as a likely participant for my research study. My research seeks to gain information from you as the parent of a student currently enrolled in a post high-school program for students ages 18-21 with identified Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Cook, DuPage or Lake Counties, IL.

In Illinois, it is required that beginning at age 14 ½, a Transition Plan be included with the student's Individual Education Program with the intent of preparing the student for post high-school life in three areas: continuing or adult education, employment and/or training, and independent living. I am interested in learning about your transition experiences as the parent of a young adult receiving services in a post-high school program. You represent a unique subgroup that can potentially offer great insight to the transition practices in not only our region of Illinois but statewide. Please consider taking 10-15 minutes of your valuable time to complete the survey. You may reference your child's Transition Plan to assist you in completing the survey. Surveys are best completed on a computer and not a Smart Device and will remain open until June 30, 2018.

You can access the survey by typing in the following URL in your internet browser.

<http://bit.ly/CPutlak1>

Your willingness to participate in my research study is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Christine Putlak
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX F

LETTER TO PARENTS WITH AN LBS-II TRANSITION SPECIALIST

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Parent,

My name is Christine Putlak and I am currently completing my doctoral degree at Northern Illinois University. You have received this letter with the assistance of the special education administrator at your school district or special education cooperative, as a likely participant for my research study. My research seeks to gain information from you as the parent of a student currently enrolled in a post high-school program for students ages 18-21 with identified Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Cook, DuPage or Lake Counties, IL.

In Illinois, it is required that beginning at age 14 ½, a Transition Plan be included with the student's Individual Education Program with the intent of preparing the student for post high-school life in three areas: continuing or adult education, employment and/or training, and independent living. I am interested in learning about your transition experiences as the parent of a young adult receiving services in a post-high school program. You represent a unique subgroup that can potentially offer great insight to the transition practices in not only our region of Illinois but statewide. Please consider taking 10-15 minutes of your valuable time to complete the survey. You may reference your child's Transition Plan to assist you in completing the survey. Surveys are best completed on a computer and not a Smart Device and will remain open until June 30, 2018.

You can access the survey by typing in the following URL in your internet browser.

<http://bit.ly/CPutlak2>

Your willingness to participate in my research study is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Christine Putlak
Doctoral Candidate