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Post-Secondary Success In Relation To Transition Programs

Christopher Brandon Jones
University of New England

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POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS IN RELATION TO TRANSITION PROGRAMS

By

Christopher Brandon Jones

Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education & Special Education from Rhode Island College
Master's Degree in Special Education from Rhode Island College

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of
the College of Graduate and Professional Studies
at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

It was presented on
August 4, 2021
and reviewed by:

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Christopher Brandon Jones



UNIVERSITY OF
NEW ENGLAND

College of Graduate and Professional Studies

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Dedications

I dedicate this work to my guardian angel, my mother, Joyce Ellen Jones. Many years ago, I made a promise to you before you left us, and I have always vowed to keep it. No matter how difficult the road has become, the doubt that tried to settle in, and the thought of giving up, I could always hear you in my ear. Whispering, “you are my knight in shining armor, promise to always stand by me.” Well Mom, I am proud and honored to present you with a doctoral degree. I thank you mom for always looking in on me and my family. Your presence is always with me, and I will cherish it forever. Dad and I miss you every day. Gone but never forgotten 5:12.

“My guardian angel is my mom in heaven.”- unknown

“Follow your dreams, transform your life, take the path that leads to God. Perform your miracles. Cure. Make prophecies. Listen to your guardian angel. Transform yourself. Be a warrior and be happy as you wage the good fight. Take risks.”- Paulo Coelho

“I love you more.”- unknown

“There are three things that are important to every man in this locker room. His God, his family, and the Green Bay Packers. In that order.”- Vince Lombardi

“Why do we fall? So that we can learn to pick ourselves back up.”- Batman

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Abstract

The general topic of this qualitative case study was post-secondary success in relation to transition programs, which was assessed by looking at evidence-based practices, employability frameworks, and guidepost to success. The findings from this research can identify current gaps about this topic by analyzing previous research, looking at existing theories, or by identifying practices that are not effective. Research in this area suggests there is still a way to go despite tremendous focus on providing more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to gain employment in areas of interest. Previous studies about this topic are limited because there is not a substantial body of literature about the efficacy of transition model. Furthermore, each school district may or may not institute the model the same way. Studies exploring the efficacy of the transition model would assess how the program is being implemented (i.e., what evidence-based practices, employability frameworks, and guidepost to success are being implemented with fidelity). Comprehending employability includes considering the many aspects and various ways in which it is assessed and evaluated, the basic applicable skills, and the competencies required for employment opportunities. It is important to look at employability through multiple lenses and thoroughly assess the study. It is not sufficient to consider only whether someone has a job. It is also important to look at a person's happiness related to their job and place of employment, success in their job, opportunity for growth in their industry, whether they want their specific job, and opportunities for developing relationships with co-workers.

Chapter I

Introduction

In August 2020, the United States Department of Education revised a *Transition Guide to Post-Secondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities*. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) revised the guide to include updated transition planning opportunities to prepare youth with disabilities for post-secondary success. The guide includes policies under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that identified transition services and new terms being implemented. In the transition guide, post-secondary options for students' address education, training, and employment opportunities. The final concept included is based on supporting student-made decisions, which include person-centered planning, making informed choices, addressing students social and emotional needs, and providing support to make decisions (US Department of Education, 2020). This study aimed to research the efficacy of transition programs by exploring post-secondary success for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Data from a public school in Rhode Island (Site A) was analyzed using Indicator 14 (i.e., post-school outcomes), which showcased the number of students employed due to their participation in a transition program. Data from a public school in Connecticut (Site B) was analyzed through the Connecticut State Department of Education post-school outcomes. The primary goal was to learn about and analyze each transition program's effectiveness and its benefits for students with significant intellectual disabilities (SID). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, significant intellectual disability is defined as an individual who has deficits in intellectual functioning (e.g., reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and experiential learning) and impairments in adaptive functioning (e.g., daily living skills, such a

communication, social skills, personal independence at home and in the community, and social or work functioning; American Addiction Centers, 2020).

The primary function of a transition program is to prepare students with disabilities for adult life, and, in the process, leverage interagency collaboration to assist students in reaching their maximum potential within becoming active members of society. There are many aspects introduced and reinforced in these essential programs, including functional daily living skills, activities of daily living, academia, and socialization. Students are provided with opportunities to practice crucial daily living skills that offer them independence and soft skills in the employment field. Students can broaden their understanding and awareness of various careers within their community and amongst their peers, enabling them to practice soft and job-specific skills. Through these hands-on experiences, students can identify their preferences and career interests within the context of a real-life situation. These experiences have potential to reinforce longevity of engagement and participation, and, ultimately, increase production rates to meet industry standards. Within this process, students are provided opportunities to further their education and training in various ways (i.e., college, job-specific training, and exploration of interests). Additionally, students in transition programs are introduced to myriad recreational and leisure activities to enhance their quality of life.

Background of the Study

The National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012 identified a disparity among youth with disabilities participating in paid work experiences compared to youth without a disability. Fifty percent of typically developing students participated in a paid work experience compared to only 40% of youth with a disability (Lipscomb et al., 2017). The National Longitudinal Transition Study also found 12% of youth with a disability participated in a school-sponsored

trial work experience (Lipscomb et al., 2017). This finding led to the inquiries of this dissertation study to explore integrated trial work experiences mandated by Sites A and B, how these work experiences were being implemented, were they successful, and what evidence-based practices were being implemented to support the transition services identified in their transition plans.

Last reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlined the necessity for transition services to assist youth with the transition to post-secondary success (PACER, 2021). According to IDEA, transition services include post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing adult education, adult services, and independent living and community participation (Schall et. al, 2012). Schall et al. (2012) suggested favorable outcomes of transition programs include: vocational competence and employment perspective, implementing evidence-based practices to increase independence, increase social competencies, self-determination and self-advocacy, parental involvement, school and community inclusion, and post-secondary education.

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C; 2020) identified research-based and promising predictors of positive educational, employment, and independent living outcomes. Within the area of employment, NTACT:C (2020) identified inclusion in general education, occupational courses, paid employment or work experience, vocation education, and work study as research-based predictors of positive employment outcomes. Promising predictors of employment outcomes included career awareness, community experience, exit exam requirements or high school diploma status, interagency collaboration, parent or family involvement, parent expectations, program of study, self-advocacy or self-determination, self-care or independent living skills, social skills, student support, transition programs, and travel skills (NTACT:C, 2020).

These evidence-based and promising practices fall under the student development category of the five primary practices of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 by Kohler et al. (2016). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 utilized research literature to identify effective practices that predict post-school success. Additional effective practices include student-focused planning, family engagement, program structure, and interagency collaboration (Kohler et al., 2016). According to Kohler et al., data has demonstrated transition-focused education improves post-school outcomes of students with disabilities. Transition-focused education occurs when educators, families, students, and community members and organizations collaborate during transition planning for an individual with a disability.

The IRIS Center (2021) identified six features included in the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0. Program philosophy ensures curricula and services are outcome-driven, culturally and linguistically responsive, community-referenced, and implemented in an integrated setting. Strategic planning within a transition program incorporates collaboration between schools and school districts to identify barriers needed to be addressed to prepare youth for post-secondary success. Schools implement program policies supporting implementation of effective practices, such as those previously identified by NTACTION: C. To ensure teachers are implementing effective practices, training and professional development must be facilitated to ensure human resource development. Another feature is allocation of resources, which states schools must ensure resources and funding are provided for appropriate community-based placements; this feature is extremely relevant to this study (Iris Center, 2021). The IRIS Center identified program evaluation as an essential feature of the transition program structure, which is also a key factor in this study. Schools must evaluate post-school outcomes and utilize the data to identify improvements needed to enhance effectiveness of the program. This feature was used in

this dissertation study to evaluate data and determine the efficacy of the identified transition programs.

Statement of the Problem

The National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012 identified 40% of youth with a disability have participated in a recent paid work experience compared to 50% of youth without a disability (Lipscomb et al., 2017). School programs, such as transition programs, appear to be assisting individuals with disabilities while enrolled in school, as youth with an individualized education plan (IEP) are more likely to receive paid or unpaid school-sponsored vocational experiences in comparison to their non-disabled peers (12% and 7%, respectively; Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Picchi (2017) found individuals with disabilities are still struggling to find employment opportunities. In 2020, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), collected data on employment rates of individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities had an employment-population ratio of 28.8% compared to the 71.1% employment-population ratio of individuals without a disability (ODEP, 2021a). ODEP supports a variety of initiatives geared toward employers interested in employing individuals with disabilities. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) provides education for employers on strategies, recruitment, hiring, retaining, and promoting individuals with disabilities. Additionally, it includes a job posting website that provides success stories. The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is another resource that connects employers with recently graduated individuals with disabilities who are looking for employment in a variety of career fields. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) provides advice on accommodations that will improve productivity rates and allow individuals with

disabilities to reach their maximum potential as employees. The Campaign for Disability Employment facilitates positive media around benefits of employing individuals with disabilities. Another incentive is the Work Opportunities Tax Credit, which is a federal tax credit for employers employing individuals with disabilities. Fact sheets and resources are presented on the Department of Labor Website (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Though the U.S. Department of Labor provides a plethora of employer incentives, individuals with disabilities in 2020 still had an unemployment rate of 13.9% compared to 6.4% of persons without a disability (ODEP, 2021a)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and analyze the efficacy of transition programs and determine if they assist individuals with significant intellectual disabilities with preparing for post-secondary employment. IDEA mandates implementation of transition services to prepare youth with disabilities for movement to post-secondary activities, such as integrated employment, higher education, adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017b). Through reviewing existing literature, research, and data collection this study identified evidence-based practices and transition services that were implemented in transition programs. Additionally, the data analysis process included calculating the direct correlation of post-school employment rates. Evidence-based practices implemented in Sites A and B were identified to determine whether these strategies demonstrated a positive effect on individuals who participated in the transition programs. Based on the effective practices and predictors matrix provided by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (2019), the implementation of evidence-based practices—such as student-focused planning (e.g., student-led

IEPs) and student development (e.g., self-determination skills)—are essential for preparing youth with significant intellectual disabilities for employment. This population of individuals is afforded opportunities to learn and apply these necessary vocational skills through transition programs.

At both sites, students were required to complete two 60-day work trial experiences. Youth in Rhode Island (Site A) are required to complete vocational experiences, which is mandated by the Rhode Island Consent Decree (United States District Court of Rhode Island, 2013, p. 17). These work trial experiences provide students in the program with opportunities to experience on-the-job training in an integrated setting with their non-disabled peers. The students can apply and improve their employability skills while preparing for competitive employment. This study identified the implementation of the student’s participation in integrated, community-based work experiences and analyzed its correlation to the post-school employment rate.

