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Running Head: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS RELATED TO TRANSITION
PLANNING

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS RELATED TO TRANSITION PLANNING
THAT SUPPORT THEIR PURSUIT OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

by

Nancy Johal Singh

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Special Education

In the

Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA

2019

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS RELATED TO TRANSITION PLANNING

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, Davinder Singh Johal, who taught me to work hard and set very high expectations for me throughout my life. His constant motivation has given me the confidence to pursue things I never imagined could be possible for me. To my mother, Lovleen Johal, who always believed in my ability to accomplish all of my goals. To my brother, Tarvinder Johal, thank you for still being there to support me through all of the significant milestones in my life. To my son, Avi Singh, and my daughter, Eva Singh, who have been supportive and patient with me on my dissertation journey, I hope you learned to never give up on your dreams from watching me work towards earning this doctorate. To my past, present, and future students, thank you for inspiring me every day to become a better educator. I wish all of you achieve the goals you set for yourselves.

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to understand the influence that transition planning had on the pursuit of postsecondary education based on the perceptions of students with disabilities. The present study was guided by the following research question: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? A qualitative research design involving case study methods was chosen for the six-month investigation. The essential reason for utilizing case study methods was to provide rich data using a smaller sample size of participants. The participants in the present study included three first-year college students with disabilities and one senior high school student with disabilities. Other participants included four (4) parents and two (2) lead high school special education teachers in the school district from which the students graduated. Data collection involved in-depth biographical interviews with student participants, open-ended interviews with students, parents, and lead special education teachers, document review, and student-generated visual representations. These multiple data sources were analyzed using the constant comparative method throughout the study. The constant comparative method of data analysis involves using information from data collection and comparing it to emerging themes. The Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the framework upon which results were analyzed, findings were explicated, and assertions were formulated.

The five major assertions of this study are: (1) students with disabilities must have access to equitable opportunities to examine their postsecondary life options as do their typically developing peers by being provided critical guidance and support from their teachers; (2) this critical guidance and support needs to be offered through a comprehensive transition planning process that begins before the transition planning meeting and extends well into and beyond the

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transition planning meeting; (3) students with disabilities must be actively involved in the transition planning process in order to chart their own course in life post-high school; (4) parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential, but must be accompanied by coaching, encouragement, advising, and support by external stakeholders as well; and (5) collaboration by internal and external stakeholders in the transition planning process is essential if students with disabilities are to realize their postsecondary goals, particularly if those goals include postsecondary education.

Keywords: transition planning; students with disabilities; postsecondary education; Social Cognitive Career Theory; Choice-Making model

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Within the past two decades, increased importance related to postsecondary education for high school students with disabilities has become a reality for individuals who desire to continue their education beyond secondary school in the United States (Cheatham, Smith, Elliott, & Friedline, 2013; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Madaus & Shaw 2006; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey 2009). Students with disabilities are now deciding to pursue secondary education more often than ever before (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Hong, 2015; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), 99% of medium-sized and 100% of large-sized public postsecondary institutions reported enrolling students with disabilities in the 2008-09 academic year (Hadley, 2017). Before the 1970s, postsecondary education institutes did not admit students with disabilities (Grigal, Hart, & Papay, 2018).

Postsecondary education currently is a crucial transition outcome for students with disabilities due to the influence of a college degree on future adult outcomes (Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Students with disabilities are still less likely than their peers without disabilities to apply to colleges (Kosine, 2007; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009; Stodden, Stodden, Kim-Rupnow, Thai, & Galloway, 2003; Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004). Although students with disabilities have transition services embedded in their Individual Education Programs (IEP), they continue to lack knowledge of their postsecondary education options (Trainor, 2005). The literature strongly suggests that during transition planning meetings students do not, typically, receive in-depth information, such as which institutions they should research, what requirements are needed for successful enrollment, college entrance exams, and about postsecondary education in general (Garrison-Wade, 2012; Trainor, Morningstar, &

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Murray, 2016). As a result, many students with disabilities are ill-equipped to make informed decisions about life after high school in general and about the options they may qualify for in postsecondary education, specifically (Bangser, 2008; Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Although legislation is in place to support high school students with disabilities to enroll in postsecondary institutions, the actual percentage of students with disabilities who decide to pursue postsecondary education continues to be low in comparison to their typically developing peers (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer, 2011). Most careers today require some postsecondary education, and if students with disabilities are not pursuing higher education, they may not qualify for competitive employment. For students with disabilities currently enrolled in postsecondary institutions, it is crucial to explore what prompted them to pursue postsecondary education. Knowing these reasons may hold implications for special education policy and the implementation of transition services. Did their transition planning influence or play a role in their decision to attend postsecondary education, and if so, how? It seems important to investigate how students with disabilities arrive at college, what prompted them to pursue postsecondary education, and what keeps them motivated to continue (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009; Naugle, Campbell, & Gray, 2010).

Relevant Overview of Special Education

In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was passed by Congress to guarantee students with disabilities a free appropriate education in all public schools throughout the U.S. that received federal funding (Pazey & Yates, 2018; Sarason & Doris, 1977). Under this law, students with disabilities are evaluated, and an individualized

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educational program is created with parental input (Wolfendale, 2017). In 1990, Congress reauthorized the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) and changed its title to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). IDEA, as it is known, also requires public schools to provide students with disabilities the same educational opportunities as typical developing students (Kauffman, Hallahan, Pullen, & Badar, 2018). IDEA includes six elements that are crucial to its implementation: formulation of an Individual Education Program (IEP), Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), instruction in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Appropriate Evaluation by an interdisciplinary team, Parent and Teacher Participation in the interdisciplinary team, and Procedural Safeguards (Carson, 2015; Osborne & Bon, 2013; Yell, 1995). In addition to the six elements, IDEA also mandated the Confidentiality of Information, Transition Services, and Discipline (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Osborne & Bon, 2013). Thus, in the field of Special Education, several mandates and documents are significant to students with an eligible disability.

According to the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, every student with an eligible disability served in special education in public schools is required by law to have an IEP (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Osborne & Bon, 2013). The process for becoming eligible for special education services involves the student initially receiving a referral by either their teacher(s) or their parents/guardians. Once a referral is made and parents give their consent for having their child evaluated, the school psychologist meets with the student several times to complete his or her psychological evaluation (Act, 2019). The school psychologist also requests information from parents and the student's teachers to make a final determination on whether the student is eligible for receiving services in the special education program. A special education teacher, along with a general education teacher, the parents, school psychologist, and an

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administrator have an eligibility meeting to determine if the student qualifies for receiving special education services. If all members agree that the student is eligible to be served in special education, the special education teacher becomes the caseload manager for the student and, together with an interdisciplinary team which includes parents, creates an IEP for the student. The IEP includes academic/behavior goals, transition services, accommodations/modifications for classroom instruction and state testing, and instruction-related services. The instruction-related services to help students achieve their academic goals could be provided through any number of options, including: resource classes, inclusion classes, and consultation, depending on the needs of the student (Act, 2019; Bateman & Bateman, 2001).

IDEA also mandates an annual IEP review meeting to discuss academic and transition goals of students with disabilities, as well as accommodations and services students will need to be successful in their required classes in order to meet graduation requirements (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). These accommodations could include: small group testing, reading aloud of material, repeating/rephrasing directions, extended time on assignments and tests, and others specifically related to the individual needs of the student (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008; Swisher, Green, & Tollefson, 1999). Students with disabilities are additionally served in a continuum of settings, including inclusive general education classrooms, in which they may or may not receive the same support as their typically developing peers (Lalvani, 2013).

Until recently, students with disabilities now apply to colleges once they graduate from high school (Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004). Students with disabilities are finding that the transition services are differentially supporting them in pursuing postsecondary education. According to Wrightslaw, transition services are defined as:

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

(Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 56).

A vital part of transition services is transition planning, a process in which students with disabilities in collaboration with their IEP team (e.g., special education teachers, general education teachers, local education agency representative, and parents/guardians) create goals for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Bangser, 2008).

Although transition planning may not have been a mandated component of the IEP in the past, its inclusion has been a requirement for more than ten years, according to the Council of Learning Disabilities (n.d.). There are four significant transitions that students with disabilities undergo during their school years before they graduate from high school. The first transition is from early childhood to pre-kindergarten, second from elementary school to middle school, third middle school to high school, and lastly from high school to postsecondary. While transition is difficult at all stages for students with or without disabilities, the most challenging stage for

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students with disabilities is the transition from high school to postsecondary life, whether that includes college or career following high school (Bangser, 2008; Schutz, 2002). This is the most challenging transition because students with disabilities who have been receiving services throughout their school years are not guaranteed to receive the same level or amount of individual services thereafter (Garrison-Wade, 2012; Guthrie, 2014; Shaw, 2009). Because postsecondary institutions must follow the regulations of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and not IDEA (2004), they are not obligated to pay for evaluations or assessments for students with disabilities to determine whether they need services and accommodations at the postsecondary education level (Madaus & Shaw, 2006).

Under IDEA (2004), the special education teacher constructs a transition plan depending on when the student becomes eligible to receive specially designed instruction through the special education program. The transition plans for high school students with disabilities are typically initiated for students at age 14, but mandated when the student reaches the age of 16, and are in effect until the student generally graduates between ages 17-18 (Cobb & Alwell 2009; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Janiga & Costenbader 2002; Kosine, 2007). Transition planning typically occurs during an IEP meeting, where parents, general education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), a local education agency representative (LEA), and the student discuss options for postsecondary life which could include: education, employment, and/or independent living (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Etscheidt, 2006; Prince, Katsiyannis & Farmer, 2013; Rehfeldt, Clark, & Lee, 2012; Shaw, 2009). For example, when discussing postsecondary education goals, the IEP committee might suggest that students search for colleges to find programs they may be interested in pursuing following graduation. In addition, for high school transition planning an external representative of an agency (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, representative

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from a postsecondary institution) may also be invited to attend the IEP meeting to provide further information pertaining to postsecondary options (Bangser, 2008; Madaus & Shaw 2006; Morningstar, Bassett, Kochhar-Bryant, Cashman, & Wehmeyer, 2012).

Transition plans are usually led by students' preferences and interests relative to what they wish to pursue after they graduate (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). An effective transition plan translates students' aptitudes and preferences into measurable goals (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murraray, 2016). Thus, the active collaboration of all stakeholders (e.g., student, parents, teachers, LEA representatives, guidance counselors, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, representatives from a postsecondary institution) is critical in the process of creating not only the IEP, but also in creating an effective and realistic transition plan (Rous, Teeters Myers, & Buras Stricklin, 2007; Winterman & Rosas, 2014).

The most common path for students with disabilities upon graduation is vocational training or postsecondary education (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). The accommodations for these students often do not prepare them to enter a vocational training program or a postsecondary education environment (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Guthrie, 2014; Hamblet, 2014). For example, in high school, some students may have an accommodation to extend the deadline for a project; this does not teach the student how to develop time management skills. These self-efficacy skills can be vital for students with disabilities as they may not receive the same accommodations in their postsecondary institution (Guthrie, 2014). Since postsecondary institutions are not under IDEA requirements, the shift of responsibility for making decisions and advocacy goes from special education teachers and parents to the student once he/she graduates from high school (Garrison-Wade, 2012; Newman, Madaus, & Javitz,

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2016; Steele & Wolanin, 2004). Once admitted, the onus is on the student with disabilities to contact the institution's Disability Services office to initiate services and share paperwork with all instructors to allow for necessary accommodations within courses (Guthrie, 2014). If students do not take the initiative to follow through, they are not likely to receive the supports the institution offers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore factors related to transition planning and the influence these have on a student's decision to pursue postsecondary education. Transition planning is necessary for providing students with disabilities with options and paths for postsecondary education, but do students feel supported by their school during the process of transition planning, and does this support translate to their decision to pursue postsecondary education? Do students rely on others' voices to help them determine whether or not to pursue higher education? Are they receiving open and/or subliminal messages at home that postsecondary education is not an option but must be considered? Do students feel the transition planning process is influencing the direction they take after graduation? What factors do students with disabilities consider most important in the transition planning process when deciding to pursue postsecondary education? This study could be used to further our understanding of transition planning and the factors that successfully dispose students with disabilities to pursue higher education following high school.

For high school students with disabilities, transition planning is essential to their ability to make decisions about their futures (Corbett & Barton, 2018). The decisions students with disabilities make in their academic and career choices can influence their future achievements, income, standard of living, self-esteem, and social status (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, &

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Pastorelli, 2001). Postsecondary education can provide students with disabilities better employment opportunities in which they can earn significantly more in their lifetime than with a high school diploma alone (Autor, 2014; Caplan, 2018; Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Cheatham et al., 2013). According to Shaw (2009), the College Board (2006) asserts that unemployment is less likely for adults with some college background (e.g., associate degree, bachelor's degree). Over a decade ago, the U.S. Department of Education (2006) reported that "90% of the fastest growing jobs in the information and service economy require postsecondary education" (as cited in Shaw, 2009, p.2). It is increasingly more important to assist students with disabilities toward pursuing their best postsecondary options as they are entitled to earn wages comparable to their non-disabled peers (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Wehman et al., 2018).

It is critical to provide students with disabilities with the information they need so they are able to make informed decisions about their post high school years for employment and/or postsecondary education options for which they may be qualified (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Thoma & Getzel, 2005). During IEP meetings, students with disabilities can voice their interests and postsecondary goals when discussing their transition plan. Students' input in their transition planning can determine the specificity of the action steps they need to achieve their goals. Yet, transition plans typically have been found to be limited and lack explicit guidance to help the students with the process of finding and applying to colleges (Conley, 2005; Guthrie, 2014; Lucas, 2018; MacKenzie, 2015). As a result, it seems important to investigate students' perceptions of their transition planning experience to gain insight into how educators can better inform and support students with disabilities who have aspirations of attending postsecondary education in the future.

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Research Question

The research question that guided the present study is: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education?

Objectives of the Study

The overarching research question was addressed using a qualitative research paradigm. As current literature on transition planning does not provide insight into students' perceptions of the influence of various factors related to transition planning on postsecondary education decisions, this topic was thoroughly explored in-depth through a case study. Through listening to the voices of students with disabilities about aspects of their transition experiences, the results of the study can provide educators with a better understanding of specific supports that make it possible for students with disabilities to successfully pursue postsecondary education.

Significance of the Study

Many researchers (Collier, Griffin, & Wei, 2017; Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer, 2011; Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; MacKenzie, 2015, Strnadová & Cumming, 2014) have conducted survey studies on transition planning using students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and college service coordinators. These studies have identified various aspects and factors of transition planning which influence orienting students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education, but these studies fall short of providing the actual experiences of students in the process of pursuing postsecondary education. While postsecondary education may not guarantee success in life, it can help students with disabilities gain knowledge and skills to prepare for a better job or career than with a high school diploma alone (Green, Cleary, & Cannella-Malone, 2017; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2018).

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Another aspect of this study is to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing insight into those factors that positively influence the pursuit of postsecondary education by students with disabilities. A critical look at the decisions of students with disabilities to pursue secondary education may provide insight into the specific aspects of transition services that have the most significant influence on them while in high school. This, in turn, could assist special education teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, general education teachers, and related service personnel to better serve their students with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are provided as a context for the chapters/narratives that follow:

Caseload manager. A licensed special education teacher who is responsible for the delivery of special education services. They are the primary contact for the parent, a team member of the Individual Education Program, and the coordinator of instruction and related services for the student with disabilities (Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016).

Direct service transition professionals. High school special education teachers, secondary transition specialist, transition coordinators, secondary vocational coordinators, and transition focused rehabilitation counselors who assist students with disabilities with transition planning and provide transition services (Herbert, Lorenz, & Trusty, 2010; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009).

Diversity. Various groups of individuals identified by race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, learning preferences, culture, age, physical disabilities, and sexual orientation (Multicultural & Diversity Education, 2014).

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Document review. “Documentary data are particularly good sources for *qualitative* case studies because they can ground the investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

Guidance counselor. A person who helps students with academic and personal issues. In high school, these counselors assist students in applying to colleges or entering the workforce (Barnett, 2016).

Individual Education Program (IEP). “Legally mandated documents developed by a multidisciplinary team assessment that specifies goals and services for each child eligible for special educational services” (Committee on Children With Disabilities, 1999, p. 124).

Lead special education teacher. A special education teacher whose role involves providing guidance, organization, and supervision to other special education teachers within a school to help coordinate the special education program processes. This position may have different titles (e.g., special education coordinator) and involve various roles across school districts and states. (Layton, 2005).

Parent. Mother, father, guardian, or caregiver of a child. This individual is the primary contact for school personnel for all school related involvement in the child’s education (Cortiella, 2006).

Postsecondary. After graduating from high school, either college or career pathways (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Postsecondary education. Technical, vocational, community college, any coursework after high school leading to a certificate, license, an associate, and a 4-year college or university offering a bachelor’s degree (Shaw, Madaus, & Dukes, 2010).

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Postsecondary outcomes. The status of students with disabilities following high school graduation in terms of obtaining an education, employment, and independent living (Bouck, 2014).

Private liberal arts college. A small four-year postsecondary institution which offers a “strong faculty commitment to teaching, low student-to-faculty ratios, greater ease for student interactions with faculty, and the enhanced level of personal attention” (Moore, Hatzadony, Cronin, & Breckenridge, 2010, p. 2) to students.

Public college. A type of postsecondary institution which has lower tuition costs for in-state students because the institution is supported by resident tax dollars. These postsecondary institutions “vary widely in size, cost, quality, and the kind of degrees they award” (Sweetland & Glastris, 2015, p. 44).

Purposeful sampling. When a researcher "wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61).

Students with disabilities. Children "with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services” (Knoblauch, 1998).

Technical college. Also known as vocational schools, offer occupations education with certificates and Associate's degrees in numerous career fields (e.g., computer technology, construction, culinary arts, medical assisting, business management, cosmetology) that can be earned within 1-2 years (Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011).

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Transition. Moving from one level to the next. For example, a student going from 8th grade to 9th grade is transitioning from middle school to high school or a 12th-grade student starting their 1st year in college is transitioning from high school to college (Halpern, 1994).

Transition planning. "Transition planning is a process mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) for all students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in K-12 education. The purpose is to facilitate the student's move from school to post-school activities" (Learning Disabilities Association of America, n.d.).

Transition services. "The term 'transition services' refers to a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that- (A) is designed to be a results-oriented process, and 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 postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation" (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 56).

Triangulation. A strategy used in qualitative research which involves verifying evidence from multiple data sources and the existing literature to assist with defining a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2007).

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. A professional who works with secondary special educators to provide pre-employment transition services to high school students with disabilities (Oertle & O'Leary, 2017).

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one provides background information, statement of the problem, and an overview of special education as it pertains to transition services for high school students with disabilities. It also presents the purpose and need for the study, as well as the overarching research question that is addressed in this study. The chapter concludes with objectives of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of relevant terms used throughout this study. Chapter two provides the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks which undergird this study. In addition, chapter two presents a review of the existing literature related to the topic. Chapter three reveals the methodology of this study. It describes the research design, context and access, participant selection, and participants. Also included are the positionality of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and validity considerations of this study. Chapter four presents the results and findings of the study, where data are presented based on the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and are discussed across participants (i.e., cross-case analysis). Lastly, chapter five provides a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, major assertions, limitations and delimitations of the study, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

This literature review carefully examines the relevant research related to transition planning, which is a part of transition services that supports students with disabilities' decisions to pursue postsecondary education. This literature review is designed to address the following question: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? The literature review is organized in the following way: 1) an explanation of the search process undertaken to address the research questions, 2) an overview of the legislation and policy supporting postsecondary goals of students with disabilities, 3) the literature on the decision-making process, 4) the conceptual framework, 5) a review of the relevant empirical literature, 6) relation of the literature to this study and 7) the methodological framework. The chapter concludes with an overall summary of the literature.

Search Process

When searching for articles on transition planning, and those elements that have the potential to support students with disabilities' decisions to pursue postsecondary education, the following sources were examined: the Proxy Server, ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, and Education Source databases. The keywords used included: *transition planning* (2,539,959 results), *postsecondary education* (774,885 results), *decision-making process* (10,908,742 results), *social cognitive career theory* (589,278 results), *college transition planning* (1,216,036 results), *high school students with disabilities* (1,175,172 results), *youth with disabilities* (916,946 results), *transition planning for postsecondary education for students with disabilities* (221,369 results). The criteria for inclusion in this review were the following: (a) the research had to include participants who were high school or college students with disabilities;

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(b) the methods needed to reflect desire to pursue college preparation and transition (e.g., surveys, case studies, record review, secondary analysis studies); and (c) the participants had to have a transition plan in their IEPs. Of the 137 articles that were reviewed, 43 empirical studies, including research methods, results, discussions, and implications for future research about transition planning, were used for this literature review.

Legislation and Policy Supporting Postsecondary Goals

Special education has many laws, policies, and procedures to protect, provide, and support students with disabilities with equal access and opportunities as their typically developing peers (Bryant, Bryant, & Smith, 2017; Kauffman, Hallahan, Pullen, & Badar, 2018). To understand transition planning for students with disabilities, it is essential to know the legislation and policies that are in place to support this population of students. Transition planning has always been part of the IEP, but the push for college and career readiness has recently been prioritized by policy (Cheatham et al., 2013; Lombardi, Kowitt, & Staples, 2015). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) passed in 1990 initially mandated for students to be involved in their transition planning (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated for students with disabilities to receive a more rigorous curriculum and be included students in standardized testing. The act also required schools to provide highly qualified teachers to teach all students, including students with disabilities (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2014). In 2009, the Common Core Standards were passed, which warranted schools to implement programs to prepare students served through special education programs for college and career readiness (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Eventually, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 to replace the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. One of the goals of the ESSA is to prepare all

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students for college and careers (English, Cushing, Therriault, & Rasmussen, 2017). ESSA also required schools to provide all students with college and career counseling as well as to offer all students advanced placement courses (Malin, Bragg, & Hackmann, 2017).

Throughout the changes in legislation over time, policymakers have emphasized students with disabilities to become college and career ready through improving their services. For instance, Thomas and Dykes (2011) stated that "Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) requires transition planning and transition-related activities, defined as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed in an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities" (p. 1). Once the special education teacher completes a student's IEP and the transition goals are added, however, progress monitoring towards meeting those goals is not consistently reported (Etscheidt, 2006). Students with disabilities who are served through special education have IEP progress reports, but only the progress towards meeting the students' academic/behavior goals are typically addressed (Peterson et al., 2013; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). Some schools have implemented interventions to increase students' levels of self-determination, student participation in IEP meetings, and students' knowledge of self but these interventions are not used by all school districts or geographical regions (McConnell, Little, & Martin, 2014; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015; Rehfeldt, Clark, & Lee, 2012; Seong et al., 2015). Unless students themselves, their caregivers, and their teachers proactively work towards accomplishing transition goals, students may remain unprepared to make informed decisions about their postsecondary options for college or career (Cavendish & Connor, 2018).

Literature on the Decision-Making Process

During their high school years, adolescents can significantly influence their future through decision-making. They need to decide whether they plan to pursue postsecondary education or employment and, in consultation with advisors and other educators, which courses need to be taken to best prepare them for their postsecondary goals. The decisions they make regarding their courses will ultimately guide them to their possible career choices. A wrong career choice can affect the achievement, contentment, and mental health of the individual for life (Goodman, Doorley, & Kashdan, 2018; Kapoor, Rahman, & Kaur, 2018). As a result, decision-making for postsecondary education is an integral part of transition planning for students with disabilities.

Many career decision-making theories point to various factors that influence the decision-making process (Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015; Walsh & Osipow, 2014). For instance, Garcia et al. (2015) proposed that parent and teacher support positively influence the development of career decision-making. Parental and teacher support builds confidence in an individual's career decision-making and gives them a positive outlook about their future career (Garcia et al., 2015). Parent and teacher support are also factors needed for effective transition planning, which can result in positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Additionally, Krumboltz (1979) describes four categories of factors that influence career decision-making in his Social Learning Theory of career decision-making, which is based on Bandura's Behavioral Theory (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976). These categories include genetic endowment and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and task approach personal skills.

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Further, the literature suggests that intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors also affect career decision-making (Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey, & Malau-Aduli, 2018). Unlike the four categories of factors that influence career decision-making mentioned by Krumboltz (1979), these factors not only include aspects that individuals have no control over but also include an individual's development and interests. For instance, intrinsic factors include the role of personality and metacognition, which is the development of decision-making and problem-solving skills (p. 6). Extrinsic factors involve the economy, job security, and job availability (pp. 4-6). Interpersonal factors include the influence of family members, teachers, peers, and social responsibilities (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018, pp. 6-10). Transition plans for students with disabilities may include postsecondary goals based on students' strengths and interests; however, these theories can offer various factors of the decision-making process, which may help special education teachers/caseload managers delve more deeply into students' goals.

Since career decision-making is a complex process, many career decision-making theories present multiple factors that can influence individual career decisions. Aspects such as career maturity, career decidedness, career indecision, and career decision-making self-efficacy have also been extensively studied by many researchers to explain career decision-making processes and career development (Lam, 2016; Martincin & Stead, 2015; Walsh & Osipow, 2014; Xu & Tracey, 2017). These theories and aspects of career decision-making can also provide insight into various perspectives of other possible factors that influence decision-making. For instance, career maturity, a concept that was proposed in the 1950s and researched in 1970s, is defined as “the individual’s readiness to make informed, age-appropriate career decisions and cope with career development tasks” (as cited in Powell & Luzzo, 1998, p. 145). Are high school students with disabilities ready to make career decisions? If students with disabilities lack

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knowledge of career options, how can transition planning for postsecondary education be effective?

Career decidedness and career indecision are opposing concepts, where decidedness indicates that the individual is committed to a career choice he/she wants to pursue, and indecision, where the individual has not chosen any career path to pursue (Martincin & Stead, 2015; Walsh & Osipow, 2014). Career indecision is also linked to psychological issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and self-efficiency (Pond, 2010). Are high school students with disabilities not able to make career decisions due to anxiety or low self-esteem? In order to understand how students with disabilities make decisions to pursue postsecondary education, it is critical to recognize as many factors as possible that may influence their decision.

Conceptual Framework

While there are many decision-making frameworks in education, the Social Cognitive Career Theory provides the framework for this study as it explains data, as well as the findings that data suggest, through synthesis and integration. This theory is used because it provides a model for us to investigate transition factors that influence students with disabilities (Gibbons et al., 2015; Lent, Ezeofor, Morrison, Penn, & Ireland, 2016). This lens helps us understand the process that students with disabilities call upon when sifting through their postsecondary options before and following graduation.

Social Cognitive Career Theory was first introduced 20 years ago by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (Lent & Brown, 2013). It derives from Bandura's General Social Cognitive Theory. Initially, the theory focused on three interconnected models to explain "interest development, choice-making, and performance and persistence in educational and vocational contexts" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, p. 557). A fourth model was added to explain satisfaction/well-being in

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educational and vocational contexts. In this research study, the Choice-Making model (see Figure 1) of the Social Cognitive Career Theory is used to analyze factors related to transition planning and the resultant decisions made by students.

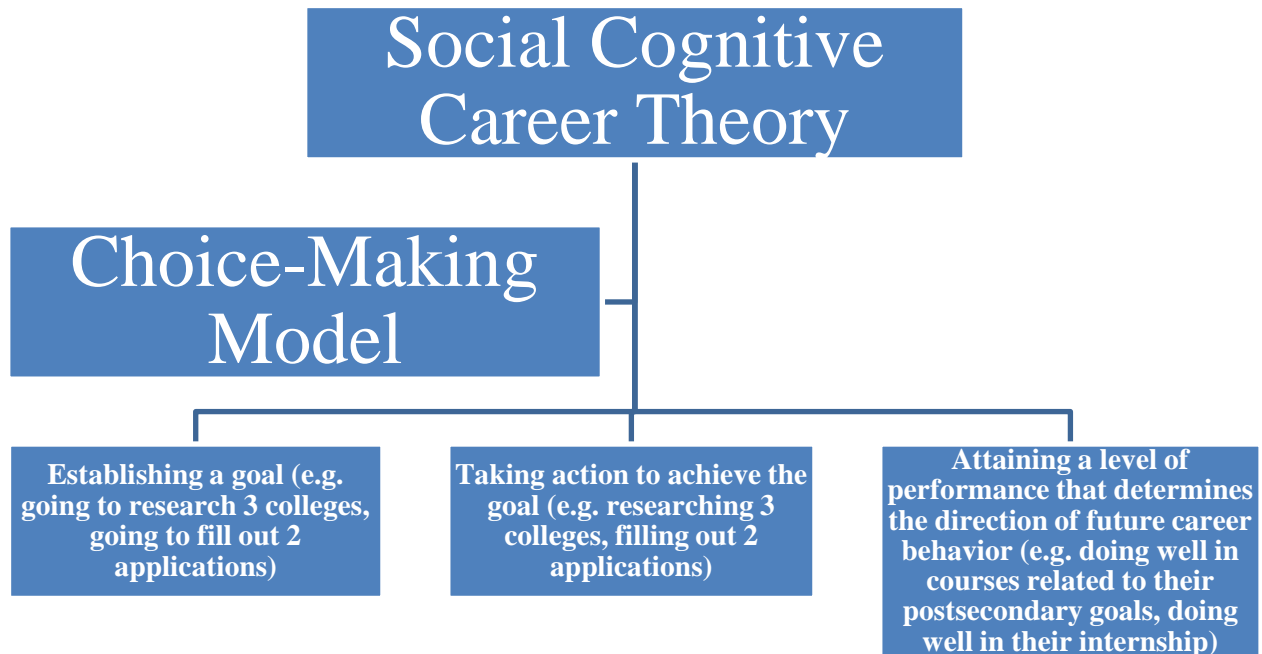


Figure 1. The three key constructs of the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Adapted from ‘Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance,’ by R. Lent, S. Brown, and G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122.

The Choice-Making model centers around three key constructs that directly align with factors related to the transition planning process. One is establishing a goal, which refers to individuals defining desired future academic or career outcomes, and aligning related activities with their interests, and self-efficacy (Sheu et al., 2010). In terms of the transition planning process, this construct is demonstrated when students with disabilities and their IEP team create three transition goals (e.g., education, employment, and independent living). Ultimately, this first construct dictates the scope and shape of the entire decision-making process.

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The second construct involves taking actual action to achieve the goal(s) established in the first construct. In transition planning, this equates to the IEP team deciding how progress towards those goals will be met. For instance, if a student's goal is to pursue postsecondary education in the particular field, the student and the IEP team may construct action steps to achieve the desired goal(s). These action steps could include researching programs offered at various postsecondary institutions, researching admissions requirements for postsecondary institutions, registering to take entrance exams (i.e., ACT, SAT), or figuring out the cost of tuition. In other words, the IEP team recommends the actions students will take towards meeting their transition goals.

When the IEP team meets again to follow up on students' transition goals, the IEP team can determine if the students are attaining a level of performance that determines the direction of future career behavior, which coincides with construct three. For instance, a high school student interested in pursuing a career in nursing may select courses related to healthcare or find student internships at a local hospital or doctor's office. Based on how well the student performs in the class and his/her experience in the field of their interest, he/she could either further pursue the goal or decide that it may not be the "right fit."

Relevant Empirical Studies

The literature provides a treasure-trove of research on the topic of transition planning for students with disabilities (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Gil, 2007; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Test et al., 2009). However, few studies have examined students' perceptions of postsecondary education (Brown, 2017; Kapitz, 2014; Yamamoto, 2010; Yarbrough, 2016). Studies to date mainly involve students' experience in a postsecondary education setting and the barriers that students face in accessing services but not their experience

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in the actual transition planning process. Many studies also provide input from students, parents, and teachers to identify what has and has not been helpful in transition planning for students with disabilities. Key aspects of transition planning that the literature to date has addressed include lack of knowledge of transition planning, student involvement, parent involvement, and the involvement of stakeholders. The empirical studies summarized in this review are organized by type of study.

Lack of Knowledge related to Transition Planning

Quantitative Studies. Daviso, Denney, Baer, and Flexer (2011) conducted a quantitative survey study consisting of a student records review and student/family interviews to determine whether or not courses of study and transition services for students with learning disabilities were related to their postsecondary goals and whether the students were satisfied with their services. The research questions guiding their study focused on employment and postsecondary goals of students with learning disabilities exiting high school in Ohio, how well their high school program and transition services aligned with their goals, and what students perceived as helpful in their meeting their goals.

Two-hundred and fifty local education agencies were asked to collect data to represent a cross-section of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The results of the study indicated that students were mostly unsatisfied with their independent living and community preparation, moderately satisfied with their postsecondary education planning, and highly satisfied with their employment planning. The researchers suggested that there is a need to add independent living skills and activities for community preparation into the curricula for these students. The limitations of the study included: 1) it was a correlational study, so causality could not be determined; 2) the study was limited to Ohio, so the results and findings may not be generalizable to other states that it provided limited analysis of

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school settings; 3) teachers may have been biased in the interviews; and 4) the survey methodology was used. Future research needs to increase the sample size for students from rural and urban settings to provide stronger statistical comparisons. This study addressed both employment and postsecondary education and is closely related to the impact of transition planning on the postsecondary education of students with disabilities.

Irvin et al. (2011) conducted a study on students' perceptions of school and their educational aspirations. They compared 6,171 nondisabled students with 428 students with learning disabilities (LD) in 34 states. Through various instruments, the researchers measured student perceptions concerning academic self-concept, school valuing, school belonging, educational plans, and educational aspirations. The results of the study showed that rural high school students with learning disabilities were unsure of their postsecondary plans and less likely to continue further education after graduating from high school compared to their typically developing peers. One-third of the students with learning disabilities in the study were rated high-belonging, high-school-value, and high-on-all configurations. Those in the high-school-value and high-on-all configurations categories were more often planning to continue education beyond high school than their peers. This led the researchers to clarify further why some students are more determined and focused on their education goals and do not follow the expected negative trajectories. Rural students face barriers that contribute to reducing their interest in pursuing further education, such as lack of support and resources, diminished social and cultural expectations, fewer local educational and occupational opportunities, and limited high school course offerings that would prepare them for postsecondary education. Rural areas often also have challenges hiring and retaining good teachers to teach advanced classes due to lower wages, limited resources, and geographic location. The limitations of this study included that the researchers used only a rural population, results from which cannot be generalized to metropolitan areas, and that

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the self-reported perceptions of high school student experiences cannot determine any causality.

Future research needs to examine more variables in various metropolitan settings, since

“understanding the complexity of variables involved in the development of a student’s educational aspirations and the link between these aspirations and actual attainment are critical in preparing students with LD for successful postsecondary options” (p. 10).

Qualitative Studies. Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, and Test (2017) conducted a qualitative study using focus groups, drawing from a purposive sampling of 22 state education agency representatives as participants representing 17 states. Their research focused on college and career readiness (CCR) framework for secondary students with disabilities. Participants agreed that the six CCR domains were essential and should be embedded in secondary and transition practices for supporting students with disabilities. The focus group participants identified the importance of the transferability of their academic and nonacademic skills across educational settings and experiences to promote adopting positive adult life roles. The major limitations of the study were a potential bias among participants and the inability of the results to be generalized to a broader context. Suggestions for future research were to clarify the framework with a more extensive stakeholder base at both the local and state levels.

Gibbons et al. (2015) conducted a study in which they interviewed 12 high school students with moderate intellectual disabilities (ID) in a southeastern U.S. school district. The purpose of their research was to explore the social-cognitive understanding of college and career among these students. Researchers used Social Cognitive Career Theory, Self-Efficiency Theory, and Self-Determination Theory as their theoretical framework. Most participants demonstrated strengths related to self-determination but had a limited understanding of postsecondary planning. Of the 12 participants, nine found teachers helpful in their career planning, and ten

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found family members helpful. The limitations of the study included its small sample size, that participants were unable to describe their understanding of college and career due to communication or social skill difficulties, and that they were unable to generalize the findings to other students in other regions. The researchers recommend a more rigorous study for future research.

Mixed-Methods. Cawthon and Cole (2010) conducted an online survey of 110 undergraduate students in a four-year public university to gather student perspectives on accommodations use and the barriers/obstacles to accessing services that they faced. The survey included checklists and open-ended questions. A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data. The results showed that students did not use all the available university resources and that a greater awareness of the resources was needed. While students reported access to accommodations that would require them to have an IEP, 91% of the students were not able to recall having an IEP at all. For those who did recall having an IEP, most did not remember reviewing transition topics, teacher responsibilities, or academic goals. Also, 48% reported not receiving any guidance on how they could receive accommodations at the university, whom they would need to contact, what accommodations/services would be available to them, or what documentation they would need to apply for those accommodations. The limitations of this study included its use of a convenience sample that may not represent all students with learning disabilities at the University (the participants were selected to participate as a part of their course requirement). The information gathered relied heavily on what students could recall from their high school years, and information regarding their transition planning may not have been accurate if they were unable to remember their experiences. Also, many of the student participants were not diagnosed with a disability until they were in college, so they may not have

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had an IEP in high school. Another limitation of the study was that some participants might have decided not to receive accommodations. Also, service providers were not included in the survey. The researchers suggested that future research to use a longitudinal study design in which the transition experiences of students with learning disabilities are documented from middle school through postsecondary education. To study the approach students take to receiving accommodations in college, documenting interactions between students and faculty could be included in future research. The third recommendation for future research was to investigate how students with learning disabilities are coached to discuss their needs and rights as they transition to postsecondary settings.

Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto (2012) conducted a study of parents' means of obtaining information and the effects of K-12 inclusive general education experiences on parents' desires for, and expectations of, postsecondary education. The 61 parents with students who participated were members of The Arc of Northern Virginia who completed surveys on the web, by mail, or through a telephone interview. Of the 61 participants, 45 also answered open-ended questions and commented on the survey margins. The survey instrument used was organized into eight domains: characteristics and general school experience items, participation in school-sponsored planning activities, participation in non-school-sponsored planning activities, sources of information about postsecondary education options, involvement in advocacy and support organizations, and open-ended comments. The finding of this study revealed that nearly an equal number of parents reported having and not having a transition plan, that parents felt they had little input in the meetings, and that the information shared with them was either not helpful or not accurate. In addition, out of 52 parents whose children still attended school, 37% reported their children did not have transition plans, and 17% were unsure of whether they did or not. One limitation of this study was that participants belonged to The Arc of

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Northern Virginia, an organization that supports individuals with disabilities; the participants are invested in their involvement, thereby increasing the potential bias of their responses in this study. Also, some parents may have given an inaccurate time for their child's inclusion in general education, and some may have lacked an understanding of their child's IEP. For future research, the researchers recommend focus groups, a scale to assess parent frustrations with the transition process, an operational definition of degree of inclusion, and demographic questions to allow respondents to describe disabilities better and reflect the diversity of the participating families.

Collier, Griffin, and Wei (2017) conducted a study using a survey and focus groups on exploring student perspectives on their own transition needs by identifying gaps in their knowledge and experience. Participants in the study included 130 high school students with disabilities who completed a questionnaire and 24 stakeholders from a rural school district in a southwestern state who participated in focus groups. The results of the study indicated that there was a lack of knowledge of Vocational Rehabilitation. Items regarding disclosure and self-advocacy were rated low, but participants rated instruction on independent living skills as an area of strength. The limitations of this study included its use of a convenience sample, so that findings may not be generalizable to a larger population, that the focus group only included students and educators, and students were not given an opportunity to share their postsecondary goals. Researchers recommend that future research use a more representative sample, include more stakeholders, measure the effect of taking the Student Transition Questionnaire (STQ) on student engagement in transition planning, focus on ways in which students can be taught about Vocational Rehabilitation and how they might be connected with such services, and focus on the training delivered by transition teachers and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.

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Summary of Literature. The existing literature on transition planning for high school students with disabilities reveals that there is a lack of knowledge by internal stakeholders in several areas of transition planning. For instance, students appear to be generally unaware of their transition goals, their parents seem to be unaware of the transition plans that exist in their children's IEPs, and students do not appear to be aware of additional stakeholders, such as vocational rehabilitation counselors. Additionally, only two of these studies are qualitative studies. One used 22 state education agency representatives in focus groups, and the other interviewed 12 high school students to explore students' understanding of college and career. The present study will extend the existing literature on transition planning in the following ways: focus on students' lived experiences of the transition planning process, use multiple data sources (e.g., student interviews, collages, drawings) to allow students to express their knowledge of transition planning, and find transition-related activities that were helpful to students. In addition, the present study will focus on improving understanding of transition planning for students with disabilities who want to pursue postsecondary education.

Student Involvement

Quantitative Studies. Brown (2017) conducted a quantitative study using surveys to examine the relationship between family characteristics and environment and rural students' decisions to enroll in postsecondary education institutions. This study also examined the high school experiences of the students, which led them to pursue secondary education and the impact that the Tennessee Promise had on further rural students' educations. Tennessee Promise is a 2-year scholarship awarded by the state that allows students to attend a community or technical college tuition-free. Seventy-three high school senior students completed two surveys, one called the Student Status Assessment, and the other called the Student Outcomes Assessment. The results of the study revealed a strong relationship between students pursuing college and their

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fathers' expectations, frequent discussion about college with parents, students' grade point averages, the value students placed on education, and students' personal academic goals. Also, the students who were rewarded the Tennessee Promise scholarship reported that their decision to pursue higher education was due to the scholarship. The limitations of the study included that the researchers only using surveys, which they referred to as introducing a mono-method bias, and they were unable to thoroughly examine the reason for students' decisions to pursue postsecondary education. Survey fatigue was another limitation because both of the surveys, one of which included 27 questions and one of which included 28, were lengthy. As a result, the survey took participants approximately 45 minutes to complete, which may have impacted the quality of their responses to the questions. In addition, the Tennessee Promise scholarship program was only in its first year, and the researchers were only able to get an opinion of the program from most of the participants. One of the recommendations for future research was to examine further those factors that impacted the decisions of rural students to pursue college. These factors included family influences on rural students' decisions to attend college and students' academic and personal goals.

Bouck (2014) conducted a secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) to investigate the postschool outcomes of students with mild intellectual disabilities after two years, four years, six years, and eight years of graduating high school. Data were analyzed from the NLTS2 using frequency distributions and by conducting a significance test. The results of this study showed that, compared to students with other disabilities and nondisabled students, students with mild intellectual disabilities struggled more with postschool success, which includes employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. Also, students with mild intellectual disabilities did not have either improved or declined outcomes the longer they were out of school.

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“Less than 26% of individuals with MID attended any form of postsecondary education (community college, vocational or technical education, or 4-year college), regardless of the number of years students were out of school (i.e., within 2 years, within 4 years, within 6 years, and within 8 years)” (p. 540). Students in the study with mild intellectual disabilities were more likely than those with severe disabilities to enroll in community college and vocational or technical education, but the results did not indicate whether individuals enrolled right after graduating from high school or long after they graduated. The limitations of this study were that it used a secondary analysis; therefore, the limitations included all the limitations of the original NLTS2 data collection, which included issues of attrition. The sample size may also have been insufficient to report the frequencies that occur for outcomes within 6 and 8 years of graduating high school. Lastly, the NLTS2 gathers student, parent, or teacher-reported data, which can be biased, and for students with mild disabilities, there is the possibility of misunderstandings the questions being asked. Future research needs to investigate the in-school and postschool experiences of students with MID and identify the positive educational experiences of students with mild intellectual disabilities that led to improved postschool outcomes.

Hitchings, Retish, and Horvath (2005) conducted a study that focused on the academic preparation of adolescents with disabilities for postsecondary education. They used records from 110 students who had graduated from two high schools in western Illinois. The researchers used the Transition Planning Guide (TPG), an instrument created for the Illinois Transition Project to help special education teachers develop transition plans for students with disabilities, assess community needs, and analyze statewide systems for the transition. The TPG was divided into three sections: (a) general information, (b) desired postsecondary outcomes, and (c) action plans. In addition, the researchers used a Course Comparison form to determine the students' levels of academic preparation for postsecondary education. The researchers created a form to record courses that were listed in the

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students' IEPs, courses that were listed as completed on the students' final transcripts, and courses that were recommended for students wanting to attend state universities. The findings revealed that student interest in pursuing postsecondary education significantly decreases from the first year of high school to the last year of high school. The comparison of IEPs and transcripts revealed that 79 students expressed an interest in taking recommended college preparatory courses for state universities. The limitations of this study included limited sources of information and the researchers' sampling method. Therefore, the findings of the study may only be representative of the sample and the district used in the study. Future research recommendations were to include participants from suburban and rural districts across multistate regions since transition planning policies vary across districts and states.

Qualitative Studies. McCall (2015) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth phenomenological interviews. The focus of the study was on the transition experiences, activities, and supports of four college students with disabilities. McCall also used the Ecological Theory of self-determination as a framework for the study. The disabilities of the four participants included blindness, hearing impairment, ADHD, and learning disabilities. The findings showed that all participants attended their meetings but that their participation varied, and all participants reported little self-determination or self-advocacy instruction. One of the four participants reported teacher-directed or coordinated transition instruction, and only one participant reported being prepared for college. All the parents of the participants expected them to go to college. The limitations of the study included its small sample size, its reliance on retrospective accounts of participants' high school experiences, and its lack of triangulation. The researcher suggested examining the transition experiences of students with disabilities who do

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not attend postsecondary institutions or students who attend college but do not disclose their disabilities.

Summary of Literature. Most of the studies on transition planning related to student involvement were quantitative studies. While surveys and secondary analysis studies provide valuable information regarding student involvement in transition planning, insight into the students' perceptions of their participation in their transition planning process is missing. McCall's (2015) qualitative study does provide a more in-depth view of students' experiences with transition planning but lacks triangulation. Bouck (2014) recommends for future research to investigate postschool experiences of students with mild intellectual disabilities and to identify positive educational experiences of these students with improved postschool outcomes. The present study provides both triangulation and identifies the positive educational experiences of students with disabilities with improved outcomes.

Parent Involvement

Quantitative Studies. Hirano, Garbacz, Shanley, and Rowe (2016) conducted a quantitative study using survey data to investigate parent involvement in secondary special education and transition. Researchers used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement and other frameworks, such as Epstein's School, Family, and Community Partnerships model and a transition specific framework developed by Hirano and Rowe (2015) that supports the multidimensional nature of parent involvement. Participants were 149 family members or guardians of high school students with disabilities recruited through federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers throughout the United States. The results of the study showed a distinction between home- and school-based involvement activities, which confirmed the findings from a principal component analysis by Walker et al. (2005). The researchers also

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found that a multidimensional view of parent involvement in education expands traditional involvement activities beyond attending meetings and helping with homework to parents acting as decision-makers, evaluators, collaborators, instructors, coaches, and advocates. The limitations of this study include that the sample was not representative of the population, participants were already involved in their students' schooling and transition planning, and most were White mothers of male children who were eligible for free and reduced lunch and receiving special education services under the autism and intellectual disability categories. The researchers suggested that future research should aim to recruit a more diverse sample of participants.

Howard et al. (2016) conducted a study examining the progression of the impairment of adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) through their transition out of high school. They used eight waves of data from a prospective 16-year follow up to the Multimodal Treatment of ADHD study. Parent involvement was assessed during adolescence, and parent support was assessed in young adulthood. There were 579 participants recruited from the Multimodal Treatment of ADHD study. The findings of this study revealed that parent involvement in adolescence and family income were positively correlated with attending college. Impairment and family income were negatively correlated with parent involvement and support and with dropping out. Adolescents attending college whose parents were involved during adolescence showed the most dramatic improvements over time and were the least impaired. The limitations of this study were that it included reports from parents who may not live with their children in adulthood, so the information may not have been accurate since the researchers were not directly observing their children, and children with the ADHD subtype were not recruited in this study. For future research, the researchers recommend an examination of differences in post high school outcomes for students attending different types of postsecondary institutions and a comparison of student and nonstudent outcomes.

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Qualitative Studies. Fullarton and Duquette (2015) conducted a case study of five families of adolescents with disabilities to provide their perspectives on the process of transitioning to employment and postsecondary education. They aimed to investigate the transition process from the students' and parents' perspectives to understand the collaboration between students, parents, and teachers. Their case study included three in-depth interviews with students and their parents. All families reported having had informal transition plans but no formal written transition plans. The findings showed that parents did not recall working with teachers on formal transition planning. Four out of the five families in the study reported having achieved their transition goals, to which they attributed the following factors: parent's high expectations and advocacy, students' effort, self-determination, self-advocacy, and the teachers' mentoring and support. Although parent advocacy has been related to a positive transition to postsecondary education, it is not necessarily linked to poor postsecondary results. Four of the students in the study developed self-advocacy skills without any training on self-advocacy in school. They were aware of their strengths and needs, attended their meetings, knew their rights, and were able to communicate their needs to others. The limitations of the study were that it included self-selected participants who were motivated to share their stories, that participants chose what to reveal during their interviews, and that it lacked the perspectives of school personnel. The suggestions for future research included examining the nature of collaboration, especially how students are supported to increase their responsibility in their transition process in high school, teacher perspectives on the nature of their role in mentoring and supporting students during the transition, and students' whose parents are not active in their child's transition process.

Mixed-Methods Studies. Landmark, Zhang, and Montoya (2007) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine parent experiences of their involvement in transition planning. The

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participants included 19 parents of 19 high school students with disabilities from a midsized city in a southwestern state. The instrument used to collect the data was a seven-item open-ended questionnaire that the researchers developed based on their literature review of parent participation in the transition process and their research questions. The questions asked each participant about their knowledge of their child's transition status and requested a self-evaluation of their parental involvement. The findings of the study revealed that 37% of the parents did not know what transition planning was, and 16% of the parents knew little to nothing about their child's transition planning. Participants identified their children's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and goals, but the goals were often focused on independent living and employment. In addition, 63% of the participants did not know about the legal requirements for transition planning; 47% of the parents reported attending a transition planning meeting, but their involvement in the meeting varied from passive to full participation; and 63% of the parents reported work-related barriers, communication-related barriers, and personal barriers, such as feeling unprepared emotions for meetings, that inhibited their involvement in their child's transition process. The limitations of this study included its small sample size of students from multiple cultures, which yielded results that may not reflect the perspectives of other parents in the same culture. Further, parents were only interviewed one time during a telephone interview, so the researchers were unable to consult with participants to verify whether their responses to the questions were accurately presented, to observe facial expressions, and to ask probing follow-up questions. The researchers recommended that future studies include focus groups or face-to-face interviews to gather richer information by providing in-depth data from parents of diverse cultures and integrate survey research using larger samples of parents from diverse cultures to produce more generalizable results.

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Landmark, Roberts, and Zhang (2013) conducted a study of parent involvement in the transition process from an educator perspective. Their study involved individual interviews with eighteen educators from two different local education agencies (LEAs): Uptown and Downtown. They were asked to respond to ten open-ended, semi-structured questions that the researchers developed after their review of the literature regarding parent involvement and transition. The results of the study were divided into three categories: (a) conceptions of parent involvement in the transition process, (b) barriers to parent involvement, and (c) promoting parent involvement. More than half of the participants reported that parents do not understand the importance of transition planning. The participants stated that barriers such as cultural differences, lack of time, and a belief that education is the LEA's job were reasons that many parents were not involved in their children's transition planning. In terms of promoting parent involvement in the transition process, participants mentioned providing comfort, ongoing communication, a partnership with parents, and training on transition. The limitations of this study included a tendency of participants to provide socially correct responses, that triangulation was limited because they did not observe educator practices or archival documents, and that there were noteworthy student demographic differences between the LEAs used in the study. The researchers recommend future qualitative studies that include parent interviews, parent-teacher interaction observations, and a document review to increase triangulation and provide greater credibility. For quantitative studies, they recommend using a larger sample size to include regression analyses or structural equation modeling that would determine which variables predicted or explained behaviors that promoted parent involvement.