Research Questions

To demonstrate post-school employment outcomes of public-school transitions programs at Site A and Site B, research questions were aligned with the goal of conducting a program evaluation through an archival data review. The direct correlations of student success at both sites—identified with the metric of gainful employed—were identified. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1. What are the evidence-based practices that Site A and Site B are implementing as part of the transition program?

Research Question 2. How often are Site A and Site B incorporating the skills identified in various employability frameworks?

Research Question 3. How are Site A and Site B utilizing the post-school outcome rubrics to identify if students are participating in employment opportunities and/or enrolled in higher education to prepare for employment?

Conceptual Framework

Using the theory of employability as a foundation for the theoretical framework, the efficacy and fidelity of two transition programs for individuals with significant intellectual disabilities (Site A in Rhode Island and Site B in Connecticut) were assessed and analyzed. When considering employability for students with intellectual disabilities, it is essential to identify effective practices that predict vocational success. According to the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C; 2020) effective practices include teaching methods that provide direct instruction of a specific skill identified as effective through high-quality research. Like effective practices, NTACT:C (2019) identified evidence-based practices for vocational success, including career technical education, student involvement in the IEP, self-determination, and goal setting. Research-based practices include inclusion in general education, occupational courses, paid or unpaid work experiences, work study, self-advocacy, self-directed IEPs, community-based instruction, computer-assisted instruction, constant time-delay, self-management, simulation, least-to-most prompting, counseling, interagency collaboration, supported employment, counselor education, and services to the targeted group (NTACT:C, 2019). Promising practices include career awareness, community experiences, high school diploma, interagency collaboration, parent or family involvement, parent expectations, program of study, self-care or independent living skills, social skills, student support, participation in a transition program, travel skills, youth autonomy and decision making,

community-based instruction to teach employment skills, financial literacy, mnemonics for completing job applications, video prompting, and video modeling (NTACT:C, 2019).

This study explored a post-school outcomes survey, secured employment, higher education and certificate programs, and access to—or collaboration with—a benefit planning specialist. This information was extrapolated through data of post-school outcomes and a teacher survey. Analyzing data of post-school employment outcomes provided a better understanding of transition program efficacy.

This study aimed to understand individuals with intellectual disabilities, their experiences of attending a transition program, and how those experiences correlated to sustained competitive employment. It is widely accepted that lifelong learning through acquiring new skills improves employability, which can be facilitated in a transition program. However, despite there being different facets of “employability,” consensus is there are key skills that consist of four components. According to Lees (2002), communication, numeracy, information technology, and learning how to learn are essential. Teamwork is also identified. UKEssays (2018) identifies job-specific skills, such as reading, language arts and written expression, mathematics, listening, public speaking, critical and creative thinking, and self-management are essential components of becoming employed. Processing skills are also essentially, including problem-solving, decision-making, planning and delegating, understanding business and commercial interests, prioritizing, teamwork, and negotiating. These skills are developed through simulation and work experience, rather than through academia. (UKEssays, 2018).

A significant challenge is designing and conducting research, as well as working assumptions that influence your work (Anderson & Saavedra, 1995; Chawla, 2006; Peshkin, 1988; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). While conducting this research and

gathering data from surveys, I exhausted all avenues to effectively analyze the ability of the transition programs to enhance employability skills of those in the programs.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

An assumption and bias of the study was the notion that all learners who participated in a transition program would eventually become gainfully employed in an area of their interest. The programs, unfortunately, were not designed to guarantee all students will obtain competitive integrated employment prior to exiting the program. Though transition programs prepare youth for postsecondary success, schools only play a modest role in helping youth with and without disabilities find employment (Lipscomb, 2017).

According to the NLTS2, youth with disabilities are not participating in paid work experiences at an equitable rate in comparison to their typical peers. A primary reason for this lack of participation is many individuals with significant intellectual disabilities require supported employment to discover work interests, abilities and preferences, participate in experiences of their interest area to clarify goals and identify support needs, prepare for employment, and support to learn and maintain employment (Office of Rehabilitation Services, 2021). The additional support requires staff who are knowledgeable and willing to uphold the responsibilities of being a job coach, which is pivotal to the individual's success. According to the website Payscale (2021) the average wage of a direct support professional is \$11.92 per hour. This low rate makes it difficult for state agencies to find qualified workers; the rate of pay does not correlate to the amount of responsibility required for the job. On March 24, 2021, Tina Spears, the Executive Director of the Community Provider Network of Rhode Island (CPNRI) appeared on *GoLocal LIVE* to advocate for an increased wage for direct service providers (GoLocal LIVE, 2021). CPNRI is a federally funded nonprofit agency that provides services and

support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (CPNRI, 2021). The current wage for direct service providers at CPNRI is \$13.18, which is only \$1.68 above the state's minimum wage of \$11.50. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, it has been difficult for the agency to recruit, train, and retain direct service providers. CPNRI is advocating wages increase to \$17.50 per hour (CPNRI, 2021). This has clearly resulted in a deficit in the number of current state agency employees who assist individuals with disabilities. This factor may be a limitation to the study because employment rates may have been affected due to the youth's inaccessibility to necessary employment services.

Most, if not all, studies have limitations. Limitations are occurrences in a research study that were not foreseen. This research design had some limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in limited access to in-person interviews with human subjects in the school setting. This was overcome by implementing video conferencing platforms (via Zoom). The scope of the research was assessment of level of participation in employment, higher education, and independent living situation of students with significant intellectual disabilities between the ages of 18 through 22 (when they exit) and 3 years beyond (age of 25). As a result, the pandemic presented a barrier that could not have been predicted. This resulted in a shift in design as well as location. Lastly, given the length of the time the programs had been in existence and the many changes they underwent there is a possibility hard copies of some informational documents were not available. As a result, certain historical documents were not captured in this case study.

Personal biases may have limited the study scope because I had a previous professional relationship with administration at Site A. Since we worked together in a former district, I made sure the administrator was not involved in data collection. It is important to note I served as

special education director in a neighboring district of Site B. During my time as director, I developed many professional relationships in local communities. To address any biases or possible misconceptions for the reader, the study was conducted in a location where I did not have any prior relationships.

An assumption in the field of transition programs and planning for adulthood is all students will exit the transition program with a paying job in an area of their interest. Unfortunately, that is not true as the program is not designed to guarantee employment. The purpose of transition programs is to teach individuals in the program skills that will prepare them to be productive citizens of society. In some cases, individuals will gain employment through internship, job placements, and other work trial experiences during vocational exploration.

Rationale and Significance

IDEA mandates transition services to be implemented starting no later than the age of 16 (many districts start at the age of 14) (IDEA, 2017). Throughout their educational experience, students with disabilities will participate in a variety of activities to prepare them for post-school success. This study identifies if the Transition Programs are implementing evidence-based practices and employability frameworks to reinforce positive student outcomes. The data is analyzed to identify the direct correlation between the program's implementation of skills and post school employment. The study aimed to explore levels of success for all learners in the transition programs and, hopefully, help increase those successes moving forward.

I believe this study's findings have potential to contribute to society considering the importance of looking past a person's barriers, whether physical, cognitive, or emotional. First and foremost, this study may contribute to the overall well-being of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities. As discussed, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 demonstrates

the inequality of employment rate for youth with disabilities compared to their typical peers (Lispcomb, 2017). The transition programs are an essential component of adulthood planning and the gateway to employment opportunities for youth with significant disabilities. This study analyzes if a correlation exists between the experiences of individuals in transition programs and the successes they may or may not have in a vocational setting. In this regard, it is essential to note each district has its challenges finding employment opportunities for individuals with significant intellectual disabilities. Finally, this study represents an emerging research plan for special education at the post-secondary level, and, more specifically, for the employability theory. As I have noted, much of the work in this area focuses on students within the public school between the ages of 18 and 22 who have significant intellectual disabilities. If the primary goals of transition programs are to teach individuals with SID and better prepare them for life after high school, then all soft skill and job-specific skill development must be addressed, taught, and applied in the context of a vocational setting.

Definition of Terms

Intellectual disability: Intellectual disability (ID; formerly known as mental retardation) is the most common intellectual disability in the United States, affecting almost 6.5 million individuals. There are over 545,000 children between the ages of 6 and 21 with ID (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015).

Transition plan: Transition preparation is a systematic method for assisting students with IEPs in deciding their post-secondary objectives and how to get there. The law necessitates it through IDEA. The aim of transition planning is to assist teens in becoming self-sufficient young adults. Young adults are encouraged to engage in IEP meetings and take the lead (Lee, 2021). Transition preparation can help students achieve better results by increasing their sense of self-

determination, or power over what they can do and achieve. The transition planning process is intended to consider students' needs, desires, and talents, as well as to include them as much as possible in charting their own paths (Lipscomb, 2021). Transition planning is individualized and considers students' strengths, preferences, and interests. During the process the IEP team will identify opportunities to develop the student's functional skills for work and community integration (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2021).

Job coach: A career coach, also known as a job coach, is someone who works with people with disabilities to help them understand, adapt, and perform their job duties. Most school districts utilize paraprofessionals in the capacity of a job coach. A career coach can assist the new or potential employee with soft skills in addition to skills related to performing specific job tasks (Lightner, 2020).

Job shadowing: Job shadowing is a type of on-the-job employee training during which a new employee, or one who wants to learn about a different job, follows and observes an experienced and qualified employee. For certain workers, work shadowing is an important method of job preparation (Heathfield, 2020).

Post-secondary outcomes: The report Post-High School Results of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School: Key Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 used data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 dataset to provide a national image of post-high school outcomes for students with disabilities. The study explains the lives of young adults and their experiences (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2).

Special education: Special education is a broad term used by the IDEA law to describe specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of those who have a disability. These

services are provided by the public-school system and are free of charge. Services can include education in the classroom, at home, in hospitals, and in institutions. Learning disabilities cover a broad spectrum of disorders ranging from mild to severe. They can include mental, physical, behavioral, and emotional disabilities. (IDEA, 2017)

Individualized Education Program (IEP): Each child's IEP must contain specific information, which is detailed within IDEA (2017), the U.S. special education law. This includes (but is not limited to):

- The child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, describing how the child is currently doing in school and how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.
- Annual goals for the child, meaning what parents and the school team think they can reasonably accomplish in a year.
- The special education and related services to be provided to the child, including supplementary aids and services (such as a communication device) and changes to the program or supports for school personnel.
- How much of the school day the child will be educated separately from nondisabled children or not participate in extracurricular or other nonacademic activities such as lunch or clubs.
- How (and if) the child is to participate in state and district-wide assessments, including what modifications to tests the child needs.
- When services and modifications will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last.
- How school personnel will measure the child's progress toward the annual goals.

Disabilities: There are 13 categories of special education defined by IDEA. To qualify for special education, the IEP team must determine that a child has one of the following: autism, blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment (IDEA, 2018).

Transition: Under IDEA students with disabilities must be provided with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment (LRE; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020). IDEA also states that students, beginning no later than the age of 16 years old, must be provided with transition services, which are integral to FAPE. These services are embedded with a student's transition plan, which is documented in the IEP. The transition plan and services are based on a high school student's individual needs, strengths, skills, and interests and are implemented to facilitate the transition from school to post-school activities, such as higher education and competitive integrated employment. Related services are identified to assist youth with achieving their post-secondary educational and vocational goals. The continuum of services based upon individualized independent living, employment, and educational goals continue throughout high school and prepare youth for accessing these post-secondary services. Some vocational services may include pre-employment training services, job placement services, other vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment services. (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020).

Self-determination: Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Self-determination refers to the attitudes and abilities necessary to serve as the primary causal agent in one's life and make decisions free of

undue external control or intervention (Wehmeyer, 1992, p. 305). A person's actions are self-determined if the person acts autonomously, regulates his or her behavior, initiates and responds to events in a manner indicating psychological empowerment, and behaves in a manner that is self-realizing. That is, the person acts in ways that make positive use of knowledge and understanding about his or her characteristics, strengths, and limitations (Wehmeyer, Kelchner, & Richards, 1996). A self-determined person is one who sets goals, makes decisions, sees options, solves problems, speaks up for himself or herself, understands what supports are needed for success, and knows how to evaluate outcomes (Martin & Marshall, 1996). Students who have self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Starting with the 1990 reauthorization of IDEA (P.L. 101-476), transition services must be based on student needs and consider student interests and preferences. To accomplish this goal, students must be prepared to participate in planning for their future. Several curricula have been developed to address the need for self-determination skills among adolescents, including the skills needed to take control of the IEP process. Selected curricula are identified and described at the end of this brief.

Self-advocacy: There are many aspects about self-advocacy skills that improve a student's success and independence. Self-advocacy is being able to defend or assert oneself with matters involving decisions to be made. When this skill is developed, one will be able to access information based upon their interests and identify appropriate supports within their journey. Self-advocates know their rights and responsibilities, can problem-solve, listen and learn, and reach out to others for assistance and social interactions. Self-advocacy is important to youth being able to access information to make informed decisions and identify and demand

appropriate supports and services based on their individual preferences and needs (Wrightslaw, 2020).

Conclusion

The lives of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities can be shaped and enriched by exploring employment opportunities, independent living, and education and training programs. The purpose of transition programs is to provide students with opportunities and interest inventories to shape their career choices. Without a transition program to adulthood, many individuals with disabilities would not be afforded an opportunity to be gainfully employed or even work in a capacity that is fulfilling and individualized. The transition program works as a bridge from school to adulthood and works as the liaison to adult service providers such as the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) in Rhode Island, Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH) in Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) as well as guardianship and social security providers.

Chapter II

Literature Review on History on Transition

Though the transition initiative is new, there are some previous and current studies and research being facilitated around the many facets of transition. Currently, Rhode Island is in the implementation phase of a consent decree created in 2014. The data from the implementation of the consent decree will be formally assessed in the year 2024. The Consent Decree of Rhode Island has shaped the transformation of transition planning for individuals with disabilities. In 2014 the Department of Justice identified Rhode Island's violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and created the Consent Decree of Rhode Island as a remedy (Olmstead, 2021). This civil rights investigation discovered individuals with disabilities were segregated in settings of facility-based day programs and sheltered workshops.

The Birch Vocational School at Mount Pleasant High School was identified as a sheltered workshop that held "unjustified isolation" of persons with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The Department of Justice discovered approximately 80% of individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) receiving state services were enrolled in sheltered workshops or facility-based day programs, which segregated 2,700 individuals from their typical peers. In contrast, only 385 individuals with I/DD were participating in integrated and individualized employment experiences, which was about 12%. For those participating in sheltered workshops and facility-based programs, individuals typically stayed in their placements; 46.2% stayed for 10 years and 34.2% stayed for 15 or more years. The individuals in sheltered workshops received a payment of \$2.21 per hour (Olmstead, 2021). In response to the investigation by the Department of Justice, Rhode Island officials created an interim settlement agreement to ensure future compliance. The creation of the consent decree addressed a 10-year

plan by adjusting the responsibilities of the stakeholders in transition planning for individuals with disabilities. The stakeholders include vocational rehabilitation, day service providers, and schools working with transition-aged youth (Olmstead, 2021). Through federal mandates, Rhode Island continues to identify strategies to prepare youth for employment and post-secondary success. Transition programming and person-centered plans are now required for all youth with I/DD.

Rhode Island must implement “supported employment services” in compliance with the interim agreement of the consent decree. Transition services include vocational and related services, such as instruction, community experiences; the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; school-based preparatory experiences; career preparation, and integrated work-based learning experiences, such as site visits, job shadowing, soft skill and job skill development, internships, part-time employment, and summer employment; youth development and leadership, including training in self-advocacy, self-determination and conflict resolution skills, peer and adult mentoring, and, where appropriate, daily living skills; connecting activities, including exposure to post-school educational and community services, transportation, benefits planning, and assistive technology (Olmstead, 2021). All supported employment services must be individualized, flexible, strength-based and continuously supporting the individual’s employability. The placement must be integrated, and compensation must be at least minimum wage with appropriate benefits. Individuals will work the maximum number of hours appropriate for their ability levels and must be provided with equal opportunities to their non-disabled peers.

Based upon the consent decree, the Department of Justice mandated that Rhode Island implement policies and procedures for the creation of a career development plan (CDP) for all

youth in the target population (Olmstead, 2021). The CDP is an individualized, person-centered plan that incorporates data from evidence-based vocational assessments that gather information on the individual's strengths and abilities. All work-based assessments must be implemented in an integrated community setting, conducted by appropriate staff, maintain fidelity to an asset-based model, and provide accommodations based on the individual's needs (Olmstead, 2021). The CDP must be revised annually in congruence to the IEP and be integrated into the person's individual plan for employment (IPE), individual support plan (ISP), IEP, and individual learning plan (ILP). A scope and sequence of supports and services must be outlined in the CDP along with integrated trial work experiences in the career field of interest (Olmstead, 2021).

According to consent decree, Rhode Island must adopt the employment first policy to demonstrate the values of the school district's transition planning (Olmstead, 2021). A school-to-work transition process for transition-aged youth must be developed for individuals with I/DD and include interagency collaboration to ensure employment is implemented in an integrated setting. Transition planning must begin at the age of 14 and no later than 16 years of age. By the age of 18, individuals must be introduced to a variety of post-secondary employment options by participating in community-based work experiences. All transition-aged youth with I/DD will participate in two 60-day integrated trial work experiences before exit. Within the year prior to exit, the individual must receive benefits planning services (Olmstead, 2021).

The consent decree resulted in development of transition planning to ensure individuals of all abilities are not discriminated against and are provided with opportunities that are equitable to their non-disabled peers. The CDP produces documentation of individualized transition plans along with the scope and sequence of implemented and future transition services. The correlation of the CDP with the IEP ensures all stakeholders are held accountable and interagency

collaboration is reinforced to provide appropriate vocational and community-based support. These federal mandates have been identified as strategies to reinforce vocational opportunities, preparation, and success for youth with disabilities (Olmstead, 2021).

Another federal mandate that supports post-school employment is the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA; 2004). IDEA identifies transition services that must be provided in an IEP. IDEA identifies transition services as a coordinated set of activities that prepares individuals of all abilities for post-school success, including direct instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and post-school goals, and daily living skills instruction, when appropriate (IDEA, 2017). The results-oriented process is based on the individual's needs related to improving functional and academic achievement while preparing them for higher education, job-specific training, integrated employment, adult services, independent living, and community participation. These transition services all provide opportunities for individuals to enhance their preparation for postsecondary success and are included within the student's CDP.

Another policy that reinforces vocational preparation is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA assists individuals seeking employment with accessing education, training, employment, and supports and services required to attain and maintain employment (Employment and Training Administration, 2021). The reform of WIOA improved services to individuals with disabilities. It did this by increasing access to high-quality workforce services in preparation for competitive integrated employment. Specifically, it provided programmatic accessibility to employment and training services, pre-employment training services through vocational rehabilitation, and increase employment opportunities through employer collaboration and engagement (Employment and Training Administration, 2021.).

Rhode Island has a phased implementation of WIOA. The Governor’s Workforce Board is developing a plan for the state of Rhode Island to issue policy and directives, allocate resources and collaborate to deliver high-quality workforce development services (State Workforce Development Board, 2020). The development plan “Rhode Island Innovates 2.0” identifies subsectors and business concentrations to provide employment opportunities. These include biomedical innovation, information technology and software, defense shipbuilding and maritime, advanced business services, arts, education, hospitality, and tourism, design, food, and custom manufacturing, transportation, distribution and logistics, the blue economy, offshore wind, and ‘back office’ operations (State Workforce Development Board, 2020). The Governor’s Workforce Board’s implementation of WIOA in Rhode Island demonstrates the creation of vocational positions for individuals with disabilities. If these subsectors are utilized to effectively match a student with a career field within their interest, schools and agencies could create meaningful vocational experiences for youth of all abilities. The consent decree requires transition-aged youth to participate in integrated vocational experiences, and, through the implementation of WIOA, schools would increase compliance with diverse career opportunities (Olmstead, 2021).

The consent decree identifies responsibilities of vocational rehabilitation with assisting youth in preparing for competitive employment. The Office of Rehabilitation and Services (ORS) of Rhode Island provides pre-employment training services (ETS) services including, virtual job exploration, summer work, college planning, community-based work experiences, Connect2Careers interview simulations, Dare to Dream advocacy conferences, job exploration, project search, real world to work, transition academy, and tri-employment programs (Office of Rehabilitation and Services, 2021). This study analyzed the support provided by vocational

rehabilitation in both Sites A and B and identified if the services correlated with the post-school employment participation rates.

Another service that implements integrated trial work experiences is summer work. Erik et. al. (2011) examined summer employment experiences of 220 youth with high incidence disabilities. The data demonstrated students with emotional or behavioral disorders and intellectual disabilities participated in summer work experiences at a significantly lower rate than youth with learning disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities did not receive formal support with finding and maintaining their employment (Erik et al., 2011). This is often demonstrated with the pre-ETS services in Rhode Island, as well. Many students who require more supported employment do not participate in summer work experiences since there is not enough staff available to provide these services. This data is extremely relevant to transition planning and ensuring compliance with the consent decree as it can guide the identification of natural supports that can offer work experiences in the summer. The transition team would need to explore their social capital to determine where and how supports can be provided. The study explored participation in summer work experiences and analyzed the correlation to post-school employment participation rates.