Summary of Literature. The existing literature on transition planning investigates parent involvement in various ways. The studies included surveys, a review of 8 waves of data from a 16 year follow up study, a case study involving three in-depth interviews, and open-ended

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questionnaires. Landmark, Zhang, and Montoya's (2007) study revealed several barriers parents encounter, which inhibit their involvement in transition planning, and the lack of knowledge parents had about their children's transition planning process. The researchers collected their data with a one-time telephone interview with the parent participants. Fullarton and Duquette's (2015) study provided more information through their case study, which involved three in-depth interviews with parents and students, but they did not include a perspective of the school. The present study will extend the current literature by examining the perceptions of students' of their parents' involvement in their transition planning process. This study is going to focus on how students with disabilities are supported in their transition planning through in-depth interviews with students, parents, and teacher participants. In addition, the present study will include document review of IEPs, transition plans, and meeting minutes to present evidence of parent involvement, which other researchers have not included in their studies.

Stakeholder Involvement

Quantitative Studies. Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray (2016) in a quantitative study used secondary analysis of the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2) to examine the quality and characteristics of transition plans for a nationally representative group of high-incidence disability (e.g., LD, emotional disabilities (ED), and ADHD) adolescents. The purpose of their study was to investigate the relationship between planning and poor postschool outcomes for this student population. They included four waves of data collection: (a) parent/youth surveys and interviews, (b) teacher and administrator school and program surveys, (c) direct assessment of students, and (d) course transcripts. Vocational training and postsecondary education programs were commonly found to be necessary for postschool goal attainment across students' IEPs. They also found that, according to school personnel, most of

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these students had transition-focused instruction and that their courses were aligned to their postsecondary goals. In addition, their findings revealed a low rate of participation in IEP meetings from vocational educators, vocational counselors, and postsecondary education representatives. The limitations of the study included the fact that it relied upon documents related to transition planning that were teacher-reported and not directly examined, that it yielded low return rates for the school-generated survey data and that the school and transition data only represented a snapshot of transition planning, not long term participation over time. The researchers recommend an in-depth study of transition planning and processes using other methods, especially to examine transition goals and course alignment. While this study revealed that students are receiving transition instruction and that their courses were aligned to their postsecondary goals, it was not able to determine how or to what extent the instruction was linked to the transition goals of gaining employment, pursuing postsecondary education, or independent living.

Griffin, McMillian, and Hodapp (2010) conducted a web-based survey study to examine issues that families of students with intellectual disabilities encounter when they consider making decisions to pursue postsecondary education. The researchers drew data from a sample of 108 family member participants of transition-aged students with intellectual disabilities from Tennessee. The survey included fifty items that were divided into four categories: (a) information about primary respondents, (b) information about students with intellectual disabilities, (c) perspectives on postsecondary education options, and (d) open-ended questions. The findings of this study revealed that respondents had positive feelings about postsecondary education programs but found educators' attitudes to be less supportive. Lack of information and guidance was identified as a barrier that prevented family members from understanding postsecondary options for their children. The

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limitations of this study included the fact that survey responses were not confirmed by school records, student observations, teacher reports, or other sources. Also, responses to the survey may have reflected priorities for transition planning to postsecondary education that were specific to the sample but not reflective of other families who had students with intellectual disabilities. The researchers recommend further investigating the factors that were critical to developing successful postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

Miller-Warren (2016) conducted a study using a survey to examine parental insights into the effects of secondary transition planning. The researcher used 24 parent participants from a small rural school district in the southern United States. The survey instrument used to collect the data consisted of ten closed-ended questions. The results of the study revealed that IEPs were inadequate: 95.8 % of the participants reported that their children had detailed transition plans, but only 16.7% felt that the transition plans prepared their children for postsecondary challenges. Also, 62.5% of students surveyed were not enrolled in college, and 58.3% were still living at home with their parents.

Further, collaboration from stakeholders such as high school teachers and postsecondary agency representatives to help students with their transition planning processes was nonexistent. The limitations of this study were that students were not asked about their feedback, there was a difference in the IQ levels of the participants, the participants included a transient population, there were relatively few postsecondary opportunities available due to the school's rural location, and there was a lack of inter-observer reliability. The researcher recommended, for future research, replicating the study in a larger school district with more than one high school or across several different school districts and interviewing high school graduates with disabilities to reveal perspectives.

Plotner, Mazzottie, Rose, and Carlson-Bitting (2016), meanwhile, conducted a study using surveys to examine the factors associated with enhanced knowledge and use of evidence-based

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secondary transition practices. The researchers evaluated the frequency with which training and resources regarding secondary transition evidence-based practices were provided to educators and direct service transition professionals. The survey instrument consisted of five sections and with forty-six questions. Participants in the study included 224 high school special education teachers, 56 middle school special education teachers, 122 secondary transition specialists, 45 secondary vocational coordinators, and 36 transition focused rehabilitation counselors from three Southeast and two Midwest states. The results of the study revealed that 68% of the teachers and 50% of the direct-service transition professionals rarely provided with evidence-based practice training regarding the transition. Also, 45% of direct-service transition professionals and 50% of teachers reported never receiving resources related to evidence-based transition practices. Of the participants, 73% reported that they did not gain knowledge regarding transitions in their university preparation programs, and 62% of teachers and 53% of direct-service professionals reported that they did not gain knowledge related to secondary transition during their professional development. The limitations of the study included the fact that the full survey was not psychometrically analyzed, that the participants were from different states and their role in transitioning students may have varied across states, and that middle school and high school teachers may place different emphases on the delivery of transition services. The researchers recommend future research to ensure a psychometric analysis that would better establish the validity and reliability of the survey, as well as research to examine the differences in evidence-based practices for transition and methods of gathering evidence-based practices for specific groups. They also recommended a focus on teacher knowledge and disaggregating the use of secondary transition evidence-based practices by disability category and a detailed analysis of secondary transition evidence-based practices used to teach life skills to students in a variety of disability groups.

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Grigal, Hart, and Migliore (2011) conducted a secondary analysis of variables from the NLTS2 database. In their quantitative study, the researchers were interested in comparing the postsecondary transition goals written into the IEPs and transition plans of students with intellectual disabilities to students with other disabilities, specifically with regard to contacts and referrals made to outside agencies during transition planning, the participation of other agencies in transition planning, and students' postsecondary outcomes. Although 11,000 students were eligible for the study, 520 students with ID were selected. The information for analysis included multiple sources collected at different points in time. Parent surveys were given five times every two years, student surveys were given four times every two years, and teacher/staff surveys were given two times during the first half of the study. The findings indicated that students with intellectual disabilities have more sheltered and supported employment goals and outcomes than postsecondary education or competitive employment goals and outcomes compared to students with other disabilities. The findings also revealed a lack of stakeholder involvement in transition planning meetings from postsecondary education representatives and that while Vocational Rehabilitation counselors are contacted most often, their level of participation in transition meetings was not high. The limitation of this secondary analysis study was that it was descriptive and could not be interpreted as implying causal relationships. The researchers suggested future studies to expand on the NLTS2 data set with added variables related to dual enrollment programs for the purpose of addressing whether student's skill levels and specific disabilities limited the goals of sheltered employment and day habilitation and to identify factors that may affect the postsecondary attendance, retention, and outcomes of students with intellectual disabilities.

Taylor, Morgan, and Callow-Heusser (2015) conducted a study using two electronic questionnaires to investigate collaborations between Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and

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transition teachers. Their participants included 78 vocational rehabilitation counselors and 220 transition teachers from Florida, Maryland, Oregon, and Utah. The two questionnaires gathered demographic information, vocational rehabilitation involvement, and ratings of the participants' perceived importance and feasibility of collaboration practices. The results indicated that both vocational rehabilitation counselors and transition teachers need further training on the transition process and that both groups of stakeholders acknowledge the importance of collaboration but did not think both were feasible until key policymakers made changes to improve collaboration. In the open-ended responses, the participants reported the need for more time to develop relationships, shared funding, stakeholder training, support from the administration to hire more qualified personnel, and to clarify roles and responsibilities to improve interagency collaboration. The study disclosed the following limitations: only participants from the four states participated, who may not have been representative of practitioners in other states, low sample sizes in some of the states that may not have represented all practitioners within the state, low response rates to the questionnaire, and a possible lack of homogeneity among participants in the study (i.e., they had several titles/roles, various levels of experience, and multiple levels of skill). For future research, this study's researchers suggested exploring ways to improve interagency collaboration, the use of focus groups to provide in-depth analysis of recommended practices, and to "extend previous intervention study to evaluate whether interagency collaboration increases successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities" (p. 173).

Qualitative Studies. Stmadova and Cummings (2014) conducted a qualitative study, using open-ended survey questions, to examine the importance of quality transition processes for students with disabilities across settings. Their study's framework was the Ecological model. The participants were 75 teachers from New South Wales, 37 of whom were primary school teachers

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and 38 of who were high school teachers from 208 government primary schools and 84 government high schools. These findings showed that none of the schools reported any transition assessment, that few participants reported any structured planning process, especially one that involved team collaboration, and that there was a lack of active and self-determined involvement in the transition process. The limitations of the study included its small sample size due to low survey participation and that its context was limited to government schools in New South Wales, which may not be representative of other regions. The researchers recommend future research using more participants and observing actual transition practices as they transpire in schools.

Mixed-Methods. Cavendish and Connor (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine perspectives on the factors that influence meaningful student and parent involvement in the Individual Education Program (IEP) transition planning. They used survey and open-ended qualitative interviews completed by sixteen urban high school students with learning disabilities, nine of their parents, and seventeen of their teachers. The survey results did not reveal any differences between students and teachers concerning school efforts at facilitating student and parent involvement. However, the open-ended interviews revealed some challenges in the areas of student involvement, parent involvement, adequate support for graduation, and support for career and college preparation. A significant limitation of the study was that it used a newly developed instrument to measure teacher perceptions, one that the researchers felt needed further validation by administering it to a larger group of teachers across schools. The researchers also found that the instrument they used, called SIS, a 24-item measure of perceptions of school efforts to coordinate student involvement in education planning, was one-dimensional because it only reflects perceptions of schools' efforts. An additional limitation of the study was that it included a small number of participants, so the findings could not be generalized to the general

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population. Their suggestions for future research were to include stakeholder perceptions and observations of students' and parents' involvement in planning.

Summary of Literature. The need for stakeholder involvement in transition planning for high school students with disabilities is emphasized throughout the existing literature. Since IEP meetings involving transition planning include establishing goals for employment, education, and independent living, the presence of external stakeholders is needed. The literature suggests that students would benefit from their transition planning if stakeholders such as guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and postsecondary education representatives were present in the meetings (Miller-Warren, 2016; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). Plotner, Mazzottie, Rose, and Carlson-Bitting's (2016) study revealed 50% of special education teachers/caseload managers do not receive training related to evidence-based practices for transition, and 62% of the teachers do not gain knowledge in their professional development opportunities regarding secondary transition. While these studies support the necessity of including external stakeholders, the perception of the students and how stakeholders help them in their transition planning process is missing in the current literature. Miller-Warren's (2016) study recommends that future research include interviews of high school graduates with disabilities to capture their perspectives. Thus, the present study attempts to add to the existing literature by focusing on t students' perceptions of stakeholder involvement in the transition planning process.

Relation to the Study

The findings of the studies present four key aspects of transition planning for students with disabilities. Knowledge of transition, student involvement, parent involvement, and the involvement of stakeholders are crucial topics for understanding transition planning for high school students with disabilities. The existing literature does not provide students' perceptions of the factors related to

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transition planning that support their decisions to pursue postsecondary education. The present study could extend these empirical studies in the following ways: a) include students' perceptions of the transition planning process through interviews and visual representations, b) examine the choice-making process of students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education through the lens of the Social Cognitive Career Theory, and c) provide insight into the benefits of transition planning from the students' perspective. While the study stands apart from previous studies on transition planning, it also adds to the existing literature through an in-depth exploration of the transition planning process to students with disabilities who desire to pursue postsecondary education.

Methodological Framework

Since the current research on transition planning does not provide an in-depth view of student perceptions on the factors related to transition planning which influence their transition their postsecondary education decisions, the best qualitative paradigm for addressing the research questions of this study is a case study. Case study research "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The proposed case study provides a close-up view of what students with disabilities experience as they participate in IEP meetings involving transition planning to postsecondary education. According to Merriam (1998),

a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, context rather than a specific variable, and discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

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Through qualitative case study research design, the perceptions of participants can be explored to provide a deeper understanding of their transition experiences. In contrast, quantitative research methods do not provide adequate insight to address the research question proposed by this study. A case study supplies rich empirical data that will be analyzed systematically and rigorously.

While Yin, Merriam, and Stake are the leading methodologists in case study research, each author provides differing perspectives on how to conduct a case study (Yazan, 2015). This case study will follow Stake's perspective because he "conceives of the qualitative case study researchers as interpreters, and gatherers of interpretations which require them to report their rendition or construction of the constructed reality or knowledge that they gather through their investigation" (Yazan, 2015, p. 137). Stake's approach to case study methods allows for the flexibility to interpret the data that will be collected in this study.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the research relevant to the following overarching research question: What factors of transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? The review included empirical literature based on survey studies, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews, secondary analysis, and single-subject design (Collier, Griffin, & Wei, 2017; Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer, 2011; Miller-Warren, 2016; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). It delineates numerous aspects that need to be addressed that can influence the decisions students with disabilities make when pursuing postsecondary education (see Sprunger, Harvey, & Quick, 2018; Taylor, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016). Factors such as knowledge about the transition, student involvement, parent involvement, involvement of stakeholders are covered on the topic of transition planning (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Also, the literature

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repeatedly suggests that the purpose of transition plans for high school students with disabilities is to help students prepare for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living as a part of FAPE (Etscheidt, 2006; Prince, Katsiyannis, & Farmer, 2013; Shaw, 2009). Most of the literature on transition planning for high school students with disabilities does not focus on transition planning for postsecondary education alone (Haber et al., 2016; Lipscomb et al., 2017; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016).

The literature does not consider students' perceptions of the factors related to transition planning that influence or support their postsecondary education decisions (Francis, Stride, & Reed, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2016), which makes the current study particularly valuable in addressing this topic. Many researchers (Collier, Griffin, & Wei, 2017; Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer, 2011; Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; MacKenzie, 2015, Strnadová & Cumming, 2014) have conducted survey studies on transition planning using students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and college service coordinators in identifying factors which contribute to effective transition planning for students with disabilities, but these studies fall short of providing the actual experiences to explain what kind of guidance they are receiving to reach their postsecondary goals. Common limitations of such studies include: generalization to all students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education, lack of triangulation, and lack of student perceptions informing in-depth knowledge concerning their transition experiences. Thus, a critical look at students' perceptions of the influence of factors related to transition planning on postsecondary education decisions position the current study to better prepare educators to understand and address the needs of this population.

Chapter three reveals the methodology of this study, which includes descriptions of the research design, the context and access, participant selection, and participants. Also included are

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the positionality of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and validity considerations of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This chapter provides the methods used for this study relevant to the overarching research question: What factors of transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? First, a description of the research design and context and access is provided. Next, the participant selection and the participants for the study are presented, followed by the positionality of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and credibility, and finally, the summary.

Research Design

A qualitative research design using case study methods was chosen for the current investigation. The appropriateness of using qualitative methods over quantitative and mixed-methods is to provide rich data using a smaller sample size of participants (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Curtis, Rabren, & Reilly, 2009). Student perceptions of the factors related to transition planning which influence their pursuit of postsecondary education will be examined. The data also includes parents' and lead special education teachers' perceptions which will be interpreted and examined.

Context and Access

Every year high schools across the nation report their graduation rate to the state, and individual schools compare their own school's graduation rate to the state average. The state in which this study was conducted had the nation's third lowest high school graduation rate for students with disabilities in 2015, which was 36.5% at the time compared to the 62 % national average and 72.5% state average. The state's graduation rate increased from 79.4% in 2016 to 80.6% in 2017 (High School Graduation Rates Website, 2019). The graduation rate for the state in this study has been gradually increasing since 2012.

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This study focuses on participants who have graduated from a mid-sized rural school district in a southeastern U.S. city. The demographics of the students within their former school district include 5% ELL, 0% Migrant, 1% Asian, 7% Black, 10% Hispanic, 0% Native American, 79% White, and 4% Multiracial. The graduation rate for the school district was 94.3% for all students and 77.4% for students with disabilities, which at the time of this investigation exceeded that state average in 2018 (Target High School Demographics Website, 2018). The rate of graduation for students with disabilities, regrettably, is still lower than their typically developing counterparts. The special education program in this school district offers students with disabilities services in a full range of placement settings (e.g., self-contained, resource, inclusion, and consult) depending on their individual academic needs. Students with disabilities may also pursue a certificate of attendance instead of a high school diploma if they feel that they are not able to complete the course work required for them to obtain a diploma.

All student participants in this study were born and raised in a rural town in the northwestern quadrant of a southeastern U.S. state. In the 2018-2019 school year, 872 students were enrolled in the high school from which the participants graduated. The school's demographics include the following groups: 81.7% White, 8.8% Hispanic, 5.5% African American, 3.8% two or more races, 0.1% Asian, and 0.1% Pacific Islander students. Further, the population includes 25% economically disadvantaged students, 38.8% of students who receive free or discounted lunch, 16% of students with disabilities, and 2% English Language Learners. The high school has a graduation rate of 97.9%, which is higher than 96% of other high schools in the state (Target High School Demographics Website, 2019). According to the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), a tool used by the target school district to measure of how well their schools preparing students for postsecondary education, 61.7% of the

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school's graduates are college and career ready (Target High School Demographics Website, 2019). College and career ready means that the graduates are prepared for postsecondary education or employment and should succeed without the need for remediation.

While the school district where the participants attended high school in this study has a graduation rate that is above the state average, the number of students with disabilities pursuing higher education is relatively low compared to their peers without disabilities (Bouck, 2014; Daviso et al., 2011; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Plotner et al., 2016). For example, the school district in the present study reported the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Postsecondary outcomes refer to the path students who have graduated from high school are pursuing, such as higher education, employment, independent living (Bouck, 2014). In 2017, the postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in this school district reported the following: 26.98% college/university, 33.33% competitive employment, 6.35% postsecondary education (this includes any education training program or technical college), 12.7% other employment, and 20.63% unengaged (Target School District Postsecondary Outcome Report, 2017). In 2018, the postsecondary outcomes reported: 18.18% college/university, 34.55% competitive employment, 10.91% postsecondary education (this includes any education training program or technical college), 14.55% other employment, and 21.82% unengaged (Target School District Postsecondary Outcome Report, 2018). Lastly, in 2019 the postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in the school district of this study reported: 27.87% college/university, 36.07% competitive employment, 11.48% postsecondary education (this includes any education training program or technical college), 9.84% other employment, and 14.75% unengaged (Target School District Postsecondary Outcome Report, 2019). While the school district from which the four participants graduated high school achieves

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a high graduation rate for its students with disabilities, a consistently low percentage of these students pursue postsecondary education.

The current higher education contexts for the study include (a) a local private liberal arts college; (b) a small, local technical college; and (c) a local public college. The local private liberal arts college is a private 4-year or above institution which offers Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees. The undergraduate enrollment is 1,936, with 78 graduate students. The demographics of undergraduate enrollment within this local liberal arts college include: 39.6% men, 60.4% women, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2.1% Asian, 5.1% Black or African American, 6.6% Hispanic/Latino, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 79.6% White, 5.6% race/ethnicity unknown, and 0.8% non-resident alien (Local Private Liberal Arts College Website, 2019).

The small local technical college is a public 2-year institution that offers three types of certificates (i.e., less than one year, one but less than two years, and two but less than four years) and an Associate's degree. The undergraduate enrollment is 5,643. The demographics of undergraduate enrollment within this local technical college includes: 37.9% men, 62.1% women, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.0% Asian, 7.0% Black or African American, 13.7% Hispanic/Latino, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 74.9% White, 2.1% two or more races, 0.0% race/ethnicity unknown, 0.9% and non-resident alien (Local Technical College Website, 2019).

The local public college is a public 4-year or above institution which offers either an Associate's or a Bachelor's degree. The undergraduate enrollment is 6,013. The demographics of undergraduate enrollment within this local public college include: 37.7% men, 62.3% women, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.6% Asian, 16.0% Black or African American,

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13.2% Hispanic/Latino, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 64.0% White, 3.5% two or more races, 0.3% race/ethnicity unknown, and 1.2% non-resident alien (Local Public College Website, 2019). The current context of these four student participants qualifies them to address the research question of this study, while the former context provides contact information for accessibility.

In order to gain access for this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the university, as well as the target school district, was obtained. Following IRB approval, I requested approval from the principal from the high school(s) from which my participants graduated to conduct my research. As for recruiting student participants, the special education department at the board of education office of the target district was contacted to obtain former student contact information and postsecondary status. Lead special education teachers were contacted in the target school district to obtain a list of students that would be treated anonymously, who were served in inclusion classes, and went on to pursue postsecondary education. The role of the lead special education teacher is to provide guidance, organization, and supervision to special education teachers in the school to help coordinate the special education process. They are the most appropriate resource to coordinate other special education teachers in exploring possible participants for the study. Lead special education teachers and staff of the special education department provided student contact information (i.e., phone numbers, emails) for the researcher to contact participants for the study.

After obtaining student contact information, I contacted students and parents via phone call and email. My goal was to find four participants and their parents who met the study criteria. I invited former students recommended by the lead special education teachers whom I could confirm were in the target district. For those who agreed, I sent out a consent letter with

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information about the current study and contact information to address any questions regarding their participation (Appendix B). Once participants confirmed their participation, they were provided with the location and possible dates for interviews, which did not necessarily need to be held at their former high school(s).

Participant Selection

The participants in the present study included three first-year college students with disabilities and one senior high school student with disabilities. Other participants included four parents and two lead high school special education teachers in the school district from which the students graduated. Creswell (2007) recommends no more than 4 or 5 participants in a case study, which he asserts "should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis" (p. 128). Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) do not recommend a set number of participants to use in case study research but suggest to have an adequate number of participants to maximize learning to the point of reaching redundancy. Once redundancy is achieved, the researcher does not benefit from including more participants because adding more participants does not generate any new information (Merriam, 1998). The rationale was to obtain the students' most recent perceptions germane to the transition planning process. One senior high school student was chosen because she was at the end of her school year and the end of her transition process. High school students not in their senior year were not selected as they may or may not have attended transition planning meetings by that point in their high school program of study. In addition, students who have graduated from high school for more than one year may or may not be able to recall their transition planning process.

The ideal participants for this study were either recent graduates with disabilities enrolled in their first year of postsecondary education or current high school students with disabilities

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who were accepted into a postsecondary institution. The strategy for selecting the participants in this study is known as purposeful sampling. According to Merriam (1998), purposeful sampling is used when a researcher "wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). In order to use purposeful sampling, the researcher must determine selection criteria in choosing the participants (Merriam, 1998). These students were purposefully selected for this study because they represent successful postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities who wished to pursue postsecondary education and achieved, or were poised to achieve, their transition goals. It was anticipated that their transition planning experiences were likely to provide factors that most supported their decisions to pursue postsecondary education.

The four participants were selected from the target school district and were between the ages of 19-20. The participants took similar courses and received similar special education services during their high school years. Participants' disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate the diversity of the participants chosen. The four participants were chosen to represent different types of postsecondary institutions. The specific selection criteria for student participants included:

1. Participant must have had an active IEP while in high school, which would make him/her eligible for the Special Education services;
2. The participant should have one or more of the following disabilities, which may include specific learning disabilities (SLD), mild intellectual disability (MID), autism spectrum disorders (AU), emotional behavior disorders (EBD), speech or language impairment, and other health impairments (OHI). Other health

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impairments include students with attention deficit disorders (ADD) or attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorders (ADHD);

3. The participant should have received instruction in inclusion classes (i.e., co-taught classes) and been exposed to the same general education curriculum and learning opportunities as their typically developing peers; and
4. Participants should have had postsecondary education as a goal on their IEP transition goals.

Ultimately, the students are the main participants of this case study, while parents and lead special education teacher participants were used for triangulation purposes.

Participants

The four student participants were selected from the target school district and were between the ages of 19-20. Three of the four participants are representative of low socioeconomic status, and one participant is representative of a middle (i.e., working) socioeconomic status. The four participants are similar in terms of receiving instruction in an inclusion classroom setting, which means they had two teachers (i.e., a general education teacher and a special education teacher) in all of their academic classes. The four participants also received similar special education services during their high school years, with the exception of one participant who required one-on-one paraprofessional assistance. Three of the four participants shared the same ethnic background, and only one participant was from a different ethnic background. Two of the four participants were diagnosed with the same disability. The four participants were chosen to represent different types of postsecondary institutions. One of the participants attends a local private liberal arts college, two participants attend a local

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technical college, and one participant will be attending a local public college. The students that participated in the current study are presented below:

Malcolm. Malcolm is a 19-year-old African-American male who recently successfully completed his first year at a local private liberal arts college. He lives with his parents and commutes to college. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Sports Administration with plans to become an athletic director once he graduates. Malcolm attended two school districts in his hometown; he attended one from kindergarten to 2nd grade and the other from 3rd grade to 12th grade. Malcolm reported that he first received specially designed instruction in 3rd grade as he was struggling with reading at the time, and his teachers expressed their concerns to his mother. Malcolm's mother did not hesitate to accept special education services provided by the school district when the assessments indicated that he met the criteria to be served under the specific learning disability eligibility category. Through his Individual Education Program (IEP), Malcolm received basic accommodations for classroom testing and state standardized tests, including small group instruction, extended time for assignments and tests, and read-aloud for test questions. He reported the read-aloud accommodation helped him to "get a better understanding of what [he] was reading or what was in front of [him]" in his elementary and middle school years (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Malcolm then explained that, once he began high school, his reading comprehension improved, and he no longer needed the read-aloud accommodation, so this accommodation was subsequently removed from his IEP.