NACT:C (2020) provides predictors of post-school success. Research-based predictors of positive employment outcomes include inclusion in general education, occupational courses, paid employment or work experiences, vocational education, and work-study. According to research, these predictors prepare students for postsecondary employment, which, in essence, are transition services and courses of study that should be implemented by schools. This study identified which evidence-based practices were implemented in the transition programs of Sites A and B and analyzed effectiveness of these practices.

The effectiveness of a transition program could result in barriers that prevent youth from participating in employment. According to Thoma, Agran, and Scott (2016), most of the rural educators in a study reported limited understanding in the use of assessment results for student vocational and transition planning. In this study, a group of 71 rural educators were surveyed to determine their understanding of transition assessment and practices in the rural setting. This descriptive study examined rural educators' understanding of vocational and transition assessment methods used in their rural settings, the transition assessment instruments they used with students with intellectual disabilities (ID; formerly known as mental retardation), and the impact that transition assessment had in determining the needs of students with ID. The data from this study demonstrated the need for training in this area to improve outcomes for students with ID. By understanding the barriers encountered by educators in rural environments, similar limitations can be identified that may decrease the efficacy of the transition program in a variety of settings.

In the article by Zhang (2014), two studies (one single-case and one group experimental) met quality indicator standards for “high quality,” and no study met the “acceptable” standards. An additional area that may be a factor is the paucity of research on employment development for high school and middle school students with autism who attended transition programs. Compared with the previously reviewed studies, recent single-case studies improved participant selection reporting and procedural fidelity but declined in controlling for internal validity. Group experimental studies improved from the previously reviewed studies in measuring dependent variables at appropriate times, using appropriate analysis, and decreasing reporting intervention agent details. As an update to their study, 18 empirical studies published from June 2004 to June 2012 that promoted self-advocacy for students with disabilities were reviewed. Interpretations

included a continued need to study program effects on students from diverse backgrounds and more rigorous research on self-advocacy predictors and outcomes.

Walters et al. (2010) identified permanent connections as essential to youth successfully transitioning from care. Transition planning must include permanency as a goal. Perhaps the most essential principle in implementing the transition planning requirement of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008, is an emphasis on facilitating permanent connections with youth. These relationships can support young people through every aspect of their transition to adulthood, including vocational support.

According to Wei et al. (2014), it is unclear whether family members should be involved in postsecondary educational settings, what their potential roles might be, and if family member involvement would be beneficial for students with autism. This article provides a systematic review of the literature about students with autism and the potential role of family members in higher education settings. The search terms, "autism", "familial involvement," "postsecondary education," and "educational success" and appropriate synonyms, yielded six articles that fit the inclusion criteria for this review: empirically based studies conducted in the United States, dissertations or peer-reviewed articles, articles published between the years 2003 and 2014, and articles that included some mention of family support or involvement for college students with autism.

Today, many individuals requiring support of special education and related services in public schools are graduating from high school with limited job skills and activities of daily living abilities. Graduating with work-related and independent living skills would allow them to become independent citizens of society (MDHHS, 2018). Young (2016) indicated youth with diverse disabilities often do not make as successful a transition to adulthood in comparison to

youth without disabilities. Transitioning into adulthood as a youth with special needs can be a challenging experience for both disabled youth and their families. IDEA legislation mandates all individuals with special needs receive skill development in the areas of self-determination, self-advocacy, employment, adult service agency access, and independent living. This study identified the implementation of transition services and analyzed the correlation to post-school employment success.

Researcher Background

Through experiences as an educator and administrator, I developed an understanding of transition. I utilized my wealth of experience and applied those experiences to theoretical frameworks. This dissertation used the theory of employability and looked at the correlation between best practices in a transition program and post-secondary successes by identifying employment placements for students with significant disabilities. The *employment first policy* is the notion that all citizens, including those with significant disabilities, can participate in employment that is integrated and competitive (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2021). Based on the systems change of employment first, students with significant disabilities must have access to integrated employment. These individuals participate in employment preparation activities through transition programs. The underlying rationale of this study with a focus on transition programs for students with significant disabilities was to identify the employment outcomes of youth who have participated in transition programs to assess the efficacy of the programs.

I supported and assisted youth of all abilities throughout many years and in a variety of platforms. By starting as a 1:1 paraprofessional, I was able to work with each individual and support their specific needs. During my time as a special education teacher for students with

severe and profound disabilities, I identified and implemented evidence-based strategies in a small group setting to support individuals with varying needs. Eventually, I became a director of special education and have implemented, advocated for, and provided professional development around best practices to ensure postsecondary success. Throughout my many years in education, there have been unique opportunities and experiences to design programs and implement those that best meet the needs of the students who required more support. One of those programs and experiences was a transition program in a high school where I was the director of special education. These first-hand experiences with a transition program gave me unique insight into the benefits of what the program should and could offer students with significant disabilities.

Continuous collaboration with a transition coordinator in a previous district played a vital role in my development of a transition program at a prior place of employment. As a director of special education, I identified the high school did not have a transition program. I networked with other districts and formed a partnership with the local Lowe's hardware store. An opportunity presented and I procured a grant to develop a state-of-the-art program that provided an opportunity for students to apply their skills in a setting that simulated a studio apartment. Lowe's provided the appliances and volunteers built the program to fit the specific learning needs of the students. Though the classroom was in the high school, students could apply their skills in a setting that resembled their home and community, which decreased their need to generalize their skills and enhanced their application. By completing work related tasks in a simulated setting, students are better prepared to complete work-related tasks in a vocational setting. According to the NTA:CTC (2019), simulations are an evidence-based practice that have proven to be an effective predictor of post-school success.

Study Approach

Per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, states are required to provide reports on the performance of individuals with disabilities (Rhode Island Departments of Education, 2021). Post-school performance within the areas of employment and higher education and training programs 1 year post exit was identified through the Indicator 14 rubric. Post-school outcomes data can help identify barriers and strengths within a transition program. This information can be utilized to modify the program structure and drive instruction. Predictors of post-school success and identification of effective practices can lead to strategies and teaching techniques that will assist educators in supporting student success. When measuring post-school outcomes, Site A and Site B utilized the Indicator 14 post-school outcomes survey. This information was submitted to the state department of education. One year after the student exist their transition program, the state sends a postcard with survey questions and uses that to track if a student has continued with education, employment, and independent living. The post-school outcomes survey data collected for the 2016, 2017, and 2018 exited classes was utilized for the study. This data was used to identify the relationship between the implementation of evidence-based practices and employability frameworks with the employment percentages for youth with a disability.

Overview of Study

Previous research illustrated individuals with disabilities are not earning the same opportunities to be gainfully employed as typical peers. Scholars can identify gaps in research by critiquing previous studies, expanding current theory, or highlighting ineffective practices or policies (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Research in this area suggests there are many more avenues to explore around employing individuals with disabilities although there has been a tremendous

focus on providing more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to gain employment in their areas of interests.

This study analyzed the experiences of individuals with significant disabilities who had participated in a transition program and how those experiences related to their participation in post-school integrated employment. When looking at employability for students with disabilities, it is essential to look at self-efficacy and self-determination, which help shape career goals, intentions, and interests. By instilling both self-efficacy and self-determination, these individuals will become more independent and more self-sufficient. While this is a simplified view of employability, individuals manage their careers through job opportunities and organizations, which in turn provide employment if the individual is required (UKEssays, 2018).

This study looked at data through an archival review. Data provided information that showcased whether students became gainfully employed as a result of going through a transition program. Data was gathered from Indicator 14 and post-school outcomes data. A better understanding of the efficacy of the transition programs was gained by including post-school outcomes data.

This research has gaps because it was hard to find substantial literature that about the efficacy of the transition model since each school district may or may not institute the model the same way. Transition model efficacy would assess how the program is being implemented (e.g., staff to student ratio, interest inventory surveys, actual job shadowing opportunities, the number of 60-day work trials, job talks by community members in high-interest job fields, internships, career exploration, community-based work experiences, soft skills curriculum, function life skills curriculum, and business tours). Understanding employability necessitates an examination of its various components, as well as the various forms in which it is represented and assessed, from

the generic transferable skills developed at university to the competencies necessary for jobs (UKEssays, 2018). It is important to look at employability through multiple lenses, and it was necessary to thoroughly analyze this study's data. It is not enough to only consider whether someone has a job or not; it is also important to look at if a person is happy in their job and place of employment, successful in their job, has an opportunity for growth in the industry, holds a job they want, and their relationships with coworkers.

Purpose of the Study

Individuals with disabilities typically experience poor transition outcomes because they lack success in areas of post-secondary employment, higher education, independent living, health care, and social connectedness (Anderson, 2018). The purpose of this study was to look closely at the correlation of the employability of individuals with significant disabilities as a result of participation in a transition program. I completed an archival data review to assess the efficacy of the transition program and how effective it was for students who exited the program. Additionally, assessment included whether the program served its purpose and helped individuals become gainfully employed and better prepared for adulthood. This study included individuals currently in a transition program and those who exited the program and were 3 years post-exit. The data was collected from transition programs in the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Components of a Sustainable Transition Program

Transition programs are important to young adults with significant disabilities because they are designed to prepare youth of all abilities for post-school success. In transition programs students are provided with work trial opportunities and work-based internships to prepare for employment. It is imperative to ensure the program is adhering to the employment first policy as

well as meeting the individual needs of students in the program. As a student approaches the termination of their school experience, a variety of preparations for post-school success must be implemented. For early transition planning and active participation in decision-making to occur for students with significant disabilities, members of the planning team need to be well-informed about the student's abilities, needs, and available services. This section highlights educational opportunities, credentials, and employment strategies designed to assist students with disabilities while in school to prepare for meaningful postsecondary education and a thriving career.

The National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth; 2016) identifies five guideposts to successfully prepare individuals with disabilities for their transition to adult life. The guideposts are based on research data and provide direction for youth, families, and educators when completing individualized plans such as individualized education programs (IEPs), individualized plans for employment (IPE), and service strategies required by the Workforce Investment Act. All stakeholders must have high expectations for youth with disabilities, advocate for inclusion opportunities, promote self-determination and informed choice, implement instruction on independent living and inclusion of long-term supports, participate in interagency collaboration with providing supports for competitive employment, and create individualized, person-driven, and culturally appropriate transition plans. The framework provides detailed information on strategies and activities that will lead to post-secondary success.

The first guidepost is school-based preparatory experiences. These experiences include state standard-driven academic programs; career and technical programs; program options that include universal design in school, work, and community-based learning; small group learning environments; appropriate supports provided by qualified professionals; multi-platforms for

assessments; and option-based graduation standards. While in the transition program, youth with disabilities must create their individualized transition plan, and the transition team of highly qualified individuals must utilize the plan to identify appropriate instructional opportunities that will continue post-school. Youth must be provided with accommodations that are specific to their learning needs and must be able to advocate for these accommodations in a variety of settings (NCWD/Youth, 2016).

The second guidepost is career preparation and work-based learning experiences. NCWD/Youth (2016) states that career preparation and work-based learning are essential so that students can make informed decisions about careers. Youth must be provided with information on career options, which involves the participation of career assessments to identify student's preferences and interests, exposure to higher education opportunities, exposure to career opportunities and the requirements for obtaining the position, and training for soft skill development. Youth must also be provided with opportunities within a wide range of experiences, including engagement of work-based exploration and job shadowing, participation in multiple paid or unpaid on-the-job training experiences, opportunities to develop and apply their soft skills, and instruction on specific occupational skills. For youth to successfully participate in employment post-school, youth must understand benefits planning related to their career, be able to advocate for accommodations, know when to disclose their disability, and identify appropriate supports and accommodations based on their individual needs (NCWD/Youth, 2016).

The third guidepost is youth development and leadership that prepares youth for the challenges of adulthood. Students participate in activities and experiences that assist with gaining skills needed in adult life. Some activities that prepare youth for making informed decisions are

mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring, exposure to role models, training in self-advocacy and conflict resolution, youth development and personal leadership, and exercises for students to apply and build their self-confidence. Students would benefit from understanding their rights and responsibilities as an individual with a disability (NCWD/Youth, 2016).

The fourth guidepost is connecting activities that promote collaboration with programs and services that provide opportunities for support in post-school options. These services may include mental health and mental and physical health services, transportation, housing, tutoring, financial planning and management, postsecondary support with adult service agencies, and recreational services. To participate in these activities, youth may need assistive technology, mobility and travel training, exposure to independent living centers, personal assistance services, and benefits planning (NCWD/Youth, 2016).

The final guidepost includes family involvement and supports within the many facets around post-school outcomes. Families must have high expectations, engage in their learning and transition planning, and have access to pertinent information on employment, higher education, medical and community resources, and peer support networks. In order to successfully support the individual, the family must have a clear understanding of the disability and its impact in all areas of the individual's life, knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of an individual with a disability, knowledge of and access to support programs that are available, and an understanding of individualized planning tools to assist with the transition planning process (NCWD/Youth, 2016).

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C, 2021) provides many tools and resources to assist with the transition planning process. NTACT:C identifies academic and employment skills to implement as quality transition services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) identifies transition services as a coordinated set of activities to be implemented in a child's IEP. These activities must be results-oriented and enhance the student's academic and functional achievement to best prepare youth with a disability for the transition from school to post-school activities, such as postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (IDEA, 2017). NTACTION identifies work-based learning experiences (WBLE) as essential transition services for student success.

Career exploration is a WBLE that provides youth an opportunity to explore context-specific vocations that allow for non-generalized learning of jobs and the skills required to perform them (NTACTION, 2021). This is key for students with disabilities as they learn skills on the job rather than in the classroom and then must apply those skills in another setting. This is often overlooked and discredited. Job shadowing is a transition service that allows youth to work alongside an employee to receive first-hand knowledge and experience of the skills and duties required for specific careers (NTACTION, 2021). Students can observe hard and soft skills implemented by the employee in a context-specific setting. Like job shadowing, job sampling allows the student to participate in an employment setting and learn soft skills and duties of the position. Job sampling does not benefit the employer but allows youth to implement skills and identify whether duties are within their field of interest (NTACTION, 2021). Another WBLE is service learning, which is a hands-on volunteer service youth provide in the community. It allows youth to apply skills taught through direct instruction within the transition program and provides an opportunity for reflection on their service experience (NTACTION, 2021).

Once a student completes exploration, shadowing, and service-learning to increase their employability skills, the student can reflect on their experiences and identify appropriate career

fields within their areas of interest. Youth can continue to increase their employability by continuing to participate in WBLE. Internships are a WBLE that is also a transition service to prepare youth for employment. Internships may be paid or unpaid and are opportunities for youth to practice their skills by implementing tasks identified through a formal agreement between the workplace and the student or school (NTACT:C, 2021). Internships occur during a predetermined period. Apprenticeships build upon internships and are implemented during an extended period. An apprentice learns specific occupational skills related to the trade they are implementing and may include components that provide compensation (NTACT:C, 2021). Paid employment is the ultimate postsecondary goal for youth with disabilities. Paid employment includes customized work assignments identified by the employer and the employee or the completion of standard duties of a given position. Wages are identified and paid directly to the youth. Paid employment may occur during the school day or after school, depending on the requirements of the position and the transition program (NTACT:C, 2021).

IDEA mandates assist students with disabilities in various ways. The IEP team must begin the transition process no later than the age of 16 years old, or at the age of 14 when appropriate. The IEP team identifies transition services to be implemented within the IEP timeframe, which will enhance their ability to reach their post-school goals (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020). Rhode Island begins transition planning at the age of 14 and youth with disabilities are eligible to receive transition services until they turn 22 years of age; this is dependent upon individual districts, and some allow students to finish the school year of their 22nd birthday. Prior to 2019, Rhode Island only required supports to be provided to youth with disabilities until the age of 21 (RIDE, 2021). Transition programs are required to provide free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all youth that are found eligible (RIDE,

2019). Though support and services for youth of all abilities are provided in transition programs, transition services and the implemented evidence-based practices often vary among transition programs. This study analyzes evidence-based practices and transition services implemented in two transition programs with the goal of synthesizing the efficacy of the programs.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks and conceptual frameworks work together; the conceptual framework acts as the work's overarching superstructure and the theoretical frameworks fits inside that superstructure (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 9). As part of this study and the application of the theory of employability, the focus was to analyze the efficacy of the transition programs by identifying the skills being implemented and synthesizing whether those the skills were applied in multiple settings. The study addressed the application and direct instruction of skills in the context of the environment rather than in the classroom, which requires a student to transfer skills to appropriate settings. This skill of generalizing versus concrete learning is not something all individuals can apply without practice and without opportunity in the actual community setting; this is the difference between employability theory and experiential learning theory.

While reading various chapters of Ravitch and Riggan's (2017) work on conceptual frameworks, I was able to connect with the personal interest element of the conceptual framework when designing this study; specifically, the objective of this study to enhance transition planning for youth of all abilities. I was extremely motivated by this study and passionate about possible outcomes of the study and their direct impact on the lives of individuals. I believe that the data results could assist transition programs with increasing their effectiveness and support for individuals of all types of abilities.

The theoretical framework or structural guideline of this research was to explore, assess, and analyze the efficacy and fidelity in which transition programs prepare individuals with significant intellectual disabilities for gainful employment. The study utilized the theory of employability as the theoretical framework. Hillage and Pollard (1998), describe employability as the ability to find and keep work by being self-sufficient in the labor market and realizing one's potential through long-term jobs. Employability skills include many competencies, such as ability and aptitude. The skills and qualities must be developed in a context that can be applied to an occupation or career, allowing for transfer of skills to various settings (UKEssays, 2018).

The Perkins Collaborative Resource Network (2021) identified nine components of the employability skills framework developed by the U.S. Department of Education (see Appendix A). The three main categories include applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021). For an individual to develop applied knowledge, they must enhance their academic and critical thinking skills (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021). Academic skills include reading, writing, math strategies, and scientific principles and procedures. Critical thinking skills include creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, problem solving, reasoning, and planning. When creating effective relationships, individuals develop their interpersonal skills and personal qualities (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021). Interpersonal skills include collaboration, leadership, conflict resolution, and respect of opinions. Personal qualities include responsibility and self-discipline, flexibility, independence, willingness to learn, integrity, professionalism, initiative, self-confidence, positive attitude, and professional growth. Within the category of workplace skills, individuals must develop their resource management, information use, communication skills, systems thinking, and technology use (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021).

Resource management includes time management, money management, resource management, and personal management. Information use includes locating, organizing, using, analyzing, and communicating information. Communication skills include verbal communication, active listening, comprehension, writing to convey information, and observations. Systems thinking includes understanding and using systems, monitoring, and improving systems. To improve their employability, individuals will also understand and be able to utilize technology for calculating, collecting, and displaying data (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021).

The College and Career Competencies Framework is an evidence-based framework that identified skills that reinforce in-school and post-school success (Erickson & Noonan, 2018). It includes three main areas: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive skills. Intrapersonal skills include initiative, perseverance, self-regulation, self-efficacy, self-care, self-awareness, integrity, ethics, curiosity, sustained attention, and goal setting (Erickson & Noonan, 2018). Interpersonal skills include adaptability, assertiveness, teamwork, empathy, networking, social awareness, conflict management, and communication (Erickson & Noonan, 2018). Cognitive skills include creative thinking, organization, time management, problem solving, critical thinking, learning schema, and content or technical skills (Erickson & Noonan, 2018). As educators implement activities that build upon these skills, they are supporting students to become career-equipped lifelong learners who are socially and emotionally engaged (Erickson, 2017).

Transition Plans

The transition from high school to young adulthood is a critical stage for all teenagers; for students with disabilities, this stage requires extra planning and goal setting. IDEA acknowledges the additional planning and mandates the implementation of transition services to facilitate preparation activities required for youth with disabilities (IDEA, 2017). Transition

services include direct instruction and school and community-based instruction to reinforce the skills required for post-secondary education, the development of career and vocational skills, and the ability to live independently (Office of Special Education Rehabilitation and Services, 2020). Transition services are required for students enrolled in special education and have an IEP (IDEA, 2017).

IDEA (2017) mandates the IEP team identify appropriate transition services that must be included within the IEP no later than the age of 16. If appropriate, transition services may be included beginning at the age of 14 (IDEA, 2017). Rhode Island and Connecticut require transition services beginning at the age of 14 (RIDE, 2021; Connecticut Department of Education, 2021). The IEP team begins transition planning by implementing transition assessments and identifying future goals, which must then be written into the IEP (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). IDEA mandates the annual IEP meeting focuses on more specific planning and goal setting for the necessary transition services. The transition assessments identify the student's specific needs, strengths, preferences, and interests (Connecticut Department of Education, 2021). Through the data, the IEP team identifies appropriate measurable post-school outcome goal statements within the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and independent living if appropriate. The team then writes measurable annual IEP transition goals and related objectives, which include a student success plan, course of study, transition services, related services, and adult or community services and agencies (Connecticut Department of Education, 2021). The Connecticut Department of Education provides an infographic to assist families with understanding the process of providing transition services (see Appendix B).

Under IDEA, all transition planning meetings should include the student, family members, general educator, special educator, local education advisor, translator (if needed), and other school staff who work with the student (e.g., related service providers, occupational therapy, physical therapy, adaptive physical education, social worker, and school psychologist; IDEA, 2017). According to IDEA, anyone else involved in the student's transition plan may also be invited. This might include representatives from school-to-work programs, local social service agencies, counseling programs, medical care providers, and advocates as well as interagency collaboration opportunities. All members play key roles in the students' life as they embark on adulthood (IDEA, 2017).