Malcolm's transition from elementary to middle school was challenging for him because he began to realize that he was not able to perform as well as his peers in courses that involved reading and writing. His transition from middle to high school, however, was less challenging

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because, by then, he had learned how to best address his learning needs. For instance, to improve his reading comprehension, he utilized strategies such as highlighting information in texts so that he could focus on the main ideas in the materials he was reading. His writing improved when he learned how to use graphic organizers in outlining his papers. Over time Malcolm achieved grades comparable to his peers in the areas that were initially challenging for him.

Initially, Malcolm wanted to be a teacher, so his caseload manager helped him focus on schools that offered teacher preparation programs. Malcolm recalled that his caseload manager suggested that he research colleges that offer teacher education degrees. Malcolm also added that he joined the school football team at the end of elementary school. He and his teammates all had dreams to become professional athletes, and their coaches (as well as their teachers) encouraged them to do well academically. This influenced and motivated Malcolm to focus on his academic achievement. Overall, Malcolm described his high school as a community in which everyone “helped each other out” (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). In Malcolm's opinion, the school environment was friendly and supportive. He was not bullied for having a disability; instead, he experienced acceptance, inclusion, and support by teachers and students alike within the school as well as within his personal life. His teachers offered him opportunities to retake tests and allow him to self-correct test selections to improve his grades. Malcolm received additional help from his teachers when he needed clarification on the course material, which took the form of before and after school tutoring. Both of Malcolm's parents graduated from high school but did not pursue postsecondary education. His parents always encouraged him to go to college to expand his future employment options. They understood the challenges and demands of college. Malcolm reported that he always knew he wanted to pursue a college education, which is why he decided to “at least apply and register for college” (Student In-depth

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Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Malcolm admitted that his proudest accomplishment in high school was getting on stage during his graduation to deliver the introductory statement before the valedictorian's graduation speech.

Brittany. Brittany is a 19-year-old White female who is at the end of her senior year of high school. She is the only student participant who is not currently attending a postsecondary institution. She attended K-12 grade in the same school district and was recently accepted at a local public 4-year college in her hometown. Brittany stated that her postsecondary education plan is first to pursue an associate's degree in Nursing and then to find employment in the healthcare field. She reported that she would like to continue attending school to advance her career. Brittany initially received specially designed instruction in the first grade due to her speech and language impairment. She struggled with word recognition related to difficulties with phonemic awareness, and later, with reading comprehension due to a limited understanding of vocabulary. Brittany felt that the read-aloud accommodation she received during testing helped her significantly. She received this accommodation in the form of directions read aloud to her by her special education teachers.

Brittany reported that her transition to middle school was difficult. She described her middle school years as being "rough" and stated that "the testing and all that stuff was just way different" (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Brittany also mentioned that before her transition to high school, the IEP team had considered removing her from the special education program. She explained that during her middle school years, she was performing well in all areas of academics, which included reading, writing, mathematics, history, and science. Although Brittany's mother was proud of Brittany's academic achievements, she wanted Brittany to continue receiving special education services even as Brittany was transitioning to high

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school. Brittany's mother feared that the vocabulary at the high school level in subjects such as literature, history, and science would be too overwhelming for Brittany. Although Brittany's speech and language impairment was not a barrier in middle school classes, Brittany's mother did not want to lose the support or services that the special education program would provide in her high school years.

When describing the climate of her high school, Brittany stated that she "loved her high school" and that "the environment was good" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). She felt that all of her teachers were supportive because "they worked with [her]." Brittany explained that her teachers provided her one-on-one instruction, presented large assignments in smaller segments (i.e., "chunking"), and allowed her additional time to complete work when she was unable to keep up with the pace of instruction and required course work in her classes. Brittany benefited from extra credit to bolster her grades and was appreciative when her teachers guided her, encouraged her, and checked up on her progress.

Brittany reported that her parents were involved in her schooling and provided coaching and assistance. Brittany recalled that her parents would provide her academic support at home with her homework and contact her teachers when Brittany needed additional tutoring. She also recalled that her parents taught her to prioritize her school work over her extracurricular activities. She confessed that her parents had to provide assistance to ensure Brittany's punctuality to school consistently. Brittany's parents wanted her to minimize absences, monitored her grades, and ensured that she received help if she was underperforming in her classes. Brittany stated that her parents' expectations after she graduated from high school were for her to get a good job to get "out there on her own" and pay for her own "stuff" (Student In-

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depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Brittany's proudest accomplishment in high school was receiving acceptance into the college of her choice.

Emily. Emily is a 20-year-old White female who has successfully completed her first year at a local technical college. This technical college offers certificates and Associate's degrees in numerous career fields (e.g., computer technology, construction, culinary arts, medical assisting, business management, cosmetology) that can be earned within 1-2 years. She attended all of her K-12 school years in the same district. Emily is currently studying Early Childhood Education and plans to transfer to a 4-year college after completing her core classes at the technical college in their Early Childhood Education program. The initial special education program services that she received began in kindergarten to address her orthopedic impairment, which made it necessary for her to use a wheel-chair for mobility. Her accommodations for the instructional time in the classroom included: items read aloud to her, extended time for assignments, small group setting for instruction, and access to a laptop. Emily's testing accommodations included orally read test questions, extended time, and a small group setting. She was also provided with a one-to-one paraprofessional to help her with daily activities during school hours, including assistance with note-taking, transitioning between classes, and using the restroom.

Emily recalled that she participated in IEP meetings and knew that she wanted to pursue a career in teaching. While she was clear about her postsecondary education goals, the challenge for her and her family was in determining "how it was going to work" (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). For instance, Emily needed wheel-chair accessible transportation to commute to college and was also concerned about not having a one-to-one paraprofessional to assist her, as Emily had throughout her K-12 school years. Emily reported

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that her transitions between elementary, middle, and high school were seamless; she also noted that the only difference was that each successive school was physically larger and seemed more populated. Emily also noted that she had the same one-to-one paraprofessional assisting her and that no significant changes were made to her routines or IEP services, which contributed to the ease of her transitions throughout her K-12 school years.

Emily described her high school environment as a “really tight-knit community” that was like a family to her (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Her friends and teachers consistently supported her and were “always looking out for [her]” (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). They helped her take notes, reminded her of due dates for assignments, and kept her on track to graduate. Additionally, when Emily was sick and missed school, her teachers and friends would apprise her of the material she missed. Her teachers would also extend the due dates of her assignments and allow her to make up missed tests during class instead of requiring her to stay after school; they knew she had special transportation needs.

Emily recalled that her mother expected Emily to go to college. Emily’s goals after completing high school were to earn a college degree in Early Childhood Education and to become a 2nd-grade teacher. Emily stated that walking across the stage at graduation was her proudest accomplishment for which she spent months of preparation. Emily walked across the stage using a walker and found it one of the most emotionally charged moments for her, her family, friends, and the school staff.

Madison. Madison, a 20-year-old White female, has completed her first year at a local technical college. This technical college offers certificates and Associate’s degrees in numerous career fields (e.g., computer technology, construction, culinary arts, medical assisting, business management, cosmetology) that can be earned within 1-2 years. She attended all of her K-12

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school years in the same school district and is currently pursuing a degree in Nursing. Her services in the special education program began when she was in the 4th grade. Due to a speech and language impairment, Madison struggled to recall and appropriately use subject-specific vocabulary. Her disability had a negative impact on all subject areas (i.e., reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). Madison received adaptations such as extra time on assignments/tests and having test questions that were read aloud for her. Madison reported that she participated in her IEP meetings and perceived that the transition planning meetings helped her determine what she wanted to pursue after graduation. Later in the chapter, this data will be revealed in-depth.

Madison noted that her K-4 elementary school years were a difficult time for her and that she failed every subject area, including reading and mathematics. This was a period of time where she did not have any accommodations through specially designed instruction. Unlike the other participants in the present study, who had supportive teachers throughout their schooling, Madison recalled facing discouragement in her early school years due to a lack of academic and emotional support. For example, she explained that her elementary school principal and her teachers relayed preconceived ideas about her participation in the special education program, insisting that she would not graduate from high school if she did not receive specially designed instruction. Once Madison transitioned to middle school, her grades began to improve, and this continued well into high school as well as her first year of college. Madison recalled that the reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, summarizing, using her background knowledge) and study skills (e.g., highlighting material, making note cards, rewriting class notes) that her teachers taught her in middle school helped her improve her academic

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performance. Madison also confessed that with each transition phase, she became emotionally ready to assume responsibility for her learning.

According to Madison, her high school environment “was really good” and the teachers were encouraging (Student In-depth Biographical Interview, May, 2019). Unlike the principal and teachers from her elementary school, her high school principals and teachers believed that she could graduate from high school because she was achieving academic success through specially designed instruction that was tailored specifically to her needs (i.e., extended time on assignments and tests and test questions and material read aloud). She also recalled that she had supportive friends, some of whom had the same learning disability, speech, and language impairments as she. Several of her friends struggled with vocabulary and reading comprehension, and, “like [her], also wanted to pass their classes and graduate” (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). Although Madison reported that her mother, Kelly, did not attend college, Kelly wanted Madison to pursue higher education and have more career opportunities than Kelly had. Kelly expected Madison to attend college and to work while attending school. Madison’s goals after graduating from high school included attending college and earning a degree in Nursing. Madison stated that her proudest accomplishment so far has been graduating from high school, despite the lack of support and encouragement she experienced in her elementary school years. Table 1 below summarizes the description of the participants in the present study.

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Participant	Categories	Description
Malcolm	Student with Disability Diagnosis Parent(s) Transition Goal on IEP	19 years old, completed 1 st year of college Specific Learning Disability Janet, did not attend college Post-secondary education in Construction
Brittany	Student with Disability Diagnosis Parent(s) Transition Goal on IEP	19 years old, high school senior Speech or Language Impairment Michelle, did not attend college Post-secondary education in Healthcare
Emily	Student with Disability Diagnosis Parent(s) Transition Goal on IEP	20 years old, completed 1 st year of college Orthopedic Impairment Sarah, did attend college Post-secondary education in Early Childhood Education
Madison	Student with Disability Diagnosis Parent(s) Transition Goal on IEP	20 years old, completed 1 st year of college Speech or Language Impairment Kelly, did not attend college Post-secondary education in Healthcare

Positionality of the Researcher

I was born in India and came to the U.S. with my family when I was two years old. When I started school, I did not speak any English. My father had a master's degree in Science, and my mother did not continue her education after high school when they lived in India. When they grew up, women are not pushed or expected to pursue higher education in India. Although my father found work as a teacher and worked multiple jobs to make ends meet, my mother worked in a factory for a long time and became a stay at home mom after she got laid off from the factory. My father continued to pursue his goals. He became a business owner of multiple

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businesses, while my mother remained a homemaker. She did not have a driver's license either, so she was utterly dependent on my father. At times it did not bother her, but many times she would get depressed about her life and her lack of accomplishments.

My family did not know anything about the education system in the U.S., yet my siblings and I all graduated from a very competitive four-year college and continued to pursue higher education. My parents did not know when we applied to college, which colleges we applied to, or what we studied. Most of our transition process from high school to postsecondary education was handled by the guidance counselors at our high schools. Through my experience, I felt that the education system in the U.S. is very supportive in guiding students to transition to postsecondary education, which is not the case in many other countries.

After I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Psychology, my first job was as an employment specialist, where I helped adults with disabilities find employment. Many of my clients had a difficult time obtaining work, and those who did find employment had limited options. These individuals had limited knowledge, skills, training, and certifications to qualify for many competitive employment opportunities. This experience for me was challenging, I felt many of the adults I worked with wanted to get a well-paying job and had the potential to be hired for better jobs, but they lacked credentials.

As a special education teacher in my 17th year of teaching students with disabilities, my role as a researcher is to be a learner. I have taught in three different states: two in the northeastern U.S. and one in the southeastern U.S. Of those years, I have taught five years at the elementary school level, two years at the middle school level, and nine years at the high school (secondary) level. In my experience, I have witnessed many students with disabilities graduate from high school who hold no realistic plan for their futures. I have seen students waste years

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sitting at home because they do not have the skills or knowledge to pursue a full-time job, which could improve their independence and living conditions.

As a teacher, while I am committed to teaching my students with disabilities based on my experience of working with adults with disabilities, my main concern is what happens to my students once they graduate from high school. I want my students to not only be successful in my classroom when I am their teacher, but to be successful long after they have left my classroom. Therefore at my school, I also serve as one of the chairs on the College and Career Readiness Committee. The program provides all the students at my school with activities to help them gain knowledge of their postsecondary options throughout the school year. Some of the activities in the program include reviewing unofficial transcripts with students and discussing the importance of grade point average (GPA), writing sample college admission essays, creating a resume and cover letter, visiting local colleges, completing an online career inventory, performing a college search, and discussing financial aid. While obtaining a postsecondary education may not be considered a possible outcome for all high school students with disabilities, students with disabilities who do choose to pursue postsecondary education need to be supported and informed about the process of pursuing postsecondary education.

In this case study, the participants are my former students who are currently enrolled or accepted in college. In the years that I taught them, I developed a good relationship with them, and some of us stay in touch through social media. Since these students trust me, I feel they are open and honest with me while talking about their decision to pursue postsecondary education and the influence that transition planning in high school had on their ability to do so. I am not a stranger to them or a random researcher they do not know. My students know I care for them and want the best for them. Thus, through their stories and lived experiences, I wanted to learn about

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their perceptions of the influence that various factors related to transition planning has had on their desire and ability to pursue postsecondary education. I needed to know whether specific factors related to transition planning benefitted them in their decision to pursue postsecondary education and, if not, how might educators help students pursue their future dreams to attend college.

Data Collection

The present study utilizes four data sources: (a) in-depth biographical interviews (Appendix C), (b) open-ended interviews (Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F), (c) document review (student participants' IEPs, transition plans, summary of performance/exit interviews, and the transition meeting minutes), and (d) student-generated visual representations (Appendix G). The data collection process took approximately three months. The Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory guided the data sources and the data collection process. Following IRB approval, the process began with obtaining consent from participants and scheduling dates for interviews and student-generated visual representations. Next, I interviewed students on the dates and times that were convenient for them. Following that, I obtained student-generated visual representations. Lastly, I interviewed parents and lead special education teachers. The data sources for the present study are described below.

Data Sources

Although both in-depth biographical and open-ended interviews could be categorized as one data source, for the purposes of the present study, they are delineated separately below, as are the remainder of data sources:

In-depth biographical interviews. In the first month of data collection, each student

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and parent participant was involved in a 30-minute in-depth biographical interview to provide background information. The in-depth biographical questions (Appendix C) explored the context of the students' high school transition planning experiences, which included their decisions to pursue postsecondary education, life goals, values, and beliefs. To understand how students with disabilities made sense of the process they used to pursue postsecondary education, it was critical to know about their experiences with transition planning as well as life goals, their personal and school influences, and expectations and support they received from the school system. It was also essential to understand participants' values, beliefs, and worldviews regarding education, its value, and its value to their future.

Open-ended interviews. Later in the first month, 45-minute open-ended interviews were conducted to delve into student participants' knowledge about transition planning and the various postsecondary options that were available to them before graduating high school. Stake (1995) states, “the purpose for the most part is not to get a simple yes or no answers but description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation” (p. 65). The questions encouraged participants to reflect, deliberate, and explain their thoughts on the transition planning process and the available supports that were afforded to them. (e.g., discussions with guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and direct service transition professionals) (Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F). Participants were prompted to describe their transition planning experiences and what they perceived as the purpose of the meetings and their role in the process. Participants were asked to reflect not only on their role but the role of other IEP committee members, helpful information offered, and how these transition planning experiences helped them arrive at their decision to pursue postsecondary education, in particular. The open-ended interview questions were unstructured to allow participants to enhance their responses (Creswell, 2007).

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Document Review. According to Merriam (1998), “documentary data are particularly good sources for *qualitative* case studies because they can ground the investigation in the context of the problem being investigated" (p. 126). The document review for the present study occurred throughout data collection and analysis. The documents used included the student participants' IEPs, transition plans, summary of performance/exit interviews, and the transition meeting minutes. The rationale for using these documents was to make transparent how transition planning may have contributed to participants' decisions to pursue postsecondary education. Since directly observing the process of transition planning during an IEP meeting for students with disabilities was not possible, the documents served as records of activity that led to IEP/transition plan development (Stake, 1995). For instance, the IEP transition plans state the goals students had for pursuing postsecondary education and how the goals were going to be monitored for progress. The summary of performance or exit interview describes how students perceived the services they received. In the spirit of transparency, the external stakeholder contact information was shared with the students.

The transition meeting minutes were reviewed to verify information about postsecondary options that may or may not have been discussed and to confirm which stakeholders were present at the meeting. These documents were treated in the same manner as data from student interviews, in that the content was analyzed, coded for themes, and used for cross-analysis of the cases in this study. Information provided in the documents was also compared to the verbal responses students provided in their interviews to determine the accuracy and consistency of their responses regarding their postsecondary education goals.

Visual representations (drawings and collages). After student participants were interviewed using both in-depth biographical and open-ended interview protocols, they were

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asked to generate visual representations in the form of drawings and collages. The rationale for collecting the visual representations after the interviews was to allow participants time to reflect on their transition planning experiences to prepare them to generate meaningful ideas for their drawings and collages. Visual representations to elicit students' thoughts, feelings, ideas, and perspectives were initially used as research methods in the sociology and psychology fields (Fine & Sirin, 2007), but have become more commonly used as a data source in educational research as well. Visual representations have been used in many qualitative studies to generate data as they allow participants a less pressurized means of expressing their feelings (Lomax, 2018; Mayaba & Wood, 2015; Pitt, 2017; Schulze, 2017). For instance, Lomax (2018) used visual representations to understand the daily life of children from marginalized neighborhoods; the age of the 60 children participants in the study ranged from 3 to 14 years. Mayaba and Wood (2015) used both drawing and collages to generate data in their qualitative study with vulnerable, orphaned HIV and AIDS children between the ages of 9 and 14 to explore the use of participatory visual methods to enhance resilience (p.1). Schulze (2017) used diagrams and drawings to study the learning experiences of master's and doctoral students to gain insight into their learning experiences. The researchers of these studies, similar to other researchers who have used visual representations as their data generation, have found this method provides greater freedom of expression to their participants compared to the more commonly used methods of interviewing and conducting surveys.

Visual representations used in research could include drawings, collages, paintings, photographs, and filming. The purpose of using these mediums is to allow participants to construct an image that reflects their experiences, which may be more profound than or offer more information than they may be able to express verbally through interviews or through filling

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out a survey. In the present study, visual representations were comprised of collages and original student drawings created by the students themselves. Student participants were asked to create a visual representation in response to a prompt given to them on two separate occasions because one session would be too long for the participants to complete both. The materials to produce visual representations were provided to the participants. Materials included paper, poster board, markers, pencils/pens, colored pencils, magazines, scissors, and glue sticks.

In the first session, student participants were given 2 hours to create a collage. For this student-generated data source, students responded to the following prompt: *Create a collage that depicts your transition planning process for pursuing postsecondary education.* Magazines selected for collages included a wide variety of topics (i.e., *People, Woman's World, Life and Style, Cosmopolitan, HGTV, Flea Market Gardens, Growers Supply, Good Housekeeping, Western Horseman, Techniques, Southern Living, Glamour, Family Circle, Fastline, Athlon Sports, The New Pioneer*) to give students a broad range of images they could use to depict their transition planning experience. After the completion of the task, participants were given 5-10 minutes to write an explanation of their visual on the back of the collage. For the second session, student participants were given 45-minutes to create a drawing in response to the following prompt: *What did you envision for your future when you were in high school?* Once they completed their drawing, they were prompted to briefly explain their visual representation in 5-10 minutes to minimize misinterpretations, and their verbal explanations were recorded. Both visual representations allowed participants to express their experiences and perceptions, which added depth to the data collected through interviews.

There were several benefits of using visual representations. To begin, drawings remove the linguistic barrier that many students with disabilities face, particularly students who are not

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comfortable verbally expressing themselves in interviews. The use of participant-generated drawings as a data source also provided researchers with insight into the lived experiences of the participants in the study and “a means to understand how they make meaning of them” (Mayaba & Wood, 2015, p. 3). Also, the use of collages is considered a valid source of data collection where participants are required to choose pictures from magazines and arrange them in a way that is meaningful to them to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Mayaba & Wood, 2015). The rationale for using both drawings and collages in this study was to give participants multiple opportunities to reflect and describe their transition planning experiences in a less intimidating way, to assist with triangulation of findings, and to enhance validity (Booton, 2018). When visual representations along with verbal or written explanations of the visual representations were compared to verbal responses participants provided in interviews, they may either be consistent or produce new insights (Booton, 2018; Milbrath, 2012).

There are also some negative aspects, or challenges, in using visual representations to generate data. Visual representations depend on the participant's ability to translate his or her feelings into drawing, memory, and artistic abilities. Some participants may be able to express themselves better using visual representations, but it may not be the case for all participants. The participants may also misinterpret what is expected by the prompt and what to create for the researcher. Bessette and Paris (2019) stated, “Issues related to misinterpretations or ambiguity of a participant’s message have been raised by several critics of visual data, which necessarily requires that the researcher goes beyond asking what is being depicted, to questioning its meaning and significance” (p. 3). Researchers may analyze and interpret drawings or collages different from what the participant intends to depict in their visual representation, which presents a mismatch between reality and what is interpreted. Also, participants in the study may

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misinterpret the prompt that is given and create a visual representation that may not reflect what they are being asked (Mayaba & Wood, 2015). Another issue with asking older student participants to create a drawing or a collage is that they may not be as creative as they once were when they were younger. Unless young adults are taking drawing/art courses, they are not typically encouraged to draw or create visuals. Without the practice of creating drawings and collages, the participants may not present detailed visual representations. Taking both the benefits and the challenges of using visual representations into consideration, the current study presents the visual representations with caution as this data is analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research question.

As for data storage, a locked filing system was used to separate transcribed in-depth biographical interview transcripts, transcribed open-ended interview responses, and documents used for the review. All information about participants and documents related to the present study is stored in a standard locked office file cabinet, as suggested by Stake (1995). Since participant created visual representations were too large to store in a file cabinet, a locked closet was used for storage. Audio recorded data from participant interviews were also saved on a password-protected computer, which was used throughout the study. Three years beyond the completion of the defense of this manuscript, all data on computer files will be deleted, hard copy documents (e.g., transcripts of interviews, copies of documents used for document review) will be shredded, and collages will be discarded.

Data Analysis

These multiple sources of information assisted with triangulation and provided a holistic analysis of each case (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation, in the present study, involves verifying evidence from multiple data sources and the existing literature to assist with defining a theme or

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perspective (Creswell, 2007). The interview responses were recorded using a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of participants. After listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, the recordings were self-transcribed by the researcher to avoid or minimize the loss of translation. Next, the raw data was organized and prepared for analysis. The transcripts were reviewed several times and information that presented evidence of transition knowledge, student engagement in the transition planning process, parent and stakeholder involvement, as well as any evidence of students' progressing through the three key constructs of the Choice-Making model, was highlighted. The documents for review, which included the student participants' IEPs, transition plans, summary of performance/exit interviews, and the transition meeting minutes, were also coded similar to the transcripts. Information regarding student's transition goals, their progress to achieve their goals, and feedback from their parents and teachers was highlighted as it related to the Choice-Making model. The evidence found in the data related to the themes found in the existing literature, which assisted with coding data that was relevant to transition planning of postsecondary education decisions of students with disabilities (see Figure 2).

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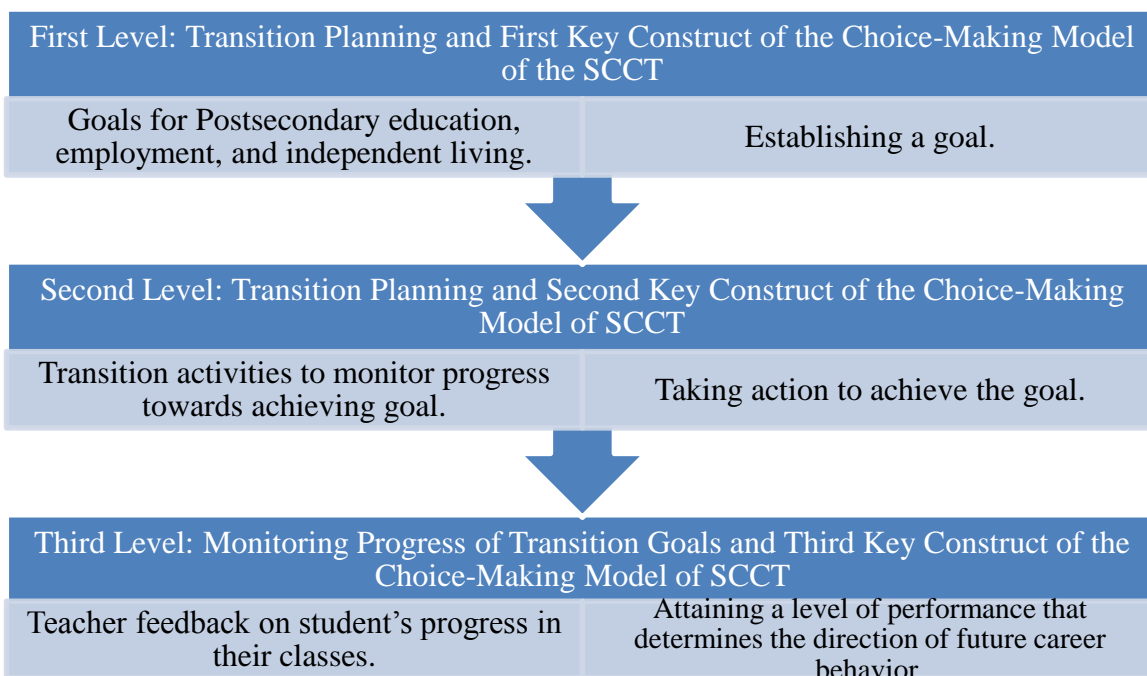


Figure 2. Transition Planning aligned to the three key constructs of the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Adapted from 'Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance,' by R. Lent, S. Brown, and G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122.