According to research by Benz, Nehring, and Lobo (2013), parents are key players in the transition planning process. Parents know their child better than anyone else and can share plans and ideas the family and child have discussed about their future. Parents can help by contributing information about the student's life and experiences outside of school. It is important to include the teenager in these discussions and encourage them to advocate for their needs and wishes. To provide new insights for research and clinical practice, Betz et al. used a systematic review to analyze the research designs, methodology, and findings reported in studies about parents during this transition period. Parents reported they were unable to envision what the future held for their children and were not well prepared by the service system to anticipate prospects (Betz et al., 2013). The National Longitudinal Study 2 (2017) identified that 42% of parents of a child with a disability expected their child to obtain postsecondary education, compared to 70% of parents of typically developing students (Lipscomb et al., 2017). Family engagement in the transition planning process ensures they are active participants and may increase expectations of their child

(IRIS Center, 2021). The family's input must be valued since they may identify appropriate supports and services in and out of school.

Many schools begin identifying appropriate transition services by implementing assessments, such as an interest inventory, to identify an individual's specific interests. The IEP team utilizes the data to identify appropriate measurable goals and design services and pathways appropriate for the individual, which are included in the student's IEP (IRIS Center, 2021). For youth who have completed their high school academic requirements and have an IEP, they may be able to participate in a transition program. The IEP team analyzes the student's current performance to identify the appropriate course of action for the individual. If the team determines the need for continued support services, they may recommend the student attend the transition program between the ages of 18–22 years old (West Bay Collaborative, 2021). Each school district may have different requirements and should be contacted for district-specific details on eligibility. While participating in the transition program, students will gain employment skills to attain and maintain competitive integrated employment; develop their functional and independent living skills; explore opportunities and develop skills required for higher education; reinforce functional academics to prepare for employment and training programs; develop social skills for community and vocational participation; and develop self-determination, confidence, and self-advocacy skills required to make informed decisions around the rights and responsibilities of adulthood (West Bay Collaborative, 2021).

In the areas of education, employment, and independent living, students entering transition programs need more support and opportunities that directly correlate to the specifics of the program and allow for real-life application. Transition services, required in the IEP, allow for real-life application in a variety of settings since students participate in functional academics

instead of being held to academic standards. These services are based upon individual needs and allow for transition planning that is most appropriate for the individual (IDEA, 2017). Transition programming is very critical to the success of one's life. If a transition program is designed correctly with the right resources, then the efficacy will show the fidelity of the program is rich and pure. The transition from academia to adulthood is a monumental step and without the right supplementary resources and interagency collaboration in the program, the transition may not be as successful. The transition program prepares youth to reach their maximum potential by identifying appropriate supports and services to provide equity and access to community integration and success.

Post-school services designed to assist youth with disabilities require a variety of adult agencies. In order to provide a smooth transition to adult services, interagency collaboration with the school is essential. The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is an agency that provides vocational support for individuals with disabilities. This support system implements customized employment, job coaching, supported employment, travel training, pre-employment training services, and any assistance to obtain and maintain a position in the workforce (Department of Human Services, 2012). Vocational rehabilitation is offered nationally. ORS is specific to Rhode Island and Connecticut utilizes the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services, 2021).

The Department of Behavioral Healthcare Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) is a federal adult agency that aids individuals with disabilities. Some supports provided by BHDDH include support coordination, supported employment, day and community activities, transportation, community supports, residential supports, and emergency assistance (BHDDH, 2021). Through Connecticut's Department of Aging and Disability Services there are

many federal and state programs. These programs provide in-home services, meals, senior community employment, health insurance counseling, services for family caregivers, and other supportive services (Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services, 2021).

Most of the information about transition programs is relatively new since the transition program initiative is new (within the last 20 years of education). There is not a lot of research studies and data regarding the direct correlation of transition programs and outcomes of student employability. This study considered students' past and present and where they are in their lives.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to research the efficacy of transition programs by identifying post-secondary success for students with disabilities 3 years after their exit from school. The primary goal was to analyze the effectiveness of transition programs and their benefits for students with significant intellectual disabilities. The primary function of a transition program is to prepare students with significant intellectual disabilities for adult life, and, in the process, assist them in reaching their maximum potential as active members of society. Many aspects introduced and reinforced in the program are essential in the development of adulthood. Students are provided with the opportunity to practice essential daily living skills that offer independence as well as soft skills in the employment field. Students can broaden their understanding and awareness of a variety of careers with the community with typical peers by practicing soft skills (e.g., daily living skills) and job-specific skills (e.g., mirroring tasks that would be asked of the students in actual job settings). Through these hands-on experiences students can identify their preferences and career interests within the context of a real-life situation; this has the potential to reinforce the longevity of engagement and participation, and ultimately increasing production rates to meet industry standards. Within this process, students are provided with opportunities to further their education and training in a variety of ways (e.g., college, job-specific training, and exploration of interests). Students in transition are introduced to a variety of recreational and leisure activities to enhance their quality of life.

As a result of not being able to interview and speak with students who participated in a transition program, data was collected through an archival data review. Due to confidentiality and privacy rights, the IRB protects the rights of students with disabilities, therefore the archival

data review has protected the confidentiality of the students with disabilities throughout this study. Data was gathered and used to determine the number of students who are employed or have been employed, because of going through a transition program. Data was collected from the Employment First-Quality Review Checklist, which is designed by the Rhode Island Department of Education, and technical assistance for application of employment first policy is provided by the Regional Transition Coordinators (RTC). Employment First Quality Reviews illustrate the strengths and needs of the program. The checklist looks at promotion of employment first policies, career development planning, district transition and vocational assessment scope and sequence inclusive of person-centered planning, established district protocol for the Office of Rehabilitative Services referral process for ages 14–22, established protocol for coordinating applications to Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), students' participation in the school-based preparatory experience, quality transition IEPs, and benefits planning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look closely at the correlation between the success of individuals with learning and intellectual disabilities—and those that affect cognitive or physical functioning—and the efficacy of transition programs. This study was conducted as a program evaluation through an archival data review of the transition programs included in this study. Specifically, data was analyzed to determine the effectiveness of transition programs once students exit the program and whether the program served its purpose and helped individuals become independent, gainfully employed, and productive citizens of society. The study focused on individuals who were currently in a transition program and those who had exited a program. Recent data from the years 2018, 2019, and 2020 were not available so the study focused on the

school years of 2016, 2017, and 2018. Transition programs are critical for individuals who participate because they provide functional life skills, employment, independent living, training, day programs, recreation and leisure, and higher education opportunities through certificate programs. The program provides students with two 60-day work trial opportunities and work-based internships, which is an essential component since it provides opportunities in the context of the work environment and out in the community. This allows students transfer learning from one setting to another. By learning skills in the context of the environment, the transfer and application of those skills are more easily learned and executed. Teaching those same skills in the classroom and expecting those outcomes to be transferred into the community at the job site is vastly different than learning on the job. Lastly, this study considered how the Indicator 14 rubric can be utilized to ensure students are accessing supports and services in the areas of education, employment, and independent living. This is an essential component in evaluating the efficacy of transition programs.

Research Questions & Design

The intent of the study was to conduct a program evaluation to demonstrate the outcomes of transition programs at Sites A and B with the direct correlations of students' successes. The goal of the program evaluation through an archival data review is to understand and carefully examine the processes of transition programs at Sites A and B. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1. What are the evidence-based practices that Site A and Site B are implementing as part of the transition program?

Research Question 2. How often are Site A and Site B incorporating the skills identified in various employability frameworks?

Research Question 3. How are Site A and Site B utilizing the post-school outcome rubrics to identify if students are participating in employment opportunities and/or enrolled in higher education to prepare for employment?

In Rhode Island and Connecticut, the agencies that students have access to include but are not limited to the Office of Rehabilitation Services, BHDDH, and mental health, and community day-based programs. These agencies provide supports and services to improve and enhance vocational experiences, community integration opportunities, mental health, and social-emotional learning.

Site Information & Population

For the purpose of this study, the proposed site in Rhode Island will be known as Site A and the site in Connecticut will be Site B. At the time of this study, there was one transition program in Site A, the district located in Rhode Island, which was in the high school. The same was true for the transition program at Site B, located in Connecticut, which was also located in a high school. There were 10 students in the transition program in Site A and 10 students in Site B, ranging in ages from 18–22. Students could remain in the program receiving services until their 22nd birthday. The program was comprised of one certified special education teacher, one job developer, two job coaches (also referred to as community transition assistant liaisons), one 1:1 paraprofessional. There was one direct administrator who was a manager of specialized instruction and services for high school and transition.

The staff in the program were certified through varying institutions. The certified special education teacher received her degree from Rhode Island College with a concentration in special education, and, specifically, severe intellectual disabilities. The job coaches were certified paraprofessionals (like the job developer and 1:1 paraprofessional), which required the

successful competition of the “Para Pro” course and assessment test (Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, 2020). The course and test are offered through the Community College of Rhode Island. The archival data review considered children who had exited the program 3 years removed and assessed where they were in their lives and if the program helped them move towards adulthood (e.g., find employment, learn skills, live independently, and gain higher education through certificate programs).

As part of the process of continued work in the transition program, the special education teacher is evaluated through the CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist standards. The CEC standards include: (1) the special education specialist’s use of valid and reliable assessment practices to minimize bias; (2) use of knowledge of general and specialized curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at classroom, school, community, and system levels; (3) facilitate the continuous improvement of general and special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for individuals with exceptionalities; (4) conduct, evaluate, and use inquiry to guide professional practice; (5) provide leadership to formulate goals, set and meet high professional expectations, advocate for effective policies and evidence-based practices, and create positive and productive work environments; and (6) use foundational knowledge of the field and professional Ethical Principles and Practice Standards to inform special education practice, engage in lifelong learning, advance the profession, and perform leadership responsibilities to promote the success of professional colleagues and individuals with exceptionalities (CEC, 2020).

Sampling Method

Under typical circumstances, I would have been on-site to conduct, gather, and analyze data, interview staff, and talk with families. However, given the circumstances of COVID-19, I

conducted a desk review of the program's information and documentation. Part of the requirements in a transitional setting are mandatory visuals on a poster that promote the employment first policy. Unfortunately, this was not permitted as part of the study. Instead, the retrieval of collected data was used to assess each transition program and the efficacy of its success to meet student's needs. Also, the dissemination of RIDE and BHDDH employment first policies were not considered as they would have been if I were on site. Through a desk audit I identified key elements of the program, which helped me gain a deep understanding of the overall foundational factors involved in the ways a program operates on a day-to-day basis. The sampling method for this study was purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or subjective sampling. In this type of sampling, I relied on my judgment when selecting the population of individuals and data to include in the study.