There were two levels of coding, one for identifying information and another for interpretive analysis of data through the three constructs of the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory. The SCCT theory was the backdrop for data collection, especially the choice of data sources to be used and the questions to be asked. During data analysis, information was highlighted by hand that related to the key constructs of the Choice-Making model. For instance, when students recalled establishing their goals to pursue postsecondary education in their interviews, the section of the transcript was coded as the first key construct of the Choice-Making model. From the review of students' transition plans, the students' goals, their transition activities, and their teacher feedback were coded as they fit with the key constructs of the Choice-Making model. The student drawings also provided evidence of the goals these student participants established for themselves while they were in high school,

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which again relates to the first key construct of the Choice-Making model. Data was also analyzed using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method of data analysis involves "taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Results from all data sources, including transcripts, documents of review, and visual representations, were compared as they were collected and compared throughout the analysis.

Due to the volume of data collected, a computer software program, Microsoft Office (i.e., Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word), was used to store, manage, and retrieve data. Since coding in qualitative analysis depends on relevant data that is collected, the rules for coding the data were established after data was collected (Merriam, 1998). After the coding of the data was completed, themes emerged from the data, which could then be connected across cases. To validate the accuracy of the information of my data analysis, I interpreted the meaning of the themes that were established across cases.

Student participants were asked to describe their drawings and collages, and common themes or symbolism was recorded. These visual representations (i.e., collages and drawings) were coded using the following protocol: level (1) features checklist, level (2) positive or negative features, and level (3) holistic coding (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2003). The responses to interview questions, the documents, and visual representations were cross analyzed to determine any contradictions. Since multiple cases were used in the study, Creswell (2007) suggests

a typical format is to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by thematic analysis

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across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case. (p. 75)

Ultimately, the data was examined, filtered, and interpreted through the three constructs of the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (i.e., establishing a goal, taking action to achieve a goal, and attaining a level of performance that determines the direction of future career behavior). This was accomplished by physically placing similar and dissimilar raw data side by side and grouping them by criterion. The researcher was able to discern where some data intersected and overlapped and where others did not and were considered outliers.

Ethical Considerations

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was completed, and approval was requested. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their identities. Participants were allowed to refuse to answer any questions in the interview if they wished or to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Since the present study involved participants sharing their stories and experiences with transition planning, it was essential to build a relationship of trust, rapport, and collaboration. The participants were encouraged to ask questions about my research throughout the data collection process.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility of the present study were established through prolonged engagement with the participants during data collection, triangulation of multiple sources of data sources, and member checking (Creswell, 2007). Data collection took approximately three months, with the researcher meeting with the participants several times to gather information through interviews as well as multiple visual representations. Triangulation is a strategy used by qualitative researchers to establish validity and credibility (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation is

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achieved when multiple data sources, varied data sources, member checking, and comparison of findings to the literature are made (i.e., literature is compared to findings to determine whether they refute or support one another).

In order to assure trustworthiness, multiple data sources were used and analyzed over a period of three months (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Stake, 1995). The ongoing analysis of data collected throughout the study also allowed for finding commonalities between participant responses. Participants were provided with transcripts and tentative interpretations from their interviews to ensure the fidelity of their responses; this is known as member checking. Member checking is another strategy used by qualitative researchers to enhance credibility. Participants had the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the data to eliminate any misinterpretations (Stake, 1995). In addition to member checking, visual representations and document reviews were juxtaposed with transcripts to increase the credibility of the results. The findings of the present study will be compared and discussed in terms of the literature review in chapter five.

Summary

This qualitative case study investigated the following research question: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? The data sources were comprised of (a) in-depth biographical interviews, (b) open-ended interviews, (c) document review (i.e., student participants' IEPs, transition plans, summary of performance/exit interviews, and the transition meeting minutes), and (d) student-generated visual representations. Data was analyzed using the constant comparison method and the three constructs of the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

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In chapter four, the results and findings are provided. Chapter four also presents the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory as it relates to the findings based on a cross-case analysis. Lastly, chapter five provides a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations and delimitations of the study, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Findings

This chapter presents the results of the data collection and a discussion of the findings based on a cross-case analysis of the data in response to the following research question: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? In addressing this question, the goal is not to suggest that correlation between factors and outcomes implies causation (i.e., students' decision to attend college), but rather to state the conditions that were already present (i.e., parental support, planning, parental and stakeholder involvement) and those factors which may have served as a favorable conduit to students' actions. The chapter begins with the results presented thematically. Then, the findings, as well as the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory as it relates to the current study, will be presented.

Results

A review of the data (interviews, transcripts, visual representations, and school records) revealed the following results, based upon recurring themes within the current study: a) knowledge of transition process in pursuit of postsecondary education, b) student engagement in transition processes, c) parent involvement beyond the IEP meetings, and d) internal versus external stakeholder involvement in the transition process.

Knowledge of Transition Process in Pursuit of Postsecondary Education

The present study found evidence in student transcripts that knowledge of the transition process favorably disposed participants to pursue postsecondary education. In the transcripts for in-depth interviews, two of the four student participants recalled that their desire to pursue secondary education began at an early age. They acknowledged that transition planning provided valuable information that helped guide them to establish their goals. The participants also stated

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that their parents' support and teachers' knowledge of transition planning and the process for pursuing postsecondary education had a positive influence on their decision to attend college.

Acculturating students to their postsecondary options was, for some of the participants, akin to acquiring knowledge of the transition process. Malcolm recalled that he attended both individual and whole group meetings related to his postsecondary school options. Malcolm specifically recalled meeting with a guidance counselor on one occasion to discuss his postsecondary education plans. He also described one of the whole group meetings he attended in the auditorium of his school, which was led by the principal and two assistant principals. Junior and senior high school students and their parents were invited to the voluntary assembly and provided information concerning postsecondary opportunities. College representatives and military recruiters were also present to offer information regarding their programs. At this meeting, the administrators predominantly discussed general requirements for the college admissions process, such as registering for the ACT/SAT exams, noting college application deadlines, and briefly explaining the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Malcolm also reported attending a Transition Fair offered by his school, which included postsecondary programs (e.g., Goodwill, the military, the 2Work Staffing employment agency, Project Search, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Sheriff's Office, Lowe's Distribution Center) for students with disabilities. These programs were presented to students in a large auditorium at the local technical college, where representatives from the different programs displayed descriptions of their programs. At the transition fair, students were able to speak to representatives and welcomed to take any additional information that the program provided (i.e., hand-outs, pamphlets, business cards). Malcolm felt that he was not interested in the programs at

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the Transition Fair because they were mostly related to immediate employment following high school, and he wanted to pursue college.

Malcolm's school offered transition-related activities to students to help them chart their future courses. For instance, his teachers reviewed the college requirements, such as grade point average and ACT/SAT scores, for various colleges. He stated, "They would show us, like, different, - I guess, websites of the colleges, -like college websites or whatever, and show us, like, how to navigate the different websites and see what we needed to, like, apply" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). Malcolm indicated that his high school curriculum did not prepare him for postsecondary education. He reported that in his first year of college, he had to submit an essay in most of his courses every week, which was an expectation he was not accustomed to in his high school years. In Malcolm's reflection of his transition planning process, he recommended that future high school students with disabilities raise more questions at the meetings than he did related to acquiring accommodations they would need, especially if they decide to pursue postsecondary education. He revealed that his first year of college was successful, but he did not receive his accommodations until his second semester. Malcolm felt that lack of information regarding the process and time for requesting accommodations in college would have significantly helped him in his first semester, as he could have used the additional time on his tests to earn better grades. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the college accommodations that Malcolm is currently provided included extra time for testing and being allowed to test individually; he reported that access to a quiet setting without distractions helps him focus on his tests.

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In her open-ended interview, Malcolm's mother, Janet, stated that she had the most difficulty with Malcolm's financial aid application. She mentioned that Malcolm received a partial scholarship, but they struggled to search for additional financial support to assist with his college tuition. Janet recalled that she did her own research to find information about financial options, but it was a complicated process. She felt that the school could have provided more information about financial aid and grants. It is possible that Janet would have benefited from having an advocate for her and Malcolm in terms of the questions they could have been asking at the meeting.

Brittany, the senior high school student, reported that she had a better understanding of her strengths and weaknesses from working one-on-one with her teachers when discussing her academic background. She explained that they would closely monitor her level of performance in her classes and follow up with her academic progress. Brittany stated, "They are constantly checking our grades, making sure we were always getting our stuff turned in on time, doing it right, and just, like, knowing how to do it and understanding what we're doing" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). She recalled that her postsecondary options were communicated through the mail and that emails were sent to her parents. The content of the emails included information about transition activities and newsletters with reminders of dates to assist with the college applications process (e.g., transition fairs, financial aid information sessions, college entrance exam dates, and local college application deadlines).

Brittany, unlike Malcolm, did not mention acquiring transition knowledge through individual or whole group meetings (e.g., one-on-one meetings with a guidance counselor, transition-related school assemblies). She mostly described meetings with her caseload manager to discuss her academic progress in classes. Brittany confessed that she relied on her friends,

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who were accepted to their postsecondary education institutions, to guide her through the application process.

Emily, the participant pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education, felt that her teachers provided adequate information to her in increasing her knowledge about transitioning to postsecondary education. She stated,

They [her teachers] helped me on a lot of stuff that I didn't understand about college. Like the SAT or, you know, the testing. And then the financial aid,--they pretty much done all that, too...-- about, you know, this is what you have to do, and this is what you have to. -- So they were pretty helpful, with stuff like that.

(Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

Emily felt that her knowledge about the transition process was increased through transition activities or programs provided by her school. She recalled that her caseload manager suggested vocational rehabilitation services, but she acquired knowledge about transitioning to postsecondary education institutions from visiting colleges on her field trips through her Teaching as a Profession pathway courses. She stated,

The tours for sure were preparing me, because I could kind of get a feel for what it was like to be in college, being on the tours. And then the vocational rehab helped too, because they were, you know, explaining to me, you know, this is what you have to do, and we're going to work with you after high school and stuff like that. (Student Open-ended Interview, May 2019)

Emily added that her postsecondary education options (e.g., technical college, 2-year college, 4-year college) were communicated with her either in her meetings or through email.

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Madison, who is currently pursuing a Nursing degree, recalled transition activities offered to juniors in her high school that included tours of local colleges. Madison felt that the local college tours provided the knowledge that she needed to prepare for her transition to postsecondary education. Madison reported that she received information from the colleges about their programs and was able to walk around the campus to see all of the amenities of the different colleges she visited. Madison reported that her experience on the college tours helped her decide on the institution that was most suitable for her to pursue her Nursing degree. She also mentioned that her high school teachers assisted her in completing her financial aid application. Madison recalled her postsecondary education options were presented to her individually and not in a whole group setting. Madison felt that her high school curriculum was adequate in preparing her for her college-level courses. She reported that she is earned all As in her first year of college, suggesting that her high school curriculum was well-aligned to her postsecondary educational goals. Madison felt that she was satisfied with her transition planning process to pursue the appropriate postsecondary education for her. She confidently stated that she knew the expectations for applying to colleges. Madison did not provide suggestions to improve the transition planning process for future students with disabilities in her interview.

Student Engagement in Transition Processes

In the present study, three of the students completed their first year of college, and one participant was accepted to a college of her choice following her high school graduation. All of the students clearly expressed their decision to pursue postsecondary education to their caseload managers in their transition planning meetings. Further, they participated in the transition planning activities that were offered in their high schools and met the requirements for college

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acceptance. The students' transcripts and a review of their IEP documents provided evidence of their involvement in the transition planning process.

Malcolm stated that his participation in high school football played a critical role in his decision to pursue postsecondary education, and all while he was in the process of setting goals on his transition plan. He recalled that his teammates and coaches encouraged him to do well in school to qualify him for college scholarships. Malcolm felt that he was fully included in his transition planning meetings. During meetings and in casual conversation, he indicated that "most of the time my mom was working, most of the time it was just me and I guess the instructor talking about what I wanted to do after I graduate from high school" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). Malcolm described his level of participation in his transition planning meetings in the following way: "I was, like, very involved in it...most of the time it was just me and that person talking so it was the only way to be involved" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). The meeting minutes of his final IEP did not provide evidence of Malcolm's verbal input or actual discussions regarding his transition plans, but this may have been inadvertently ignored by the notetaker at the meeting.

Brittany also reported attending her transition planning meetings and felt that she was actively engaged in the process. She described her inclusion in the following way:

I felt included. They always asked me if that's what I wanted to do, and they always explained-- they explained it to my momma, and if I didn't understand, they explained it to me in a different way so I would understand, like what we were going to do and what our next step was and stuff. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

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Brittany admitted that she finally decided to pursue postsecondary education at the beginning of her senior year: She stated, "When everybody, like, started talking about it, I was like, I need to do it before it's too late. So I went ahead and applied before, like, my first semester was over, so I could, like, not have to worry about it" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). Brittany reported that she knew she wanted to pursue higher education in the healthcare field from her experiences in her healthcare pathway classes. She reported that her healthcare teachers exposed her to various positions in the healthcare field. Brittany recalled having the opportunity to listen to several healthcare professional speakers in her classes, which increased her interest in pursuing a career in the healthcare field. Brittany was decided on pursuing postsecondary education, but she did not take action steps to pursue her goal until she observed her friends completing those action steps. She reported that she was inspired by her friends, who were accepted by postsecondary institutions or were in the process of submitting their application, and she became proactive in submitting her application. Brittany's IEP meeting minutes document confirmed that Brittany and the IEP team discussed her transition goals and activities: The IEP team reviewed the results of Brittany's student transition questionnaire, her progress in her healthcare pathway, and Brittany's postsecondary education and employment goals.

Emily, the participant pursuing a career in Early Childhood Education, was involved in her IEP and transition planning meetings as well, and she felt that she was included in her transition planning process. In her interview, she stated,

I felt very included because they were they would talk to me about, you know, this is what we need to do, and this is what you need to accomplish in order, you know, to get from point A to point B, whatever like that. So they were I was pretty involved. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

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She recalled that everyone knew she wanted to attend college and focus on a career in Early Childhood Education. When she was a freshman in high school, she already knew she wanted to pursue postsecondary education. In her IEP documents, it was plainly stated that Emily planned to graduate high school in May 2018 with a general education diploma before going to college to pursue a degree in Early Childhood Education. Emily's transition plan was updated 2-4 times per year. The frequency of her transition plan updates indicated that she had the opportunity to be actively involved in her transition planning. In addition, the IEP revealed that Emily changed her mind about attending a four-year college because she missed application deadlines, but that she was still interested in pursuing higher education at a different institution. Emily recalled that she was both persistent and vocal about her desire to pursue postsecondary education.

Madison, the college Nursing student, reported active engagement in her transition planning meetings. She recalled that she attended her transition meetings and strongly felt that she was included in the transition planning process: "Every time I went, I felt included because every time we, like, had a meeting or whatever, they would include me in it and say this is what you need to do to get where you want to be" (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). Madison felt that she adequately participated in her meetings and reported that she was satisfied with her involvement. During her interview, when she was asked who provided the guidance she needed to pursue postsecondary education, she stated, "No one really, it was myself" (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). Madison recalled that she wanted to attend college since she young because, in her words, "[she] did not want to struggle." Her teachers, per her IEP, reported that Madison was a hard worker and that her grades reflected growth and maturity. Her transition plan, which was updated yearly, indicated that her goal to pursue education following high

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school graduation included earning a degree or a certification in the healthcare field, which she is currently pursuing.

Parent Involvement Beyond IEP Meetings

Interview transcripts revealed that all parent participants in this study had high expectations of their child's pursuit of postsecondary education, even though three out of the four parents never attended college. One of the parents did not graduate from high school but still encouraged her child to attend college. Interestingly, the data suggest that none of the parent participants viewed their child's disability as a barrier to pursuing postsecondary education. The student interviews, parent interviews, and the document review in this study revealed that the parents supported the transition planning process for their child's decision to pursue higher education.

Malcolm described his parents' involvement this way:

My mom and dad have a high school diploma, and, uh, they have always pushed for me and my brothers and sisters to go to college even if, like, we didn't want to do college. You going to college and at least or at least try it and see what it's like. So they always pressured me to do good in school so I could have the opportunity to go to college. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

He added, "They at least wanted me to go to college for a year at least and see what it was like. If I didn't like it, then I could stop and get a job somewhere, but they really wanted me to at least try it and see" (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). Malcolm's parents were not only supportive of him pursuing higher education but were also realistic about the possibility of him not being able to complete a college degree. His mother, Janet, recalled that she considered college an option for Malcolm when he was in high school. In her interview, she

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stated, "He said he wanted to go, and I tried my best to make sure he go...we been talking about it for a long time for a long time he been saying he wanted to go to college" (Parent Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). While Janet felt she was involved in her child's IEP meetings, when she was asked in her interview if she raised any questions during the meeting, Janet reported that she only asked if Malcolm would receive his accommodations at the college level. Janet's question regarding Malcolm's accommodations suggests that she was concerned about how he would perform academically in college without receiving the supports that have helped him throughout most of his school years.

Brittany also felt that her parents were involved in her transition planning. Brittany noted her family is very close because they spend quality time together on Sundays and holidays. In her interview, she described her parents in the following way:

My parents like me to do well in school. They always – I had a hard time, like, going to school. Like, waking up and getting in there at first. And they always want me to keep going and never miss a day. And always check my report cards and make sure I was making good grades or getting help if I needed it. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

Brittany's mother, Michelle, stated in her interview that she attended Brittany's transition meetings and felt that everyone at the meetings shared sufficient information with her and her child about Brittany's postsecondary options. Michelle, like Malcolm's mother, reported that she would have liked more information pertaining to financial aid as well as a list of all the resources (i.e., websites and handouts with directions to assist with the financial aid application) for Brittany in their transition planning meetings. The document review of Brittany's IEP revealed that Michelle did not have any concerns about Brittany regarding Brittany's education. This

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information could have been communicated through a phone conference because the transition planning meeting minutes indicated that Michelle was not present during the meeting. The document review did not reflect active parent involvement, but Brittany and her mother's transcripts suggest active parent involvement in the transition planning process.

Emily's mother, Sarah, is also a working parent who recalled in her interview that she was involved in her daughter's transition planning meetings. Unlike the other parents, Sarah had many concerns about her daughter going to college because Emily has a wheelchair and needs assistance to navigate the college environment physically. Sarah had to ensure that the school she attended was handicap accessible and that transportation would be provided to Emily. Sarah reported in her interview that Emily had to attend night school because of the limited availability of handicap accessible transportation. Another issue they encountered was that the college they were considering for Emily did not provide a one-to-one paraprofessional, which Emily had throughout her school life. They had to plan routines for her to use the restroom and accomplish other adaptive tasks without the aid of a paraprofessional. Despite such physical barriers, Sarah expected her daughter to go to college to obtain a degree and believed her daughter could get a meaningful, worthwhile position in which Emily would find success and fulfillment. Sarah and Emily stated in their interviews that they met with the disabilities coordinator at the local technical college and that the coordinator provided them with all the information they needed. Emily recalled that the coordinator explained how Emily would receive her accommodations from her IEP at the technical college, gave Emily and her mother a tour of the campus, and answered their questions about handicap accessible transportation to the institution. The information provided by the coordinator answered many of the questions and concerns Emily

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and Sarah had about pursuing postsecondary education, which was not provided to them at Emily's transition planning meeting.

Similar to the other parent participants in the present study, Sarah felt that applying for financial aid was a difficult process, and she and her daughter went to the college for additional assistance. Also, similar to Malcolm and Brittany's parents, Emily's transition planning meeting minutes revealed that Sarah did not attend the meeting. Emily's IEP documentation further revealed that her mother did not provide any input or express any parental concerns about Emily's education. Her involvement was not reflected in the IEP documents. This was also the case for Janet and Michelle. In her interview, Sarah, Emily's mother, provided her support for Emily to pursue postsecondary education, recalling that she met with a vocational rehabilitation counselor and the disabilities coordinator at the local technical college on her own.

In her interview, Madison expressed that school was important to her parents, family, and friends. Madison stated, "It was very important cause---my mom graduated from high school, but they said that it was important because they don't want me to struggle like they think they are" (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). In her interview, Madison's mother, Kelly, confirmed that postsecondary education was important for her child and recalled the when she considered higher education for Madison. Kelly stated, "Yes, because I wanted her to make a better life for herself; that high school wasn't going to be enough. We considered this at the beginning of high school" (Parent Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). Kelly's statements reflect high expectations for Madison, similar to the high expectations of the other parent participants in the present study. Kelly also reported that insufficient information was shared with her and Madison at the meetings, but she did not explain how it was insufficient.

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The only question Kelly recalled that she raised at a transition planning meeting regarding college was whether Madison's IEP would be transferred to her college. Kelly reported that she was told that Madison's IEP would be transferred to college, but did not recall the IEP team member who presented this information to her. Similar to Janet, Malcolm's mother, Kelly raised this question because she was concerned about how Madison would perform in her college-level courses without the accommodations and supports Madison was provided throughout her school years. Kelly, similar to the other parent participants of this study, also reported that she was confused about the financial aid process. Unlike the other parent participants in this study, the document review of Madison's IEP revealed that Kelly did attend Madison's IEP meeting and provided input about her daughter's progress related to her academics.

Internal Versus External Stakeholders in the Transition Process

The results of the present study suggest that the most involved stakeholders in the transition planning process, other than the students and their parents, were the special education teachers (i.e., caseload managers). Each student who participated in the study noted the active role their special education teacher played in their transition process. The teacher participants also discussed their involvement in transition planning for students with disabilities reporting that the transition planning process is not just an annual meeting with the student to discuss their goals but, rather, an ongoing process in which they unofficially meet with students several times throughout the school year. This continuous interaction between students and teachers helps both internal stakeholders collaborate and frequently discuss the student's action steps to achieving their postsecondary goals, especially if the student's postsecondary plans change.

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In his transcript, Malcolm described how his football coaches guided him to pursue postsecondary education by stating,

The football coaches, they know I had the talent to play football, so they pushed for me to play harder and to work harder in high school to be able to go to college, and they helped me, like, with the steps to apply for college and get into college. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

The coaches, who were also Malcolm's teachers (i.e., internal stakeholders), encouraged Malcolm to focus on pursuing postsecondary education. Malcolm admitted that he met with the guidance counselor to discuss his college options one time in his 4 years of high school. The only other time that a guidance counselor assisted Malcolm was when he needed to receive accommodations for his ACT college entrance test. Malcolm recalled that there was only one guidance counselor for the entire school and, during his high school years, there was a significant turnover in those who provided counseling services. It appears that Malcolm only saw a guidance counselor once because counselors were not at the school long enough to get to know the students or become invested in their transition planning.

The document review revealed that Malcolm's teachers described him as "a student who worked very hard in the classroom, was a leader in the class, had a positive attitude, and showed persistence" (Document Review, June, 2019). The meeting attendees recorded on his IEP included the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative, a general education teacher, the case manager, the student, and his career technical instructor. Although Malcolm wanted to pursue postsecondary education, no guidance counselor, vocational rehabilitation counselor, or a representative from a postsecondary education institute were present at his meeting. Malcolm's Summary of Performance provided evidence that he was given contact information for the local

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vocational rehabilitation office, health and family services, an employment agency, an independent living agency, two local colleges, and a local disability services provider. This contact information is provided to all students with disabilities exiting from high school.

Brittany, the senior high school student, felt that her teachers were invested in guiding her to pursue postsecondary education by stating,

Once I got into high school, it was all about keeping your grades up, so you can get into a good college. You don't have to worry about nothing, you know.

Everyone is always encouraging you to go to college...they're always helping, to help you apply and stuff like that. (Student Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

In Brittany's IEP, her teachers articulated her as "a hard working student who put forth great effort, had exceptionally good interpersonal skills with both her peers and adults, and was highly motivated to succeed" (Document Review, June, 2019). The stakeholders who attended her meeting were the LEA representative, a general education teacher, and the speech and language pathologist. Although Brittany's transition goals and activities were discussed at her meeting, there were many stakeholders not present at her meeting. It should be noted that Brittany did not have a Summary of Performance included in her documents to provide her with information about outside agencies that could assist her in the future, which is typically provided to students in the target school district when high school students with disabilities graduate high school.