Documents were reviewed and data was collected through diverse platforms. The Employment First Rubric is a quality review checklist based on the Rhode Island employment first policy. The rubric outlines and demonstrates an expectation that all students and adults with intellectual or development disabilities should and can successfully obtain and sustain work in community-integrated settings and earn competitive wages (Rhode Island Secondary Transition & Employment First, 2020). To identify an individual's employment goal and appropriate career field, students and their IEP team develop a person-centered plan (PCP). A PCP is a self-assessment that identifies a person's likes, preferences, dreams, strengths, needs, barriers, and supports for success (RIDE, 2020). This assessment relies on the idea that the individual will create and design a pathway to reach their long-term goals and identify the supports and services that may be required (RIDE, 2020). Case managers complete career development plans (CDP) to document the transition services, career preparation activities, and community-based work

experiences based on specific interests and needs. A CDP is a planning tool used to identify an individual's employment goal and objectives, the services and supports required to meet the employment goal, the obstacles that would hinder employment, and the individuals and agencies that will assist the youth with attaining their employment goal (Olmstead, 2021). This document outlines the recommendations of the IEP to ensure the individual is prepared and receives the necessary supports to be successful (Rhode Island Secondary Transition & Employment First, 2020).

When students exit school, the district used an IEP to identify the post-secondary outcomes of the students. The schools utilize the Indicator 14 Post School Outcomes rubric. These questions identify the status of students that have exited special education services. It evaluates if the students are enrolled in higher education or are competitively employed within one year of leaving high school. It also evaluates if the students are enrolled in higher education or are competitively employed within three years of leaving high school. The Indicator 14 rubric identifies if the students are participating in recreational and leisure activities and evaluates their independent living status as well (RIDE, 2020).

The Employment First-Quality Review Checklist, CDP, and Indicator 14 Rubric are documents that provided a comprehensive look at the program and provided me with a fundamental understanding of its core components. There was an opportunity to gather historical information, utilizing spanning 3 years of students who previously exiting each program. This part of the evaluation did not include human subjects; instead, it was conducted by a desk audit review of archival data. While Site A and the Rhode Island Department of Education and Site B and the Connecticut State Department of Education own the internal documents, I was given access to the documents, which were scrubbed and or redacted of any identifying information.

Instrumentation & Data Collection Procedures

By gaining access to the Employment First-Quality Review Checklist, Indicator 14 data, and goals and objectives in students IEP's, I thoroughly explored the entire program and the perceptions and knowledge of those affiliated with the program. The data was used to help illustrate whether there was a direct correlation between the IEP goals and objectives.

It is important to note the data compiled in the Employment First-Quality Review Checklist and the Indicator 14 (post-school outcomes), shed significant light on why a program is successful or why it may be falling short. Indicator 14 looks at the "percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in place at the time they exited the school, and were: enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school" (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020).

As a former director of special education in Rhode Island, I chose a district where I had no affiliation. Through many years as a director of special education, I have experience in how to extrapolate special education data and locate the necessary information through the RIDE website through transitional services and Indicator 14. By gaining access to this it will provide the researcher with the essential information necessary to ensure that the transition program that is being evaluated is meeting the needs of those individuals it had, has, and will continue to serve.

This study will be conducted by gaining access to existing documents and information from both Site A and RIDE and Site B and the Connecticut School Department of Education

(CSDE). The documents are the property of Site A and Site B and kept on file in their respective administration buildings. Other documents, such as Indicator 14 post-school outcomes are the property of RIDE. The Summary of Performance documents are the property of the CSDE. Both Site A and Site B use data they collect to contact families of students who exited the transition program to identify their current participation level in higher education and employment. The questions ask if they are employed, not working but seeking employment opportunities, collecting social security insurance, part of a day program, or attending a higher education program. This information is reported to RIDE and CSDE who then analyze the data and report on each district's results. The Indicator 14 is a direct correlation of the district's transition program. This study also closely explored the Employment First Rubric that addressed many factors of the program and was an essential part of the program evaluation. As a former director of special education (in Rhode Island and now in Connecticut) in a neighboring district, I had access to all pertinent documentation and information needed for a deep dive into each program. The data were comprised of the current students in the program ($n = 18$) and students who exited the program in the years 2016, 2017, and 2018.

With access to this information, I reviewed the necessary documents. I used the data collected to identify essential factors that contribute to and make up the success of transition programs at Sites A and B. It is important to note that all personally identifiable information of the staff and all students and families were omitted; the anonymity of all participants remained protected throughout this study.

By using a program evaluation, I was able to understand the program more clearly by carefully collecting information about the program (McNamara, 1998). For the sole purpose of this dissertation, the program evaluation was designed to provide an understanding of both Site

A and Site B by evaluating each program's methodologies and outcomes. The program evaluation was conducted in a 4-step process: 1) I developed a teacher survey used to gather information at both sites, 2) I developed a program evaluation plan to collect informational documents at Sites A and B, 3) I coded the material received, and 4) I reported all findings.

Of noted interest, the 2019-2020 school year was affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic as schools nationwide were forced to close their buildings as of March 16, 2020. All districts were asked to implement a distance learning modality to continue with educational opportunities to the greatest extent possible. As a result of the global pandemic, all community supports and services also ceased. This factor will greatly influence the post-school outcome data of students with disabilities in future years.

Data Analysis

I conducted a thorough data analysis that included an archival data review of the Indicator 14 post-school outcome survey and a teacher survey. This process analyzed implementation of evidence-based practices and employability frameworks and predictors of post school success. The programs at Sites A and Site B serviced 18 students between the ages of 18-22. The study data was connected to students who exited within the years of 2016, 2017, and 2018. The more recent data from the years 2019 and 2020 had not yet been published.

Archival Data Review

In relation to the literature review, this archival data review identifies the implementation of employability frameworks and evidence-based practices. The data is collected through the Indicator 14 post-school outcomes survey results and a teacher survey, which demonstrates the relationship between individuals with significant intellectual disabilities' post-school success and the implementation of research-based strategies and competencies. The teacher survey is

implemented through a Google Form platform and addresses the implementation of the evidence-based practices and employability framework competencies identified in the literature review.

Limitations of the Research Design

Most, if not all studies have limitations. This research design had limitations due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which created difficulties gaining access to in-person interviews. It was difficult to gain access to human subjects in the school setting, including teachers who did not have time to participate in virtual interviews due to lack of teacher sub coverage. To cut down on the possible transmission of the virus, most school districts resorted to cohorts, which led to all certified teachers being assigned to a specific core group of students for the entire day. In turn, this led to a shortage of teachers and substitutes to cover classes. Another limitation of the research study was the number of students who comprised the study. The epidemic caused an alteration in the location of Site A, as many districts did not allow participation in the study. Site A was in a rural area with a smaller number of students participating in the transition program, decreasing the sample size of participants.

This study included students currently in a transition program and those who exited. A program evaluation was used to conduct a thorough archival data review of information which primarily came from Indicator 14 data. Indicator 14 data includes post-school outcomes and data from the Employment First Rubric. To mitigate the possibility of a small focus group, this study was conducted through an archival data review because of not being able to receive permission to interview focus group participants or conduct the necessary interviews with human subjects.

Another important limitation was my former role as special education director in a neighboring district. In this role I developed many professional relationships in other districts. To

overcome any biases or possible misconceptions, the study was conducted in a location where I do not have any prior relationships.

Credibility

Under more routine circumstances, the creditability of the study have included interviews and surveys of participants who were focus group participants. This would have included staff in the transition program, as well as the families whose children were currently in the program or who exited within 3 years. However, due to the global pandemic, this study was conducted through an archival review; creditability was derived from the information gathered and reviewed. This eliminated any judgments of participants, which would have put the study's creditability at risk. Since the study is an archival data review, the data was credible and factual.

Member Checking Procedures

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referenced member checking as a way of thoroughness in a qualitative research study. They proposed credibility be intrinsic through accurate descriptions and interpretations of research data. It is important to note that due to COVID-19, all school districts in Rhode Island and Connecticut were not allowing visitors and only had the option of teaching their students in person or remotely. The study moved from an interview and survey method of research to a deep-dive research review using archival data review. As a result, there were not any human subjects in this study. Any identifying information of the students and the school site were removed. To move forward with the study, it was utmost necessary to receive written consent from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research, Planning, and Accountability at Site A and Site B. This consent allowed for full access to informational documents related to the transition programs at both sites. B. All documents were kept

electronically through password-protected software. All hard copy paper documents were stored in locked filing cabinets in the school's main offices and in administration buildings.

Transferability

Transferability in this study could be the expectation of similar outcomes across all transition programs in both states. Data analysis could identify the need for additional outside supports and services, which would lead to enhanced interagency collaboration. Transferability may speak to the in-school context of the environments and how implementation of skills and evidence-based practices were applied in community settings and resulted in positive or negative impacts on post-school success. The data could provide guidance for appropriate concepts to be addressed with direct instruction and identified through various curricula provided throughout the states. The study could provide data to identify updated standards and importance of implementing evidence-based practices and employability frameworks. Evidence-based practices, such as work-based learning and community-based instruction, could be mandated to ensure all youth with disabilities are provided with opportunities to enhance their employability skills in a real world setting, not only simulation, with appropriate supports.

Dependability

There was a careful and detailed account of the methods of the research, so the reader can fully understand the functionality of the program through this evaluation process. By conducting an archival data review, the information collected was dependable because it was factual data. There was not an opportunity to interact with human subjects therefore the dependability and validity cannot be comprised of misperception or even biases. To showcase that the research is indeed dependable, a detailed account of the processes is detailed in this dissertation. While researching and evaluating the different aspects of transition programs at both Site A and Site

B's, the coding method provided an effective result because it allowed for a detailed look at the multi-layered facets that made each program unique and how it functioned on a day-to-day basis to support the students in the program on an individualized basis.

Confirmability

Since this study was conducted through an archival data review, the confirmability would certainly be factual as human subjects would not be a part of the study. Access to the programs' staff and families of the students was lost due to COVID-19, so the confirmability of research was represented through factual data. Therefore, what could be potentially hindering the confirmability was no longer an issue as the result of an archival data review. All reporting of findings will be done so in an objective manner by putting aside any subjectivity. All data collected throughout the research process was detailed and organized and kept in a journal.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Due to the specific nature and construct of this study's design, it was always imperative every student's confidentiality remain protected and portrayed as anonymous. The study did not include identifying information of any student or their disability. Informed consent was not required because students did not participate in this study. The study did not include conversations with staff members of the transition program or the families of the students. This study was comprised of an archival data review, which resulted in no human subjects. Therefore, all the forementioned were not relevant. All data collected will be kept on my personal laptop, which is protected with safety software and encrypted password protection.