Emily's transition process to postsecondary education involved many stakeholders, although only internal stakeholders attended her meeting. Emily and her mother separately met with external stakeholders (i.e., a vocational rehabilitation counselor, a representative from the disability office at her current college) to gather information about her transportation needs and

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the college's handicap accessibility. Emily felt that administrators and her teachers cared about her future success. She stated, "They cared because they helped me, you know, if I didn't understand something or if I needed help with something, they were there to help me in every situation I needed help in" (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). She further explained,

They helped me on a lot of stuff that I didn't understand about college. Like the SAT or, you know, the testing. And then the financial aid...they pretty much done all that, too, about, you know: this is what you have to do, and this is what you have to do. So they were pretty helpful, and stuff like that. (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019)

In her last IEP, Emily's teachers reported that she was "an enthusiastic student with an upbeat attitude, a great student who works well with her peers, and a sweet young lady who is always smiling" (Document Review, June, 2019). Her teachers also noted that she was dedicated and hard-working. In the meeting minutes, only one stakeholder, the Career/Technical Instructor, expressed concerns about Emily's decision to pursue postsecondary education. The instructor suggested that Emily contact the vocational rehabilitation counselor to address post-graduation transportation needs and provided information regarding the dates for her to register for the ACT and SAT college entrance tests. The instructor also gave Emily information about the college entrance tests for the local technical college and 2- to 4-year local public college. Emily's IEP included her Summary of Performance, which provided her with outside agency contact information.

Madison, by contrast, did not recall any stakeholders aside from her teachers assisting her with her postsecondary education transition planning. She felt that her high school special education teachers were invested in guiding her to pursue higher education. In her interview, she

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reported that her special education teachers “helped do more research than what [she] could do” on her own and that “they get in more depth than what [she] would” be able to do independently (Student Open-ended Interview, June, 2019). Like Malcolm, Brittany, and Emily's teachers, Madison's teachers also provided positive comments related to Madison's progress in her IEP. The teachers described Madison as “a hard worker who demonstrated significant growth and maturity” (Document Review, June, 2019). Madison's teachers also noted that they were pleased with her independence and work ethic. In her IEP meeting minutes, her teachers reported that Madison became an advocate for herself because she was proactive in asking her teachers for help when she needed it and took ownership of her education. The stakeholders present at her meeting included a general education teacher, an LEA representative, her mother, and the school's speech and language pathologist. External stakeholders, such as her guidance counselor, vocational rehabilitation counselor, and a representative from the local postsecondary education institute, were not present at her meeting to share additional information about transitioning to college. Her Summary of Performance document indicated that Madison received contact information for outside agencies, which included: local Vocational Rehabilitation Office, Health and Family Services, Employment Agency, Independent Living Agency, local higher education institutions, and the local Disability Service Provider. These agencies would assist with Madison's employment, education, and independent living following high school graduation.

The transcripts from the lead special education teacher interviews provided additional insight into their involvement in the transition planning process for the students they serve in the target school district. These lead special education teachers were not the caseload managers for the participants in the present study, but their role as lead special education teachers and caseload managers within the target school district represents how transition planning is generally

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provided to students with disabilities in the school district. For instance, when asked if postsecondary education was a viable option for the students on their caseloads, one lead special education teacher participant stated,

I believe some type of postsecondary education is not only an option, but it's a – it's a necessity for all of the students on my particular caseload. I – all the students I deal with are mainstreamed into inclusion classes or just on consultative basis, so that they all have some sort of need for postsecondary education, be it college, tech school, military, whatever. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

When asked how much time teachers spent on transition planning with their students, the same lead special education teacher participant reported,

Per year, we probably meet formally three to four times per year, but particularly [for] the ones that I get to have in class, we'll talk probably on average of once a week about what their thoughts are regarding life after high school. And the older they get, the more I ask them to be realistic, and the more – the more honest that I'll be with them. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

He added, "I have separate conversations with the students on my caseload. We'll – we'll meet specifically, just myself and the student, about transition" (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). This lead special education teacher reported that he meets with his students often to discuss their transition plans, and strongly feels that postsecondary education is needed for the students he serves in the special education program. He also stated that he provides his students with as many resources as possible when advising them. For example, he reported that he helps his students research programs and various types of postsecondary education institutions to

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inform his students of their entrance requirements, graduation rates, retention rates, and career outlooks. He recalled that a vocational rehabilitation counselor usually attends at least half the meetings he conducts, and if a student is already working with the guidance counselor, he invites that counselor to the meetings as well. Another stakeholder that this lead special education teacher tries to involve in all of his meetings with students is the high school's graduate interventionist, who oversees which students are at risk of not graduating. He felt that the guidance counselor's involvement in the meetings has been beneficial because the guidance counselor can provide information that he is unaware of regarding postsecondary education. In his 14 years of experience working with students with disabilities, he reported that he has seen progress in transition planning. He stated,

Every year, I think we're getting better at it, as a county, as a department, I think we are getting better at it. It used to be kind of, when we first started doing them, it almost was like we were just filling in blanks, and just, you know, dotting Is and crossing Ts just for the sake of having a complete IEP. And I think we're getting much more thoughtful about it, and I think the kids that are coming up are going to benefit. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

According to this lead special education teacher, he reported that his students' progress towards their postsecondary education transition goals is monitored three to four times per year:

Every nine weeks we sit, and we all pull up their goals and ask them if these are still relevant, and ask, okay, how have you progressed toward them? So we monitor it, for the most part, through meetings with the kids. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

He added,

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Well, through the transition planning services, I think, again, just making sure that they're in touch with vocational rehabilitation, that their, you know, the teachers, the counselor are helping them with their requirements for the tech school or community college they're going to. I've been meeting with, you know, my seniors here again, as the school year ends, and a lot of them who have, and it seems like I'm still telling them how they need to apply to [local technical college], what they need to do. I worry, because they still haven't done things that they need to do, and I'm not going to be there, or no one is going to be there to make sure they do it. So again, just kind of having more of a continuum up until...at least until they're actively enrolled in some type of post-secondary program, I think would be a really good thing. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

This lead special education teacher participant suggested that maintaining some contact with students with disabilities after they graduate to follow-up on their postsecondary education transition goals would be helpful to include as a part of the IEP transition services.

The second lead special education teacher also shared information about stakeholder involvement in postsecondary education transition planning for students with disabilities. This lead special education teacher was also not the caseload manager for the student participants in the present study, but her role as the lead special education teacher and a caseload manager provides a second perspective on how aspects of transition planning are addressed within the target school district. Her caseload, unlike the other lead special education teacher participant, included students who receive their services in a self-contained classroom instead of an inclusion classroom. She reported that she has very few students who are considering postsecondary

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education after high school graduation. She explained that most of the students and parents of the students on her caseload are interested in some type of job training certification program to obtain employment. She also stated that she works closely with vocational rehabilitation counselors and involves them in her transition meetings with her students: "Vocational rehabilitation has been really good as far as working with them and helping them with job training up working to get them their driver's license and things like that" (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019). When asked how much time is spent on transition planning and how she addresses the postsecondary options of her students, she replied,

I mean that's spread out throughout the year. Um, we give them questionnaires, you know, that we kind of work on to see what they are interested in. Um, once, again vocational rehabilitation is really good with helping them with that because vocational rehabilitation finds out what they're interested in what they want to do and then they, um, they're really good about steering them in a direction you know working with them in that way. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

She further reported that transition planning is part of the students' annual IEP meetings, but the amount of time spent on the discussions in those meetings depends on their transition goals and interests. This lead special teacher felt that students with disabilities wishing to pursue postsecondary education would benefit from the involvement of more external stakeholders than just the vocational rehabilitation counselor involvement, such as guidance counselors and representatives from postsecondary institutions, who can share valuable information with students and their parents. The lead special education teacher recalled that students and parents often lack knowledge about the requirements for pursuing postsecondary education. She stated,

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The most important thing they can do in transition is knowing what their accommodations are going to be in college if they qualify for the accommodations and what they need to make sure they get their accommodations, but also still [important], though, is knowing what they need to do the requirements for getting in because sometimes they don't. I just going to college, and they don't really think about what they have to do to get there...so...it's almost like we need another liaison. (Teacher Open-ended Interview, May, 2019)

The second lead special education teacher also recalled that the school previously had a guidance counselor, who would attend IEP meetings for students interested in pursuing college, but after that guidance counselor left the school district, there has not been anyone available to participate in IEP meetings with as much knowledge of postsecondary education options for students with disabilities as she.

Choice-Making Model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory and Findings

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) has been used as a framework in many studies to explain aspects of career choice and development (e.g., formation of career interests, career choices, and performance towards career goals) by diverse groups of students (Bikos et al., 2014; Carrico, Matusovich, & Paretti, 2019; Ericksen, 2013; Lent et al., 2018). Diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, learning preferences, culture, age, physical disabilities, and sexual orientation (Multicultural & Diversity Education, 2014). The SCCT, which is derived from Bandura's Social Learning Theory, focuses on "three aspects of career development: the formation and explication of career-relevant interests, the selection of academic and career choice options, and performance and persistence in educational and occupational goals" (Erickson, 2013, p. 13). SCCT consists of four interconnected models,

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including interest development, choice-making, performance and persistence, and satisfactory/well-being (Lent & Brown, 2013). According to Rogers, Creed, and Glendon (2008), the SCCT Choice-Making model developed by Lent et al. (1994) “extends the choice model to the domain of career decision-making by incorporating direct pathways between person inputs and choice goals, and between person inputs and choice actions” (p.4).

Since the present study concerns the perceptions of students with disabilities who engaged in the transition planning process and its related factors that supported them in their decision to pursue postsecondary education, the Choice-Making model serves as a fitting conceptual framework. The findings of the present study will be filtered through the three key constructs of the Choice-Making model. The first construct of the Choice-Making model involves the establishment of a life or career goal. When students with disabilities, in the present study, meet with their IEP teams for the transition planning component of their IEP, the first part of the discussion involves the students establishing their postsecondary education goals, followed by employment and independent living goals. In the student interviews, three out of the four participants recalled that they have always wanted to go to college as far back as their early school years. Malcolm, Emily, and Madison reported that education was very important to them and felt that pursuing college would increase their employment opportunities in their field of interest. Two out of the four participants also stated that college was important to them because they observed their non-college prepared parents struggle with limited employment options, which they perceived as instability. In the document review, all four participants revealed their postsecondary education goals related to pursuing a degree in their field of interest. For instance, Malcolm stated that he was “interested in post-secondary education in the area of construction (Document Review, June, 2019).” Brittany articulated that her goal was to “research two

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postsecondary training programs in the field of health science (Document Review, June, 2019).”

Emily expressed an interest in pursuing an Early Childhood Education degree after graduation from high school, and Madison’s goal was to pursue a degree/certificate in the Nursing/healthcare field. These goals were established by the students in their transition planning meetings, which is wholly consistent with the first construct of the Choice-Making model.

Student generated-drawings, in response to the prompt, “*Draw a picture of what you envisioned for your future when you were in high school,*” provided compelling insight into the life goals of each participant. Malcolm’s drawing (Appendix L), for example, depicts him as a football player about to score a touchdown. No other people on his team are shown in the drawing. In addition to his self-portrait, his drawing depicts the football field, the goal post, and the touchdown zone. Malcolm appears to have clearly depicted himself catching the ball in the air, eyes directly on the ball, and hands open to receiving the ball. His drawing is precise, focused, and deliberate. Although he does not currently play football, his drawing clearly suggests the goal that he has set for himself, which is to carry his “future” athletic career into college and professional football. When he verbally described his drawing, Malcolm stated, “Um, I drew a football player scoring a touchdown which I envision my future as a football player especially going up, like, up until probably, like, my senior year I envision myself playing football in college and possibly going ,like, pro...” (Drawing Description, June, 2019).

Brittany (Appendix M) drew herself with a family, a house, a yard, and a car. Her drawing includes a sun and a tree with money strewn around the bottom of the tree. It's a simple drawing that uses varying colors and represents the stable future she reported to one day establish. Her drawing could suggest that she can work towards acquiring the material comforts of what she perceives as a stable, successful future. Each piece of money is adorned with a

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numeral “100”. Her picture depicts her desire for a lifestyle centered on family and financial stability. She explained her drawing stating,

Ok, so in my picture, I have a nice house, a family with me and my husband, and two twin boys, and then I have my own car out in my front yard, and it's a sunny day, and then I drew a tree with money around it because I want to be well-off and like, be able to support my family and have a nice career, and um, yeah.

(Drawing Description, June, 2019)

Similar to Malcolm, Emily drew (Appendix N), a picture of her future career. She drew a well-organized elementary school classroom, projecting her future as a 2-nd grade teacher. Her vision of her future classroom includes five groups of three desks in different colors besides the teacher's desk, a large table in front of the board, a round carpet with a calendar in front of it, a poster with a quote, a bookcase with some books, cubbies, and art supplies, a clock, and the written alphabet. Her drawing is detailed, specific, and focused on the future career she would like to establish for herself. She described her drawing stating,

Yes, my drawing is pretty much, uh, the layout of a classroom, 2-nd grade classroom so....it has, like, the desks, the teacher's desk, a bookcase, like a poster of Dr. Seuss's quote, a blackboard, a calendar, the alphabet, a clock, just all that kind of stuff. Yeah, I want to be a 2-nd grade teacher and this is pretty much a layout of what a 2-nd grade classrooms look like so cause I interned in 2-nd grade so...(Drawing Description, June, 2019)

Madison's drawing (Appendix O) was similar to Brittany's drawing. During the session, Madison asked if she could see an example of what her drawing should look like. Her question suggests her uncertainty and apprehension in responding to a direct prompt. To reassure her and

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to ensure a valid response, she was encouraged to depict a vision of her future based upon her dreams post-high school. Interestingly, the windows on the house have light shining into them, and there are two stories with a chimney out of which there is billowing smoke. Her depiction of the life she envisions for herself evokes a sense of family, stability, and domestic calm. Her drawing does not depict any images that would suggest her professional goals (i.e., Nursing). Madison described her drawing in the following way,

My drawing is going to be a two-story house with a barn backyard...I plan on after I get done with college getting this two-story house and the barn that I always wanted. I want a family and then like little barn animals. (Drawing Description, June, 2019)

It should be noted that this prompt elicited drawings based on participants' goals, post-high school, which they were asked to recall while they were in high school. Their illustrations could suggest what they would like to achieve in their personal lives and what they believe their particular gifts and attributes are. It is worth noting that Malcolm and Emily also had explicit depictions of their professional goals in their drawings. Participants' drawings and the data from their documents also provided evidence for the first key construct of the Choice-Making model.

The second key construct of the Choice-Making model of the SCCT involves action steps towards the achievement of goals (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). The data seem to suggest that the participants in the present study were taking action towards their goals (as evidenced by their IEP transition plans). Malcolm's action steps to pursue postsecondary education were to investigate and obtain information needed to enroll in postsecondary institutes within his area of interest. He followed the steps necessary to start the admissions process, which included: researching programs offered by various institutions, reviewing the admissions requirements,

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finding the tuition cost, and completing the prerequisite course requirements. Brittany also took action steps towards her goal, as described in the transition plan of her IEP, which included researching two postsecondary training programs in her field of interest. She successfully compiled a list of admission requirements to institutes that offered programs in the healthcare field. Emily's action steps in her transition plan, were specific and detailed than her fellow participants. In that, her goal was to calculate the number of years in which she would acquire her degree in Early Childhood Education. Emily successfully listed the admissions requirements to one of her choices of postsecondary institutions, found out the cost of tuition for each semester, located the required courses she needed, and found three financial aid assistance programs for which she would be eligible. Further, Emily researched the entrance/placement exam requirements before applying to the institution she eventually chose. Madison's action plan took a different course. It did not include researching possible colleges, registering for admission exams, or designing steps related to pursuing postsecondary education. Madison's transition plan stated that she was interested in pursuing a degree/certificate in the healthcare field. During her interview, Madison recalled that she researched possible secondary institutions and guided herself through the application process despite the absence of action steps in her transition plan.

The third construct of the Choice-Making model, which is defined as attaining a level of performance that determines the direction of future career behavior (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), was demonstrated by the student participants in the study. In their interviews, three of the four participants reported that they choose career pathways (i.e., construction, healthcare, teaching as a profession courses) as early as their junior year of high school. These career pathways remained consistent and represented three of the four participants' current career paths.

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Brittany, Emily, and Madison, with support from school staff, successfully selected their high school courses to enable them to pursue their career interests in college. Within each of the students' IEPs, positive feedback from teachers on each students' academic progress was noted. Each of the participants in the present study maintained an acceptable level or above an acceptable level of academic performance within their course of study throughout high school, which enabled them to present favorably to their college of choice. It should be noted that all four student participants in the present study are currently performing academically on a level commensurate with their institutions' standards of acceptable performance.

The student-generated collages, in response to the prompt: "*Create a collage that depicts your transition planning process for pursuing postsecondary education,*" also provided insight into their future career goals. The visual data that they provided, in and of itself, were compelling and suggestive of their projected areas of interest. Malcolm's collage (Appendix H) depicted football players, construction workers, and people working with horses, such as veterinarians. In his collage, there were two pictures of football players; one appeared to be a college football player, and the other a professional football player. There were three pictures of construction workers; two looked like young men, and one seemed to be a grown man. They all had goggles and helmets on and were working with wood. There were five images of people (both male and female) with horses and one picture of a horse by itself. The two women working with horses appeared to be happy as they were smiling; of the three men taking care of the horses, two were checking a horse's eyes, and another appears to be shoeing a horse. These images could suggest a longing by the student to pursue a profession that involves hands-on work. Malcolm seemed to have an open mind about different professions based on the various professions he chose to

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depict in his collage. This may suggest that he perceived himself as having many opportunities to be successful and did not wish to limit himself to one field.

Malcolm expressed his perception of the support he received in his transition planning process in his collage in the following written explanation:

When I graduated from high school, I could picture myself doing many things like I wanted to be a vet. I also wanted to own my own construction company and I also wanted to play football. I feel very supported at school by how much the teachers made sure I have everything I needed to be great in school. (Collage Description, June, 2019)

Brittany's collage (Appendix I) was composed of affirmative and encouraging words and phrases such as: "OMG", "Never Stop Believin'," "Pushing Forward," "Take a New Chance," "Faith, Family, & Fighting," "You are Not Alone," "Feel better about facing the world," "The Broke Girl's Guide to Therapy", "We all have the Power to Stand Up," "Me, and Speed". These phrases seem to indicate that Brittany has mixed emotions about her future; she seems to understand that she will encounter challenges but seems optimistic about accomplishing her goals. Five of the pictures, however, may have depicted the need for support during her transition planning process. The collage included a picture of a girl using a laptop with two friends, one sitting on her right, and the other on her left. They seemed to be searching the Internet. There was a picture of what appears to be a male doctor smiling, a woman doctor, and a woman dressed professionally holding the side of her eyeglasses. There was also a picture of a stethoscope, a picture of a swan float with two bottles, a girl standing on a chair dressed in a fluffy pink skirt, a woman with a painting of butterfly wings behind her, two girls in their twenties carrying a couch across a busy street, a group of four friends walking and smiling, a pair

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of sneakers, and an image of superheroes. These images could be interpreted as being emblematic of the personal and professional lifestyle she hopes to attain.

Brittany's collage suggested a busy life. She knew that she wanted to go into the healthcare field as a professional, working woman. Her collage reflected her search for options with supportive friends by her side, encouraging her to pursue a goal. She depicted her excitement about her life after high school, but in some images, she depicted uncertainty that she would be able to succeed without support from her friends and family. Five of the pictures depicted the need for support: the float, the girls lifting a couch together, the girls researching on the computer, the chair supporting the girl standing on it, and the picture of the superheroes. Eight out of the eighteen people in her collage were smiling; four had a worried look on their faces, and six have a serious look. Based on the images in her collage that display groups of people, it appeared that Brittany was not confident about her future, but she seemed to believe that she can succeed with the support of others. Of her collage, Brittany wrote: "This is what my transition planning for postsecondary education looks like. I want to either be a teacher or a nurse. My teachers pushed me forward to become what I am today and told me to never stop believing in myself" (Collage Description, May, 2019). Her written statement reflected that she was involved in her college and career decision making, but she needed the support of her teachers to reach her goals.

Emily's collage (Appendix J) was not as detailed as Malcolm and Brittany's, but it still reflected how she perceived her role in the transition planning process. It included the following words/phrases: "plan us," "COLLEGE," "OFF-CAMPUS LEARNING," "Early Childhood Education," "COME FOR A VISIT," "life-changing," "FRIENDSHIPS," "BIG IDEAS," and "ANSWERS." These words represent some of the postsecondary education options that Emily

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was reviewing in high school. Her collage also included two pictures. In one, a group of older adolescent students with books open on their laps is sitting on stairs listening to someone speak. The other picture included an image of Kate Middleton smiling, but it is not clear if that represents Emily's perception of success or whether she simply admires the figure.

In the explanation of her collage, Emily wrote:

Before high school, I didn't really talk about college. I knew I wanted to attend college, but I was very unsure. Unsure of what my options were, with me having an IEP and all. When I entered high school, I had a very knowledgeable and experienced lady over my IEP. She, along with our assistant principal and many of my former teachers, helped me with my transition from high school to college. For the most part, many of my questions were answered. They also helped me with my uncertainties.

(Collage Description, June, 2019)

While Emily's explanation mostly reflects the involvement of school stakeholders in her IEP, she likely had to show interest in pursuing postsecondary education for these stakeholders to become invested in helping her to achieve her transition goals.

Madison's collage (Appendix K) was similar to Emily's in that it included a few images. Madison added the following words/phrases to her collage which she felt depicted her transition planning process for pursuing postsecondary education: "Life is calling!," "Now I see how I can program a solution to everyday problems," "Nursing," "FINDING STRENGTH," "OMG...." Madison found these words/phrases meaningful to her goals. She depicted herself as being surprised but proud of her accomplishments. A dark figure standing on top of what appears to be a mountain top with arms raised and the words "I DID IT!" in her collage appears to be her

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perception of her self-confidence and self-determination. Her collage suggested a strong spirituality, as evidenced by an image of stones with the words "PRAY FAITH GOD" written on them. Her collage also included a picture of four smiling female nursing students. It would appear that Madison envisioned herself as confident and content as depicted by her collage. In her collage, she seems to indicate that she is focused on one career and believes she can achieve it by reminding herself of her past achievements and through her faith.

Unlike other participants in the study, Madison did not find that all of her teachers were supportive of her transition planning process. She verbally described her transition planning process through her collage in the following way:

When I graduated high school, I could picture myself becoming a nurse. Not going to lie -- some teachers wasn't helpful, but most of them were. The ones that helped made sure I had all the knowledge I needed to know about college before I graduated so I could become successful in the path I am taking. (Collage Description, June, 2019)

She indicated, as an addendum to her visual, that her involvement in pursuing postsecondary education contributed more to her successful enrollment in college than the involvement of her teachers.

The Choice-Making model provides a foundation for capturing students' perceptions of the transition planning process and how particular factors have influenced their decisions to attend postsecondary education following high school. Their transition plans provide evidence for their stated goals, the actions needed by each of them to accomplish their goals, and/or evidence of the level of performance that they sought to attain to remain with their career choice. Only one study in the existing literature before this study examines transition planning through

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the SCCT as it relates to college and career understanding of young adults with disabilities.

Gibbons et al. (2015) used the SCCT as the conceptual framework for their study; however, they did not use any particular model of the theory to explain their findings. Gibbons et al. (2015) "provided a broad understanding of career development and a specific focus on individual self-efficacy and perceived barriers to success" through the lens of the SCCT (p.82). In the present study, the Choice-Making model of the SCCT was utilized to filter data related to transition planning to closely examine the process students undergo in decisions to pursue their higher education goals.

Table 2 provides an outline of the relationship between the transition planning process, the Choice-Making model of the SCCT, and the major findings of the present study.

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Table 2: Transition Planning, Choice-Making Model, and Findings

Transition Planning	Choice-Making Model of SCCT	Findings
Goals for Postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.	Establishing a goal.	Students with disabilities can be actively engaged in their transition processes, which prompts them to establish their postsecondary goals.
Transition activities to monitor progress towards achieving the goal.	Taking action to achieve the goal.	Students with disabilities can be actively engaged in their transition processes if they are provided with opportunities that encourage their participation.
Parent/Teacher feedback on student's progress in their classes.	Attaining a level of performance that determines the direction of future career behavior.	<p>All forms of parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential.</p> <p>The most critical resource for student participants who weighed their decision to pursue postsecondary education using the transition planning process were teachers themselves.</p> <p>Internal stakeholder collaboration (i.e., students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers) during transition planning for postsecondary education is vital for students with disabilities.</p>

Malcolm and Emily are the only participants whose decisions slightly changed their career path, according to constructs two and three of the Choice-Making model of the SCCT.

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Malcolm's initial career goal to work in construction was articulated in his IEP transition plan. His goal to play professional football was depicted in his drawing while he was in high school but was replaced by his decision to major in sports administration when he began college. While his career decisions changed over time, he continued to maintain a level of performance to pursue the career of his choice. Emily initially wanted to pursue a four-year college, but since she missed application deadlines and did not complete the required entrance exams, she had to apply to a different postsecondary institution than her first choice. It is worth noting that while Emily established her goal (construct one) to attend a four-year college, she did not execute the action steps (construct two) needed to meet college application deadlines. Emily changed the direction of her career path (construct three) by choosing to start her core college courses offered at the local technical college. She still plans to transfer to a four-year university to continue her studies in Early Childhood Education but will need to maintain an acceptable level of performance in order to continue in her field of interest.

Major Findings

The first major finding of the present study is: the most critical resource for student participants who weighed their decision to pursue postsecondary education using the transition planning process, were teachers themselves. Many studies have found that students with disabilities often lack knowledge of the transition from high school to postsecondary life (Gibbons et al., 2015; Hamblet, 2014; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Knowledge of how one transitions to postsecondary life includes (a) understanding of the application process for a job, (b) understanding of the application process for college, (c) understanding of the application process for special education services through the disabilities office at a postsecondary institution, and (d) understanding of the steps needed to find housing (Morningstar, Lombardi,

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Fowler, & Test, 2017). A study conducted by Gibbons et al. (2015) interviewed 12 high school students with disabilities and found that students had limited knowledge of their IEPs and college and career information: "IEP knowledge varied for participants, but most participants revealed a limited understanding of how the IEP related to career and post-secondary planning" (p. 86). Students participated in their IEP meetings but were unable to answer questions about their IEPs. Additionally, they made no connection to how their IEP related to their future career planning (Gibbons et al., 2015). The student participants in the present study knew their transition goals were directly related to their future career planning and understood that the postsecondary education goals they established for themselves required them to take action steps (i.e., full-filling college admissions requirements, application process). The student participants were also aware of how their level of performance in their high school course would determine the direction of future career behavior (construct three).

The results of the present study support the findings of Gibbons et al. (2015) in that the participants in the present study (Malcolm, Brittany, Emily, and Madison) found teachers and family members helpful in their postsecondary planning process. Although the participants in Gibbons et al. (2015) had a limited understanding of postsecondary planning in their IEP process, the participants in the present study had adequate knowledge of their transition planning process. In Cawthon and Cole's (2010) study, 91% of students were not able to recall having an IEP at all. For those who did recall having an IEP, most did not remember discussing transition topics, teacher responsibilities, or academic progress goals. Also, 48% reported not receiving any guidance on how they would acquire accommodations at the university, who they would need to contact, what accommodations/services would be available to them, or what documentation they would need to submit to apply and eventually receive accommodations. Participants in the

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present study all knew they had an IEP. They were able to recall transition planning and activities in which they participated, and could describe the involvement of their special education teachers/caseload managers. The document review provided evidence that three out of the four participants were informed by their caseload managers of services they would need for both postsecondary education and employment.

Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto's (2012) study revealed that nearly an equal number of parents reported that their child having and not having a transition plan, parent participants in their study felt they had little input in the meetings, and the information shared with them was not helpful or even accurate. In addition, 37% of the parents whose children still attended school reported that their child did not have a transition plan, and 17% were unsure about their child's transition plan. The parent participants in the present study were aware of their child's IEP and transition plans but refrained from asking many questions during the transition planning meetings. It could be conjectured that parents' hesitance was due to confusion or lack of transition knowledge for their child to pursue postsecondary education. Regarding the information that was provided to the parents in the present study, most parent participants felt they would have benefited from receiving more information about financial aid because that seemed to be the most challenging part of the process in enrolling their children into postsecondary institutions. Erroneous information was provided to three of the parents in the present study regarding the transfer or continuation of IEP services to future institutions or colleges, which suggests that some special education teachers could benefit from possibly more substantive training regarding transition planning for students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education. Special education teachers, who lack knowledge of transition planning for postsecondary education, may continue to provide misleading information to students with

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disabilities and their parents because the path to postsecondary education is not paved. Parents and students need to know that students with disabilities are responsible for applying for accommodations and services they require at their institutions.

The results of Collier, Griffin, and Wei's (2017) study indicated that there is a lack of knowledge of vocational rehabilitation, which is a viable postsecondary option for students with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation is an agency that assists individuals with disabilities to obtain employment through offering various services (e.g., finding individuals' career interests, offering some job training, providing some financial assistance for postsecondary education, assisting with independent living) (Oertle & O'Leary, 2017). Transcripts from the present study suggested that vocational rehabilitation counselors are desirable within transition planning meetings, but they are not consistently present in the meetings. The contact information for vocational rehabilitation was, however, shared with three of the four participants in the present study, as evidenced in the students' Summary of Performance documentation. While three of the participants did not mention vocational rehabilitation counselors being involved in their transition planning, Emily and her mother did speak to a vocational rehabilitation counselor to gather more information on their services to assist her in pursuing postsecondary education. It seems reasonable to suggest that students with disabilities will not be provided the full spectrum of postsecondary options if external stakeholders (e.g., guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and representatives from postsecondary institutions) are not available to explain this option within a student's transition planning meeting(s).

Among internal stakeholders (i.e., parents, students with disabilities, special education teachers, general education teachers) in the existing literature, there appears to be a general lack of knowledge about transition planning, especially for students with disabilities who choose to

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pursue postsecondary education. Irvin et al. (2011) found that rural students face barriers which contribute to reducing their interest in pursuing further education such as lack of support, resources, social and cultural expectations, fewer local educational and occupational opportunities, and limited high school course offerings to prepare them for postsecondary education. Also, the researchers found rural high school students with learning disabilities to be unsure of their postsecondary options and less likely to continue further education after graduating from high school as compared to their typically developing peers. The participants in the present study had supports (e.g., parent involvement, teachers that provided accommodations through their specially designed instruction), resources, encouragement, modeling, coaching, and advisement related to high school course offerings that were aligned to their interests and prepared them for higher education. The evidence suggests that the most critical resource and influence for participants in their decision to pursue postsecondary education were their teachers and the role(s) they played during the transition planning process.

The second major finding of the present study is: students with disabilities can be actively engaged in their transition processes if they are provided with opportunities that encourage their participation and prompt them to establish their postsecondary goals. Many studies point to student involvement as an aspect that affects transition planning and therefore affects student decision making (Bangser, 2008; Cavendish et al., 2017; Morgan, Kupferman, Jex, Preece, & Williams, 2017; Strnadová & Cumming, 2014; Trainor, 2005). Student involvement includes participation by students in IEP meetings (Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015). Although students with disabilities in high school have more involvement in their IEPs compared to elementary and middle school students, their participation varies (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004; McCall, 2015). The same is true of their involvement in transition planning. In McCall's

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(2015) study regarding student participation in transition planning meetings, the researcher found “their descriptions represent a continuum of involvement ranging from passive observers to leading the meetings” (p. 166). One participant in McCall’s study reported that when asked questions about his goals, he did not know what to say about his goals (p. 166). This student’s response is not uncommon; in fact, most high school students with disabilities do not know what they want to do after they graduate from high school (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). This was not true for the participants in the present study, however, who, despite wavering between aspirations, generally knew what they wanted to achieve post-graduation and had developed fairly realistic goals for their education and future.

Although the level of participation of students in the current study was not measured, all four student participants did attend their transition planning meetings and reported that they had been actively involved in the transition process. In contrast to the findings of McCall's (2015) study in which one of four participants reported teacher-directed or coordinated transition instruction and only one participant reported being prepared for college, the participants in the present study reported meeting one-on-one with their teachers to discuss their plans for postsecondary education and being involved in coordinated transition activities. For instance, Malcolm recalled attending a transition fair, meeting with his guidance counselor, attending a whole group meeting at his school about postsecondary options, and being instructed by his teachers to navigate college websites to gather information regarding admissions. Brittany reported working one-on-one with her caseload manager and being guided by her friends through her college application process. Emily and Madison recalled their engagement in the form of college tours that had been offered by their high school.

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In his interview, Malcolm suggested that future students with disabilities would benefit from having a class that would teach them time management and study skills, skills which he had to learn on his own once he started college. Brittany recommended that students with disabilities be offered a class where students physically engage in the application process as a group. She implied that a class designed to help students with the application process and for applying for financial aid would be beneficial as both are challenging tasks for students with disabilities to complete independently. Madison did not provide suggestions or recommendations for students with disabilities, but Emily strongly felt that students with disabilities would benefit from engaging in transition activities earlier than their junior and senior years of high school. Malcolm, Brittany, and Emily's perceptions of their transition planning experiences indicate that they are aware of the level of assistance and support needed by students with disabilities as they transition to postsecondary education.

Brown's (2017) study revealed that a strong relationship exists between students who pursue college and their father's expectations. Brown (2017) also found that students who pursue higher education have frequent discussions about college, their grade point average, the value of education, and their personal academic goals with their parents. Brown's findings are consistent with the findings of the present study in that the participants in the present study had strong relationships with their parents and frequent discussions about pursuing postsecondary education, as reflected in their interviews. Although three of four parents in the present study did not attend college, they held high expectations of their children, which included attending postsecondary education. What is not entirely clear from the data collected in the current study is how influential parents' expectations were on their children.

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Hitchings, Retish, and Horvath's (2005) study revealed that student interest in pursuing postsecondary education significantly decreases from the first year of high school to that last year of high school. The findings in the present study, however, refute the findings of Hitchings, Retish, and Horvath's study, in that all four participants of the present study reported becoming more interested in pursuing postsecondary education in their junior and senior years. During their last two years of high school, the participants of the present study reported that their teachers encouraged them to pursue postsecondary education by including them in transition activities and providing them with information regarding the college admissions process. Two of the four participants in the present study also reported going on local college tours, which helped influence them in their decision to pursue postsecondary education. Thus, the evidence supports this as a major finding of the present study that students with disabilities can be actively engaged in their transition processes if they are provided with opportunities that involve their participation and encourage them to establish their postsecondary goals.

The third major finding of the present study is: all forms of parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential. The literature suggests that parent involvement has a significant impact on effective transition planning (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Muller, 2018). Several studies establish the positive effects of the postsecondary transitional outcomes with students with disabilities that received supportive parent involvement (Hirano, Garbacz, Shanley, & Rowe, 2016; Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). The relationship between students with disabilities and their parents affects students for their entire life span (Howard et al., 2016). McCall (2015) surveyed four participants, and the relationship between their levels of self-determination and high school preparation was examined. In the students' narratives, McCall reported that all "participants'

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family members had expectations for them to go to college from an early age and provided a range of support for helping get there” (McCall, 2015, p. 167). These few parents contacted the disability services coordinator on their own to ensure their child would receive the accommodations they would need once they started college. In the present study, all four parent participants had high expectations for their children to attend college and were supportive, but Emily’s mother was the only parent participant who met with a disability coordinator before her enrollment to the institution she currently attends.

The literature also reveals that when students with disabilities enter high school, parent involvement decreases, especially in the last few years of high school when it is needed most (Hirano et al., 2016). Landmark, Zhang, and Montoya (2007) conducted a mixed-method study to examine parent experiences related to their involvement in transition planning. They found that 37% of parents did not know what transition planning was, and an even higher percentage (63%) did not know the legal requirements for transition planning. Later, Landmark, Roberts, and Zang (2013) studied parent involvement again, but this time from an educator's perspective. They used a mixed-method approach again and found that half of the educators reported that parents think of transition planning as another meeting they must attend and do not understand how critical transition planning is for their child's future.

Fullarton and Duquette (2015) found that parents in their study could not recall working on any formal transition planning with teachers. In Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto’s (2012) study, parents reported not fully understanding the transition process and having little knowledge of information regarding postsecondary education. The findings of their study suggested that 43% of the parents reported not having a transition plan, and 17% of the parents were unsure that a transition plan existed. Griffin, McMillan, and Hodapp (2010) conducted a survey using 108

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family members of high school students with intellectual disabilities in which they found the following: only 26% of parents knew that the transition plan was part of the IEP, 73% reported lack of information and guidance for postsecondary education, and 36% felt that the school was at fault for not helping them understand. The findings of these studies suggest that parents of students with disabilities lack awareness of transition planning, which limits their involvement in the transition planning meetings.

The fourth major finding of the present study is: internal stakeholder collaboration (i.e., students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers) during transition planning for postsecondary education is vital for students with disabilities. This finding infers that external stakeholders (e.g., direct service transition professionals, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and guidance counselors) are needed as they can have a substantial impact on effective transition planning; however, the collaborations of internal stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers) is essential to the transition planning process.

Internal stakeholder collaboration is vital because without it, those who are closest to the students and know the students best may find themselves at cross purposes. In other words, internal stakeholders need to work together to ensure that students' best interests are addressed. The literature suggests that internal stakeholders need to work collaboratively during transition planning. For example, Miller-Warren (2016) found that parent participants reported a lack of support, inadequate IEPs, and failed transition plans. Miller-Warren's (2016) study recommended that more collaboration is needed between parents, teachers, postsecondary agency representatives, and students. Plotner, Mazzottie, Rose, and Carlson-Britting (2016) concluded that direct service transition professionals play different "roles across states, districts, and even schools. Plotner et al. also reported that many transition professionals (e.g.,

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rehabilitation counselors) do not spend time in the classroom" (Plotner et al., 2016, p. 40), which suggests that these professionals have limited information about the students they serve. When transition professionals do not know students' abilities, they can only provide students with disabilities general guidance regarding their postsecondary options.

In the present study, the collaboration of the internal stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, and the special education teachers/caseload managers) in the transition planning process for the participants in the study was vital in the pursuit of transition to postsecondary education institutions successfully. While there was no evidence of contributions of external stakeholders in the transition planning process for these participants, all four participants of the present study recalled that their parents and high school special education teachers were continually following up with them and discussing their transition goals. The document review of the present study also revealed comments and suggestions only made by students' teachers. Emily was the only participant who spoke with a vocational rehabilitation counselor; aside from her, no other participant mentioned any external stakeholders in their transition planning process other than their parents and teachers. While the literature suggests that collaboration from many stakeholders is needed, the critical finding of this study confirms that internal stakeholder collaboration (i.e., the students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers) is vital to the transition planning process for students with disabilities.

Summary

Chapter four thematically presented the results of the current study and the major findings through the lens of the conceptual framework using a cross-case analysis approach. Chapter five, the final chapter, will present a summary of the current study, an examination of the alignment of the findings and assertions to the literature resulting in a subsequent discussion,

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limitations and delimitations, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: Summary, Discussion, Limitations and Delimitations, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This chapter will present a summary of the current study, an examination of the alignment of the findings and assertions to the literature resulting in a subsequent discussion, limitations and delimitations, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of four students with disabilities - three of whom are currently attending postsecondary education and one student who is currently attending high school with an acceptance to a postsecondary institution - on the factors related to transition planning that supported them in their decision to pursue postsecondary education. As the existing literature repeatedly suggests a general lack of knowledge of transition planning among students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders, in addition to a lack of involvement among the same, it seemed important to examine these factors in-depth with a purposefully chosen group of participants who could offer first-hand perceptions and perspectives on their post-high school journey.

The study was guided by the following research question: What factors related to transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? This question was addressed through the gathering of data from in-depth biographical interviews, open-ended interviews, document review, and student-generated visual representations, which included student-generated drawings and collages. The Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the framework upon which themes were analyzed, findings were explicated, and assertions were formulated.

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Discussion of Findings and Assertions

Interview transcripts, a review of documents (e.g., students' IEP, meeting minutes, Summary of Performance), and student-generated collages provided data that was reported to understand the factors of transition planning that favorably supported the four student participants' outcomes in this study. The findings, based on the emerging themes and the results, were presented as they align with the Choice-Making model of the SCCT. In general, as students with disabilities make decisions to pursue postsecondary education, they establish goals, take action to achieve their goals, and attain a level of performance to direct them towards their future careers (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). These constructs align with how students with disabilities progress through the transition planning process. In the current study, student participants' responses and the visuals they generated in response to the prompts they were given (*"Create a collage that depicts your transition planning process for pursuing postsecondary education."*, *"Draw a picture of what you envisioned for your future when you were in high school."*), suggest the significance that transition planning had on their lives.

Many studies assert that lack of knowledge of transition planning (Cavendish & Conner, 2018; Gibbons et al. 2015; Plotner et al., 2016), lack of student involvement (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; McCall, 2015), lack of parent involvement (Howard et al., 2016; Landmark, Roberts, & Zhang, 2013), and lack of external stakeholder involvement (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Taylor, Morgan, & Collaw-Heusser, 2015; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016) are aspects of transition planning that require the attention of teachers, administrators, and policymakers if students with disabilities are to successfully navigate postsecondary life, particularly postsecondary education. Despite the fact that the literature implies that knowledge of transition planning, student involvement, and parent involvement are typically lacking when students with

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disabilities experience transition planning, the findings from the current study generally refute those. Where the present study supports the existing literature is in the apparent lack of external stakeholder involvement in the transition planning process for students with disabilities.

Based on the findings, this author makes the first assertion, which is that students with disabilities must have access to equitable opportunities to examine their postsecondary life options as their typically developing peers by being provided critical guidance and support from their teachers. As the first major finding suggests, the most critical resource for student participants who weighed their decision to pursue postsecondary education using the transition planning process, were teachers themselves. Teachers must be apprised of the increase of students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education today (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Newman et al., 2009). The laws and legislation are also in place to support high school students with disabilities to enroll in postsecondary institutions, but the actual percentage of students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education is still low in comparison to their typically developing peers (Daviso et al. 2011; Plotner et al., 2016). Teachers must acknowledge that postsecondary education can provide students with disabilities better employment opportunities in which they can earn significantly more in their lifetime than with a high school diploma alone (Autor, 2014; Caplan, 2018; Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Cheatham et al., 2013).

The second assertion made by this author is that this critical guidance and support needs to be offered through a comprehensive transition planning process that begins before the transition planning meeting and extends well into and beyond the transition planning meeting. An effective transition plan translates students' aptitudes and preferences into measurable goals (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016), which means some transition activity such as a career

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inventory assessment that provides information about students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests needs to be completed before a transition planning meeting. Also, based on the findings of the present study, once student participants established their goals and determined the action steps they needed to make progress towards those transition goals, the students and their teachers had frequent conversations regarding the students' postsecondary goals outside of the formal transition planning meeting. Thus, for transition planning to be effective, the process has to begin before the transition planning meeting, and progress towards students' meeting their goals has to be closely monitored well after the transition planning meeting has ended.

A third assertion that the author holds is that students with disabilities must be actively involved in the transition planning process to chart their own course in life post-high school. This is based on the second major finding of the study, which suggests that students with disabilities can be actively engaged in their transition processes if they are provided with opportunities that encourage their participation and prompt them to establish their postsecondary goals. The literature emphasizes the importance of student involvement in the transition planning process. The literature suggests that student involvement is lacking regarding transition planning (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; McCall, 2015; Stmadova & Cummings, 2014), which would indicate that student involvement needs to be robust during the planning process. Hirano et al. (2016) found that the level of interest in pursuing postsecondary education decreases from freshman year of high school to junior year. The findings of the current study, interestingly, refute these studies. The student participants in the present study were highly interested and involved in the transition planning in their junior and senior years of high school. Their high schools offered the participants many opportunities to engage in college and career readiness activities. For instance, Emily and Madison went on college tours, Malcolm was learning how to research possible

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postsecondary education institutes by searching websites of various schools, and Brittany was working hard in her classes to maintain a level of performance in her classes that would present her favorably to her college of choice. These participants attended their IEP meetings and expressed their transition goals to their IEP team members. Student involvement plays a significant role in transition planning because students are at the center of their transition planning. While parents and teachers can influence students to pursue postsecondary education, it is the student's responsibility to maintain satisfactory grades, complete the required applications, and submit the applications before deadlines to be able to enroll in postsecondary institutions.

The fourth assertion holds that parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential, but must be accompanied by coaching, encouragement, advising, and support by external stakeholders as well. This is based on the third major finding of the current study, which suggests that all forms of parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential. The literature related to parent involvement in transition planning revealed that parent involvement is critical for successful postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The literature also revealed that parent involvement goes beyond attending meetings. Parent involvement includes helping with homework and acting as a decision-maker, evaluator, collaborator, instructor, coach, and advocate (Hirano et al. 2016). The present study supports the existing literature, in that the parents of the participants supported their children in their decision to pursue postsecondary education. Additionally, their involvement is not limited to attending an IEP meeting but goes beyond the transition planning meeting. Malcolm's mother researched ways to pay for college that were not covered by his scholarship. Emily's mother spoke with a vocational rehabilitation counselor and the disabilities coordinator at the college she was planning to attend

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to gather more information about the services that were available for Emily to help her with her transition to her postsecondary institute. The document review may have revealed that Malcolm's mother and Emily's mother did not attend the IEP meeting, but according to the student and parent interviews, these parents were actively involved in assisting their children to pursue college, making sure their children were doing well in school, having conversations about the importance of postsecondary education, researching financial aid options to pay for tuition, and providing support throughout the application process.

Further, Brown's (2017) study revealed that parents of students who pursue postsecondary education had high expectations, frequent discussions about college, students' grade point average, the value placed on education, and students' personal academic goals. In the present study, the student participants confirmed that their parents had high expectations of them and valued their education beyond high school. Additionally, the parent participants, in the present study, reported that they did not see their children's disabilities as a barrier in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

A fifth assertion that the author holds is that collaboration by internal and external stakeholders in the transition planning process is essential if students with disabilities are to realize their postsecondary goals, particularly if those goals include postsecondary education. This is based partially on the fourth major finding of the present study which suggests that internal stakeholder collaboration (i.e., students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers) during transition planning for postsecondary education is vital for students with disabilities; and on the existing literature, which suggests the need for external stakeholder involvement.

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Stakeholder involvement in transition planning is mentioned in multiple studies in the existing literature as a key component to effective transition planning for high school students with disabilities. While the students, parents, and special education teachers in this study are actively involved and collaborating to meet the postsecondary education goals of the students, guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and representative from postsecondary institutions are missing in their transition planning process (Gibbons et al., 2015; Miller-Warren; 2016; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). The document review of students' IEPs in the present study revealed that only students, parents, teachers, and a local education agency (LEA) representative were present at the meetings. Although Emily's mother spoke with a vocational rehabilitation counselor and a representative from the postsecondary institute, they did not attend her transition planning meeting. Thus, these findings of the present study support the existing literature because the literature reveals that external stakeholders are frequently absent from IEP meetings in which transition planning is discussed.

Collier, Griffin, and Wei's (2017) study showed that students lack knowledge of Vocational Rehabilitation, which provides another example of the lack of external stakeholder involvement in the transition planning process for students with disabilities. While vocational rehabilitation services are more beneficial for employment outcomes than postsecondary education, these services can give students with disabilities some direction as to what certificate programs, further educational training, or postsecondary education they may need to obtain employment in various fields. This lack of knowledge limits the information that is shared with students with disabilities during transition planning. In the present study, only one out of four student participants and her parent acknowledged the involvement of a vocational rehabilitation counselor in the transition planning process. Both of the lead special education teacher

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participants, however, seemed to value vocational rehabilitation counselors and their involvement in transition planning meetings for the students on their caseloads.

Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray (2016) used a secondary analysis of the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2) examining the quality and characteristics of transition plans. Their findings not only revealed a low rate of participation in IEP meetings from vocational educators, vocational counselors, but also a low rate of participation of postsecondary education representatives. The low level of participation of postsecondary education representatives was also reported earlier in Grigal, Hart, and Migliore's (2011) secondary analysis from the NLTS2 in which they compared ID students with disabilities on their post school transition goals. Unlike vocational rehabilitation representatives, postsecondary education representatives can provide valuable information to parents and students in their transition to postsecondary education. For instance, postsecondary education representatives can inform all IEP committee members about accommodations that are available at the college level and what parents and students need to do to access services provided by the institution (Dutta, Kundu, & Schiro-Geist, 2009). The involvement of external stakeholders (i.e., direct service transition professionals, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and guidance counselors), each of whom, according to the existing literature, has a substantial impact on effective transition planning, may enhance the transition planning process. The absence of guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and representatives from postsecondary education institutions did not have a negative effect on the students' postsecondary education outcomes in the present study. The active involvement and collaboration of students, parents, and special education teachers/caseload managers was most essential in the transition planning process for postsecondary education for students with disabilities in their pursuit of higher education. The

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findings of the present study recognize the primacy of internal stakeholders, yet also acknowledges the contributions of external stakeholders as suggested by relevant literature, as well as evidence from the transcripts of the lead special education teacher participants.

The concept of *causation* needs to be addressed in this discussion, as well. Conditions and factors that have been presented within the results have, in some circumstances, alluded to a *correlation*; however, the two are not synonymous. For example, those students with disabilities who had lifelong ambitions to attend postsecondary education provided data that correlated with successful postsecondary education outcomes. In other words, effective transition planning did not “cause” successful postsecondary outcomes; however, in some cases, they were factors related to the transition planning process that were tangential to successful postsecondary outcomes. This study may have had very different results had the purposeful sample chosen included students who had no ambition to pursue postsecondary education, had not received internal stakeholder support (i.e., parental messaging or adequate teacher support) that framed postsecondary education as favorable, desirable, or attainable, or followed an academic path that included coursework appropriate to collegiate programs of study.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. For one, the findings of this research include a small sample size that may not represent experiences of transition planning for postsecondary education for all students with disabilities. Since transition planning for postsecondary options for high school students with disabilities could include many stakeholders, the overall experience of transition planning may be very different for each student. Transition planning may also vary from state to state, county to county, district to district, and even school to school. Therefore, the

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results of the study cannot be generalized to the entire population of students with disabilities throughout the United States.

Another limitation involves the bias of participant responses to the interview questions and other data sources. Participants may not remember details of their transition planning experiences and may only offer information they think would be acceptable by the researcher and social norms. Participants may also fear that their interview responses and perceptions may be revealed to their former teachers and school community, which may prevent them from voicing any negative experiences. This limitation was addressed through ensuring participants that pseudonyms were assigned to them to protect their identity and building a relationship of trust and rapport with the participants.

As a teacher who has been involved in many transition planning meetings with students with disabilities, I may have personal bias regarding transition planning. This bias on the topic of transition planning for postsecondary education could have influenced my interpretation of my participants' perceptions. This limitation, however, was minimized by identifying and acknowledging my bias. Researcher bias was also reduced by utilizing multiple data sources. In the present study, data were collected through interviews with students, parents, lead special education teachers, as well as student-generated visual representations and document review.

Additionally, the timing and availability of the participants in the study could present a possible limitation in collecting sufficient data. Participants may have needed more time to reflect on their experiences and may not have been able to answer interview questions within the given time frame. This was addressed by providing participants general information about the type of questions they would be asked during the interview so that they could be prepared to provide substantial information in their responses to the actual interview questions used in the

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present study. For student-generated visual representations, the students completed their drawings and collages in the time allotted to create them. The limitation, however, of the time frame to complete the visuals within a session may have prevented students from adding details or enhancing their drawings and collages. This limitation could have been addressed by allowing participants to take the materials needed to create the visuals at home to allow sufficient time for them to reflect on the prompts and complete the tasks at their convenience. The researcher could have collected their visual representations at a later time during the data collection phase of the present study.

Implications for Practice

The current study holds several implications for practice in the areas of curriculum, teacher knowledge of transition planning, teacher preparation, teacher dispositions, and social justice. The positive educational experiences of the student participants in the present study may shed light on improving transition planning for future students with disabilities in their decision to pursue higher education.

Curriculum. Since transition planning for high school students with disabilities assists students in establishing their future goals and endeavors, special education teachers and stakeholders involved in the process must consider several things. Students with disabilities can significantly influence their future through decision-making during their high school years. Parents and special education teachers need to provide guidance to help students with disabilities make informed decisions to pursue postsecondary education or employment. This guidance includes helping students with disabilities select courses that can prepare them to meet their postsecondary goals. For instance, if teachers do not apply their knowledge of curriculum to programs of study for students with disabilities, these students may likely experience a shortfall

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of credits, coursework, and other prerequisites necessary for successfully transitioning to formal postsecondary education. Misguidance or neglect could lead students to make wrong career choices, which can affect the achievement, contentment, and mental health of the individual for life (Goodman, Doorley, & Kashdan, 2018; Kapoor, Rahman, & Kaur, 2018). Career development and decision-making for postsecondary education is an integral part of transition planning for students with disabilities.

Teacher Knowledge of Transition Planning. High school students with disabilities who decide to pursue postsecondary education need on-going support from their special education teachers/caseload managers. After students have established their postsecondary goals in their meetings, it is essential that teachers follow-up with students to ensure they are taking the action steps necessary towards achieving their goals. Special education teachers can provide students and their parents with multiple resources to inform them of different postsecondary options. Also, special education teachers could embed transition activities (e.g., showing students how to research college websites, discussing parts of college applications, or explaining college admission requirements) in the classes they teach.

For high school students with disabilities who are uncertain about their postsecondary goals, teachers can have students complete on-line career inventory assessments for students to gain knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. These career inventory assessments can help students identify the types of postsecondary institutions that may be suitable to obtain careers in their desired fields. Special education teachers should build a relationship with students on their caseload, meet with their students several times throughout the school year, and provide support through the transition planning process. Annual IEP meetings, in which transition goals are updated, are not sufficient for students with disabilities to achieve their postsecondary goals.

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Teacher Preparation. In order to prepare future special education educators, teacher preparation programs need to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of preservice teachers to help high school students with disabilities effectively navigate the transition process, beginning with setting goals and the steps necessary for pursuing transition goals. Many teacher professionals in the literature reported that their college teacher preparation programs and the professional development training they received from their school districts did not provide adequate information regarding transition planning for them to assist students with the transition planning process beyond high school (Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; Plotner et al., 2015). Transition planning, especially for high school students with disabilities, to the next stage of a students' life is a process that needs attention in teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to encourage future teachers to examine their dispositions towards students with disabilities and provide pathways for them to pursue postsecondary education.

Teacher Dispositions. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes about transition planning for students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education or employment can vary. The lead special education teacher participants in the present study both had opposing dispositions about their students' pursuing postsecondary education. The first lead special education teacher felt that some type of postsecondary education or training post-high school was necessary for the students on his caseload, while the second lead special education teacher felt that postsecondary education was not a viable option for most of the students on her caseload. Teacher dispositions regarding transition planning will always vary because special education teachers work with different special needs populations, in various settings (e.g., self-contained, resource classes, or inclusion classes), and may focus on other aspects of their students' education. High school special

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education teachers, however, need to consider all reasonable postsecondary options for their students in a non-biased way.

Social Justice. All stakeholders, internal and external, need to adopt an asset-based perspective towards students with disabilities. Students with disabilities need and deserve to be provided the same, if not more, support to pursue postsecondary education as their typically developing peers. With 99% of medium-sized and 100% of large-sized public postsecondary institutions enrolling students with disabilities since the 2008-09 academic year (Hadley, 2017), colleges in the U.S. are increasingly providing equitable educational opportunities to all students. Additionally, since 90% of jobs in the information and service industry depend upon - and are increasingly requiring - that employees earn a postsecondary education (Shaw, 2009), it is necessary to provide students with disabilities pathways toward their best postsecondary options (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Wehman et al., 2018). In a just society, it is imperative that we help our students with disabilities pursue their passions and realize their aspirations of a college education (Ladson-Billings, Welner, & Carter, 2013).

When taken together, these implications may provide future educators with suggestions related to improving transition planning, providing internal and external support to students with disabilities, and approaching discussions that include reasonable options for adolescents with disabilities who aspire to attend college. Effective transition planning, therefore, may bring students with disabilities one step closer to realizing a broad range of postsecondary options that are available to them.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study may be expanded upon or enhanced by the following recommendations. First, increasing the sample size and including participants who initially

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wanted to pursue higher education but did not, may provide insight into challenges students with disabilities face in achieving their postsecondary education goals. This would provide a better comparison across cases than the present study offers.

Second, future research might examine other aspects of career development such as career maturity, career decidedness, career indecision, and career decision-making self-efficacy to further investigate the transition planning process (Lam, 2016; Martincin & Stead, 2015; Walsh & Osipow, 2014; Xu & Tracey, 2017). Future researchers may also explore intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal factors that affect career decision-making (Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey, & Malau-Aduli, 2018). These factors include aspects that individuals have no control over and an individual's development and interests. The present study utilized the Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory as a conceptual framework, but there are numerous career development theories for future researchers to employ in building knowledge and understanding of the transition planning process for high school students with disabilities.

Third, future research could involve observation of transition planning meetings to determine the level of the student, parent, and stakeholder involvement. The document review in the present study provided information regarding who attended the meetings and meeting minutes but did not give a clear depiction of their actual involvement. Finally, a recommendation for future researchers may be to include interviews with external stakeholders (e.g., guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and representatives from postsecondary institutions) to report their perspectives on the transition planning process for students with disabilities. Since their involvement is not always present in the meetings, it is essential to know how they assist students with disabilities in pursuing postsecondary education. Transition

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planning for students with disabilities is a critical process, and there is a call for more research to increase our understanding so that educators may provide the assistance students with disabilities need to pursue their transition goals.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to understand the factors related to transition planning that support students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education based on their perceptions. The present study was guided by the following research question: What factors of transition planning support high school students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary education? A qualitative research design that involved case study methods was chosen for the six-month investigation. The reason for utilizing case study methods was to understand best how transition planning, an essential element of transition services, might have favorably influenced or predisposed the decisions of four students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education following high school graduation. The participants in the present study included three first-year college students with disabilities and one senior high school student with disabilities. Other participants included four parents and two lead high school special education teachers in the school district from which the students graduated. Data collection involved in-depth biographical interviews with student participants, open-ended interviews with student, parent, and lead special education teachers, document review, and student-generated visual representations. These multiple data sources were analyzed using the constant comparative method throughout the study. The constant comparative method of data analysis involves using information from data collection and comparing it to emerging themes. The Choice-Making model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the framework upon which themes were analyzed, findings were explicated, and assertions were formulated.

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The five major assertions of this study are: (1) students with disabilities must have access to equitable opportunities to examine their postsecondary life options as their typically developing peers by being provided critical guidance and support from their teachers; (2) this critical guidance and support needs to be offered through a comprehensive transition planning process that begins before the transition planning meeting and extends well into the transition planning meeting; (3) students with disabilities must be actively involved in the transition planning process in order to chart their own course in life post-high school; (4) parent involvement in the transition planning process is essential, but must be accompanied by coaching, encouragement, advising, and support by external stakeholders as well; and (5) collaboration by internal and external stakeholders in the transition planning process is essential if students with disabilities are to realize their postsecondary goals, particularly if those goals include postsecondary education.

Students with disabilities, like those who are linguistically, culturally, racially, or economically diverse, have largely been underserved in terms of equal access to an appropriate education. This often can have a cumulative effect, particularly in terms of students' ability or inability to successfully navigate the process of pursuing higher education. With the steady increase in the number of students with disabilities attending postsecondary education within the past decade, high school special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities must collaborate with external stakeholders to continue this trend. Postsecondary education may not be a realistic goal for every student with disabilities, but it is the responsibility of all stakeholders, especially special education teachers and parents, to provide all students with the support they need to reach their highest potential, whether that involves employment, higher education/training, or assistance with independent living.

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The perceptions that students with disabilities have regarding the factors related to transition planning that support their pursuit of postsecondary education are critical to understand. For high school students with disabilities, transitioning out of high school can be an overwhelming experience in and of itself. For some, just the realization that they will be approaching this transition point in their lives can exacerbate feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, or low self-esteem. All students need the support, knowledge, and wholeheartedness of educators and family members alike, particularly when they are transitioning from one educational stage to another. They deserve appropriate education, services, and support to pursue any postsecondary option of their choosing, whether it's employment, higher education/training, or independent living. All students must have access to effective and realistic transition planning for charting their own course post-high school. As a society, educators and parents must answer the call to prepare and guide high school students with disabilities to confidently pursue a successful and fulfilling postsecondary future.

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Appendices

- A Data Collection Planning Matrix
- B Consent Letter
- C Interview Protocol for Student In-Depth Biographical Interviews
- D Interview Protocol for Student Open-ended Interviews
- E Interview Protocol for Parent Open-ended Interviews
- F Interview Protocol for Lead Special Education Open-ended Interviews
- G Prompts for Student Visual Data (Drawing and Collages)
- H Student Participant (Malcolm) Collage
- I Student Participant (Brittany) Collage
- J Student Participant (Emily) Collage
- K Student Participant (Madison) Collage
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- M Student Participant (Brittany) Drawing
- N Student Participant (Emily) Drawing
- O Student Participant (Madison) Drawing

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS RELATED TO TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix A – Data Collection Planning Matrix

Research Question- What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	From which data sources and where will answers be elicited?
<p>What is the influence of transition planning on the postsecondary education decisions of students with disabilities? In what direction did transition planning point you to throughout high school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To know how students started out ● To know what type of support was received and the benefits ascribed to each ● To know if transition planning was conducted at all ● To know if it benefited the student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-depth biological interviews with student participants ● Open-ended interviews with student participants ● Interview with parent participants ● Interview with teacher participants ● Visual representations with student participants ● Document Review
<p>What were the benefits of transition planning in particular, in helping you decide to pursue postsecondary education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If it was successful or not from the students' standpoint. ● If students benefited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-depth biological interviews with student participants ● Open-ended interviews with student participants ● Interview with parent participants ● Interview with teacher participants
<p>How can transition planning for students with disabilities yearning to attend postsecondary education (college) be improved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To provide future high school students with disabilities with better support to pursue postsecondary education ● To provide high school special educators with student insight on what is needed to improve transition planning for postsecondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-depth biological interviews with student participants ● Open-ended interviews with student participants ● Interview with parent participants

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Appendix B – Consent Letter

I agree to participate in a research project entitled “Perceptions of Students with Disabilities on the Influence of Transition Planning on Their Pursuit of Postsecondary Education,” which is being conducted by Nancy Johal Singh, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia. I understand that this participation is voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time and have the results of the participation returned to me, removed from the experimental records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to understand the influence of transition planning on postsecondary education decisions of students with high-incidence disabilities (i.e., whether they choose to pursue postsecondary education following high school). The researcher hopes that exploring these issues will help all educators improve their practice and the process of transition planning for students who wish to pursue postsecondary education. The benefit that I may expect from it is that I have the opportunity to share my experiences and perhaps offer ideas for change. Additionally, the findings may provide insight into current practices involving transition services in high school.

2. The procedures are as follows: The researcher will interview the participant(s) between April and July 2019 about experiences associated with transition planning that prepares high school students to pursue postsecondary education. There will also be an interview that provides the researcher with some background about life experiences and childhood education. The interviews will take approximately 20-30 minutes each. Participants will also be invited to create visual representations (1 drawing and 1 collage) on two separate occasions to depict experiences

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that address the research questions. I, as a participant, do not have to answer any question that makes me uncomfortable or create a visual representation if I do not want to. In addition to the interviews, the researcher will ask me to talk about my drawing and collage and write about each at the time they are completed. The interviews and visual representation activities will take place at the school, and/or, with my permission, home. The researcher will write a report that will be read by other educators. All information from the interviews will be kept on a password protected desktop computer in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home and will be deleted by April 1, 2022. Also, any paper copies of the researcher's notes will be shredded by April 1, 2022.

3. During this research, there may be possible discomfort responding to certain queries that might evoke a visceral response. I understand that I do not have to participate in any portion that makes me uncomfortable.

4. There are no known risks other than the possible discomfort described above.

5. The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent unless required by law. The researcher plans to use first names only in the report, and if I wish, I can use a false name instead of my own.

_____ Signature of Investigator, Date

_____ Signature of Participant, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR.

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Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3417, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-6407.

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Appendix C – Student In-Depth Biographical Interview Protocol

1. Where were you born?
2. How old are you?
3. What type of postsecondary education setting are you currently enrolled in?
4. What type of degree are you pursuing?
5. Did you attend the same school district throughout elementary, middle, and high school?
6. When did you first receive special education services? How did the services/accommodations help you in school? Did you participate in your IEP meetings?
7. Do you think the meetings were helpful? Do you remember discussing transition plans in your meetings? What do you remember and do you think it was helpful in your transition?
8. Describe your transition from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school. (Probe)
9. Tell me about your school(s) and the environment there. What was the school climate like? (Probe)
10. Tell me all about your school, teachers, and friends when you were a child. Anything else?
11. Describe how important school was to your parents, family, and friends. (Probe)
12. Tell me about your parents. What were their expectations of you after you graduated from high school?
13. What were your goals after completing high school? Do you think your goals were supported by your teachers and family? (Probe)
14. What is your proudest accomplishment? Tell me all about that.

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Appendix D – Student Open-ended Interview Protocol

1. Think about the high school you attended, the teachers in the school, and the administrators in the school. How could you tell if the teachers and administrators cared or did not care about your success in school/future? Be specific.
2. In what ways could you tell if your teachers were invested in your future/goals? Be specific.
3. Did you feel that your teachers were invested in guiding you toward pursuing postsecondary education? Describe.
4. In what ways do you feel you were included or not included in your transition planning? Describe the process as you recall it.
5. What did the school know about your goals after graduating high school? What would you have liked for them to know?
6. If anyone in high school asked you about your decision to pursue postsecondary education, what would you have told them? Be specific.
7. Is there anything that would have made you want to participate more in your transition planning meetings? Why or why not?
8. Describe any special activities that were available to you such as programs, transition workshops (job/college fairs), or parent meetings, at the high school you attended and whether you attended any of these. Tell me about them.
9. What kinds of activities made you feel like the school was preparing to pursue postsecondary education? Please elaborate on these.
10. Did your teachers/school inform you of your options in pursuing college? If they did, how were these options communicated to you? For example, was this information presented to you individually, through a planning process meeting, as a whole group, etc.?
11. How did you finally decide to pursue a postsecondary education? What were some of the factors that influenced your decision? Be specific.
12. Let's talk about the curriculum from high school. Did you think it was rigorous? Too hard? Too easy? Please tell me why you feel that way.
13. Tell me about your postsecondary education goals. What was important to you about pursuing college? Please describe.
14. Who or what inspired you to pursue postsecondary education and when?
15. Who or what guided you to plan for attending postsecondary education?
16. What continues to disturb/confuse/puzzle you about your experience with transition planning on postsecondary education?

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17. If you could change anything about the transition planning process at your high school that would prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary education, what would you change? Please be specific.

Appendix E – Parent Open-ended Interview Protocol

1. Did you attend any of the transition planning meetings for your child while he/she was in high school? Were these meetings separate from IEP meetings? If not, how much time would you say was spent on discussing transition plans for your child? Employment? Postsecondary Education? Independent Living?
2. Do you think everyone at the meeting shared sufficient information to you and your child about their options for postsecondary education? Please explain.
3. Did you think postsecondary education (i.e., college) was an option for your child? Why or why not? When did you/your child consider that as an option?
4. Did you or your child ask questions about postsecondary education during the meeting? What kind of questions did you ask and were your questions answered? Were you satisfied with the responses to your questions?
5. Reflecting back on the transition process for your child from high school to college, what do you think could have been discussed at the meeting that would have helped you/your child in the process of pursuing postsecondary education?
6. What do you think would be helpful for future parents of students with disabilities as they prepare for transition planning meetings?
7. Do you have any recommendations for teachers who conduct transition planning meetings? Please be specific.
8. Is there anything else that stands out about your experience in transition planning for postsecondary education for your child?
9. What Transition Services did you and your child feel were most helpful? What do you wish would have provided to you at the time?

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Appendix F – Lead Special Education Teacher Open-ended Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been a special education teacher?
2. Do you feel postsecondary education is a viable option for most of the students on your caseload? Explain.
3. What is your expectation for students with high-incidence disabilities after they graduate from high school?
4. How much time do you spend on transition planning with your students? Do you conduct separate meetings for transition planning or is transition planning part of the IEP meeting? In what ways do you address options for your students after they graduate high school? Be specific.
5. How do you support students with disabilities who wish to pursue postsecondary education?
6. What types of postsecondary options do you regularly discuss with students and parents?
7. How often do you have a parent, student, direct services representative, vocational rehabilitation counselor, and/or guidance counselor attend transition meetings? Do you think these stakeholders' contributions are relevant to students' goals and interests? Please be specific.
8. Do you feel students benefit from their transition planning meetings? If so, how? What transition services, besides transition planning, are missing?
9. How is progress monitored on transition goals for postsecondary education? If progress is not monitored through a progress report, how can you tell whether students are making progress on their transition goals?
10. What do you feel would be most helpful for students with disabilities who want to pursue secondary education and how do you think that can be achieved through the transition planning process or other services?

Appendix G - Prompts for Visual Representations

Prompt for Student-Generated Collage: “Create a collage that depicts your transition planning process for pursuing postsecondary education.”

Prompt for Student-Generated Drawing: “Draw a picture of what you envisioned for your future when you were in high school.”

Appendix H – Student Participant (Malcolm) Collage



Appendix I – Student Participant (Brittany) Collage



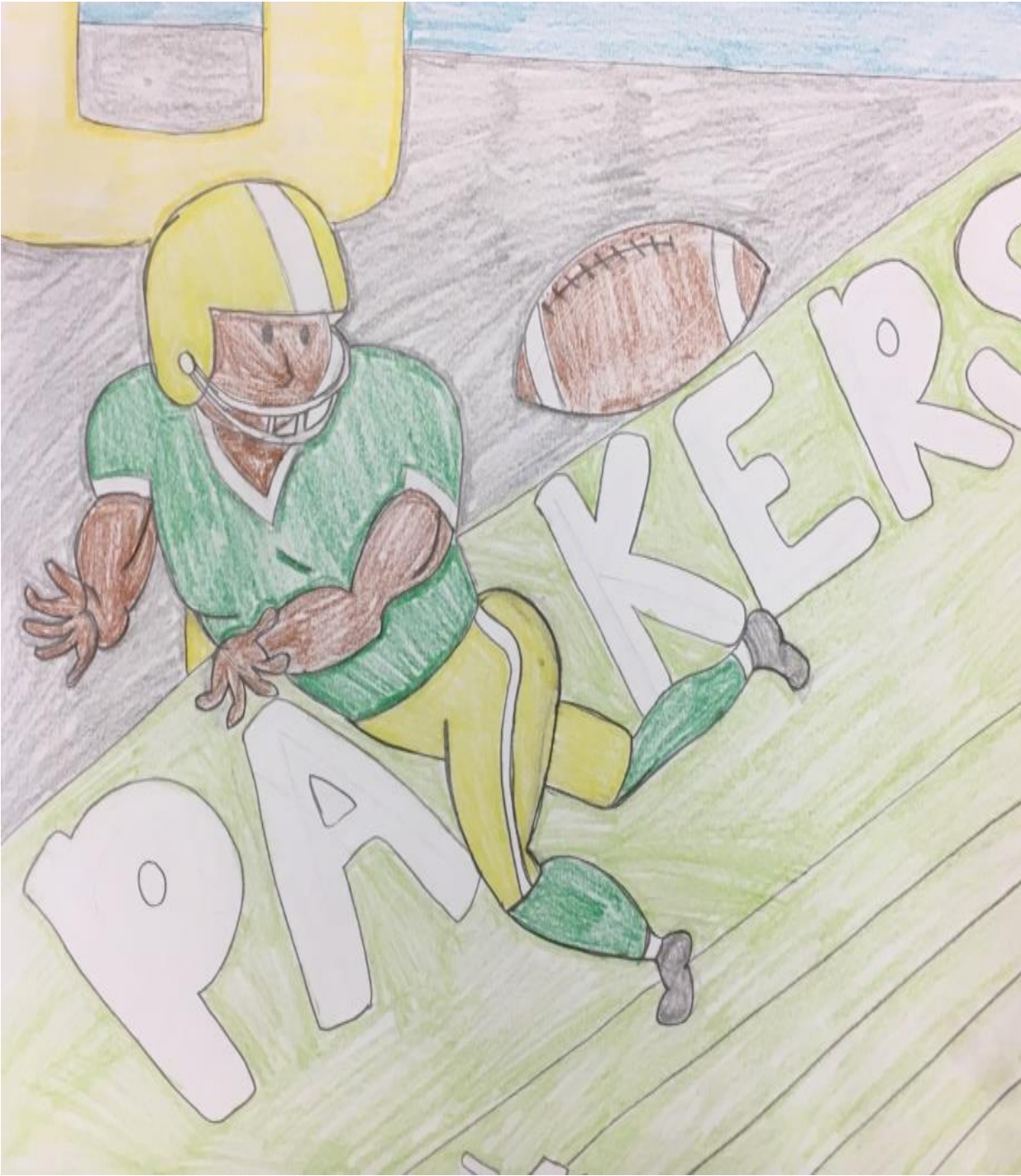
Appendix J – Student Participant (Emily) Collage



Appendix K – Student Participant (Madison) Collage



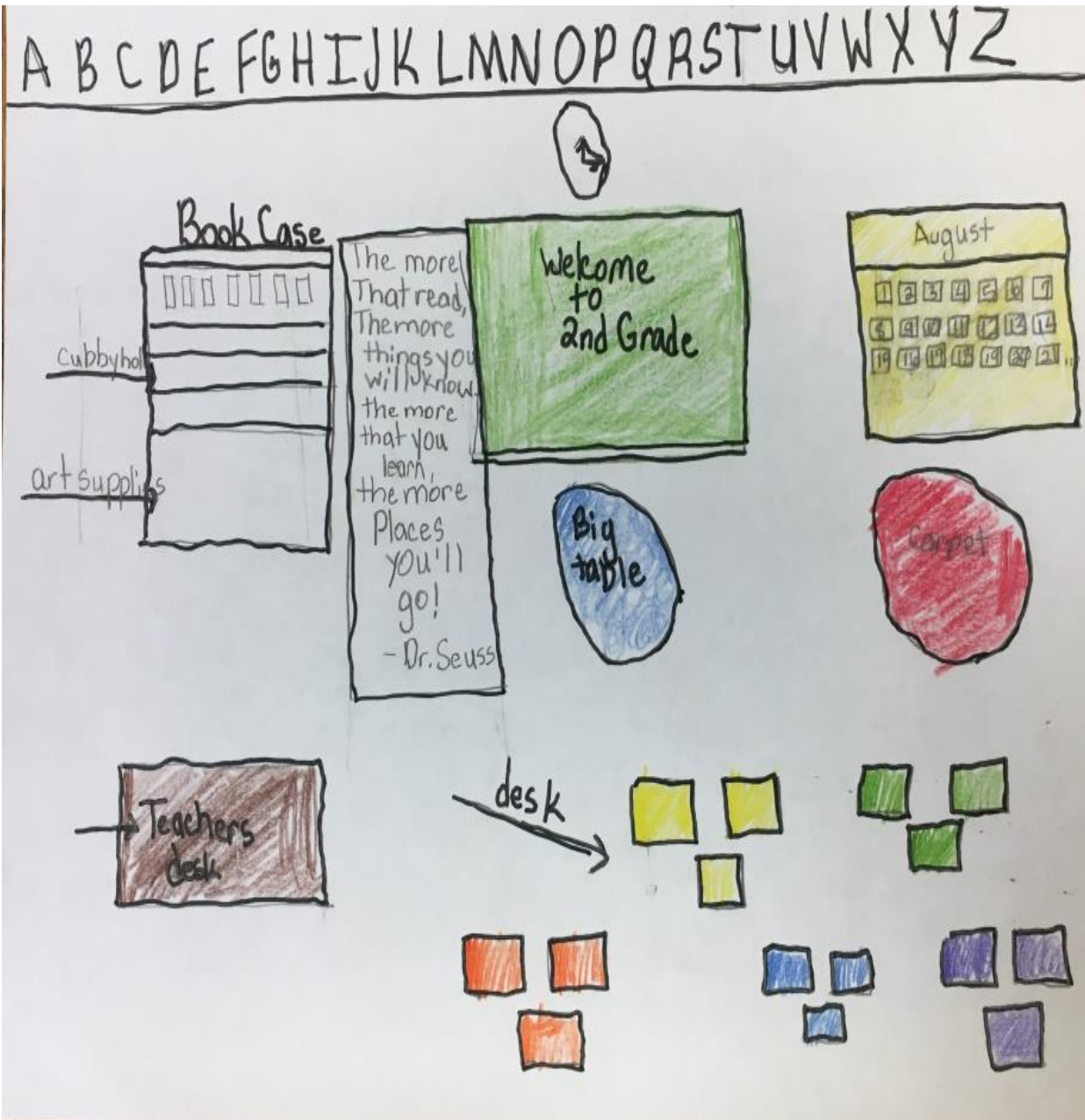
Appendix L – Student Participant (Malcolm) Drawing



Appendix M – Student Participant (Brittany) Drawing



Appendix N – Student Participant (Emily) Drawing



Appendix O – Student Participant (Madison) Drawing