Conflict of Interest

In terms of conflict of interest, there could have been professional judgments or concerns that impeded the fidelity of the study, due to the prior relationship with a former neighboring

district. This circumstance could have negatively impacted data review and analysis. Biases must be put aside to support the best possible research results. As a former special education director in the neighboring district who knew many of the participants on a professional level, a reader may view this as a conflict of interest. To alleviate misconceptions and consider ethics, this study was being conducted in a transition program in which I did not have any affiliation or prior work relationship.

Conclusion and Summary

The intent of chapter three was to provide a detail description of the research methodology that was used during this study. This research study was designed to present a program evaluation of transition program at Sites A and B. Transition programs support the needs of students with significant intellectual disabilities in a setting that is both in the public school and in the community at a variety of employment facilities. The study will be elaborating on further in the following two chapters. In chapter 4, study findings will be illustrated and chapter 5 will conclude with any recommendations to implement, continued recommendations for further research later, interpretations of the findings and implications of the study. The leadership of both Sites A and B may benefit from the study's findings and outcomes in determining whether there is a direct correlation between the transition programs efficacy and the employment of students with disabilities who participated in the programs.

Chapter IV

Results

Chapter 4 represents the research survey that was influenced by the findings in the literature review. This section of the study includes implementation of the employability frameworks and evidence-based practices. The research survey is portrayed in four areas, including: (a) participant demographics, (b) frequency of practices, (c) effectiveness of practices, and (d) potential factors. Each section of the survey was influenced by previous research explored in the literature review. The purpose of this study was to gather data around the evidence-based practices and employability frameworks being implemented in transition programs, along with the Indicator 14 data from the state department of education websites for Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Setting

The settings for this study were in two states. Site A is regional site in Rhode Island that services two school districts, and Site B is a high school in Connecticut. Site A is a rural public school district located in the northwest part of Rhode Island. The district provides services to students from pre-kindergarten through adult education. This regional location is made up of three towns. Two of the three municipalities comprise the three elementary schools, and the third town makes up the middle and high school. Site B, located in the northeast part of Connecticut, consists of one elementary, one middle, and one high school. In both Sites A and B, the transition program is in a classroom setting in the high school. Some districts have opted to move their transition program off-site of the public-school building to provide opportunities to teach and apply skills in the community and away from the classroom setting.

Special Education Services

At the time of this study, 12% of students at Site A qualified for special education services, while 20% of the students at Site B receive special education services. The services ranged from functional daily living skills in a self-contained classroom to monitoring students who participate independently in mainstream classes. In Site A, the district employed six special education teachers and 11 paraprofessionals in the high school (FGS, 2021). At Site B, the district employed five special education teachers and five paraprofessionals in the high school (PPS, 2021). Additionally, the district provided special education-related services such as: speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, and school psychologists. There were also nurses, bus aides, and behavior specialists working for the department of special services in each of the districts. These statistics are typical of districts of these sizes in northwestern Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Participants

Teachers of the transition programs at both sites were fully certified, meeting the state requirements as a special education teacher at the secondary level (both in Rhode Island and Connecticut). Each teacher's training throughout their college studies depended on the college program, which meant each teacher had different knowledge and training on significant intellectual disabilities. Each of the settings had a program led by a special education teacher and at least one paraprofessional serving as a job coach.

Demographics

At the time of this study, Site A had 111 students who qualified under special education out of 1,355 total students; 12.2% of the total student population had an IEP (district-wide across the middle school and high school). The high school had 743 students with a student-to-teacher

ratio of 13:1 (state average 14:1). This school was in the top 10% in terms of smaller class size and personalized learning. Fifty-nine teachers made up the teacher enrollment. The overall graduation rate was between 90-94%, which was in the top 20% in the state of Rhode Island. Over 94% of the student population was Caucasian, 1% African American, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 2% identified with two or more races. The female to male ratio was 51% female and 49% male. Thirteen percent of students received free lunch, and 3% received reduced lunch. There were 10 students in the transition program.

Site B had 221 students who qualified under special education out of 1,057 total students, which was 20.9% (district-wide across the middle school and high school). The high school had 272 students with a student-to-teacher ratio of 9:1 (state average was 12:1); this was in the top 10%. Twenty-nine teachers made up the teacher enrollment. The graduation rate was 90-94% and in the top 20% in Connecticut. Eighty percent of the student population was Caucasian, 3% African American, 9% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 7% identified with two or more races. The female to male ratio was 56% female and 44% male. Forty-two percent of students received free lunch, and 10% received reduced lunch. There were five students in the transition program.

In addition, Site A's district high school was in the top 30% of Rhode Island schools (Public School Review, 2021) and Site B was in the bottom 50% of Connecticut schools (Public School Review, 2021) based on how its student body performed on the state reading and math assessments.

Teacher Responses to Survey

Due to the small sample size, the participants included three teachers. All three teachers completed all of the questions in the survey, which was provided through the Google form platform. The three teachers represented the two districts of Site A and Site B. The small number

of participants included was a limitation of the study. The data collected by the survey was inconsistent at times, with only a few selected answers demonstrating 100% ($n = 3$) implementation, followed by 66.7% ($n = 2$) and 33.3% ($n = 1$). All three participants were female, and 66.7% ($n = 2$) were case managers, while 33.3% ($n = 1$) held a coordinator position. When asked how long participants have supported transition-aged students with significant disabilities, 66.7% ($n = 2$) selected 1–4 years, and 33.3% ($n = 1$) selected 5–10 years. When identifying the participants' duties for implementing and reinforcing employability skills, 100% ($n = 3$) were responsible for direct instruction, applying vocational skills in a school setting, and applying vocational skills in an integrated community setting. The survey identified that 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants provided families with resources and instruction while 33.3% ($n = 1$) provided functional life skills and community participation.

When asked how often the participants provided instruction in employability skills, 66.7% ($n = 2$) selected daily implementation provided individually, while 33.3% ($n = 1$) selected weekly implementation provided individually. Participants implemented small group instruction weekly (66.7%, $n = 2$) followed by daily (33.3%, $n = 1$). Whole group instruction was implemented daily (33.3%, $n = 1$), weekly (33.3%, $n = 1$), and bi-weekly (33.3%, $n = 1$). Participants identified various factors impacted their ability to provide direct instruction of employability skills through independent, small group, and whole-class instruction. These factors included providing instruction through various platforms, such as virtual and in-person, inconsistency in teacher and student schedules, and part-time roles. When identifying the frequency of direct instruction implementation of employability skills in multiple settings, 33.3% ($n = 1$) selected bi-weekly implementation in a general education setting, while 66.7% ($n = 2$) identified instruction in general education setting did not apply to their role. While providing

instruction in a special education setting, 66.7% ($n = 2$) selected daily implementation and 33.3% ($n = 1$) selected weekly implementation. When providing instruction in an integrated community setting, 100% ($n = 3$) selected weekly implementation. The participants identified factors that affected the implementation of employability skills in the general education classroom, special education classroom, and integrated community setting. These factors included COVID–19 restrictions preventing community experiences, lack of cohesion and collaboration for proper development of supports and programs necessary to meet individual needs. When asked how often they provided students with multiple opportunities to practice employability skills throughout the school day in real-life situations using real-life materials and equipment, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants selected daily and 33.3% ($n = 1$) selected bi-weekly. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) collaborate with families, teachers, agencies, and businesses to implement employability skills within the community setting weekly, while 33.3% ($n = 1$) collaborated monthly.

The survey assessed the implementation of the various intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive skills addressed in the College and Career Competencies Framework (Erickson & Noonan, 2013). When asked about intrapersonal skills, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants provided daily instruction and learning experiences to develop initiative, perseverance, self-regulation, self-awareness, and sustained attention skills. A participant (33.3%, $n = 1$) provided daily instruction on self-efficacy, self-care, integrity, curiosity, ethics, and goal-setting skills. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) provided weekly instructional opportunities to develop self-care, integrity, interest, and goal-setting skills, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) who provided weekly instruction of initiative, perseverance, self-regulation, self-awareness, ethics, and sustained attention skills. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) selected bi-weekly implementation of self-efficacy skills and 33.3% ($n = 1$) implemented ethics instruction monthly.

When asked about interpersonal skills, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants provided daily instruction to develop adaptability, teamwork, self-awareness, social awareness, conflict management, and communication skills, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants who provided daily instruction of assertiveness, empathy, and networking skills. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) implemented passion and empathy weekly, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants implemented adaptability, teamwork, self-awareness, social awareness, and communication skills weekly. Networking skills were implemented bi-weekly by 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants and 33.3% ($n = 1$) implemented conflict management instruction bi-weekly.

When asked about cognitive skills, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants provided daily instruction of organizational, time management, problem-solving, and content or technical skills, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants who implemented creative thinking, critical thinking, and learning schema daily. Some participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) provide weekly opportunities for creative thinking and 33.3% ($n = 1$) provided weekly instruction on organization, time management, critical thinking, problem-solving, and content/technical skills. With learning schema, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants provided bi-weekly instruction and 33% ($n = 1$) of participants provided bi-weekly instruction with critical thinking.

The survey incorporated skills addressed in the Employability Skills Framework (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, 2021). When asked about the implementation of instruction, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of the participants provided daily instruction on information use, communication, personal qualities, and interpersonal skills. Daily instruction on applied academics, critical thinking, resource management, systems thinking, and technology use was provided by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants. Weekly instruction of applied academics and critical thinking was provided by 66.7% ($n = 2$), followed by information use, communication, technology use, personal

qualities, and interpersonal skills by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants. Bi-weekly implementation of the skills resource management, systems thinking, and technology use were selected by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of the participants, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants who chose resource management and systems thinking monthly.

The research study also included questions around the five competencies identified in the Guideposts to Success: school preparation, youth development & leadership, career preparation, connecting activities and family involvement (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2016). Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) stated they provided daily instruction on school-based preparatory experiences while 100% ($n = 3$) of participants selected weekly implementation of initial career experiences. Weekly, 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants implemented school-based prior experiences, youth development and leadership skills, and connecting activities that promoted collaboration. Some participants (33.3%, $n = 2$) selected bi-weekly implementation of youth development and leadership skills and connecting activities that encourage collaboration. For monthly implementation of activities, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants selected family engagement, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants identified they provided instruction 1 to 3 times per semester for opportunities around youth development and leadership, connecting activities that promote collaboration, and activities that encourage family engagement.

The transition planning process includes many stakeholders, including those identified as IEP team members. When asked how often participants asked the IEP team to establish post-secondary employment goals and associate annual transition goals based in part on the results of vocational assessments, 66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants selected 1–3 times per semester followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants that chose they never include the team. When asked how often

participants ask teachers for information on what they are implementing to promote employability skills in school, 33.3% of participants selected daily collaboration to practice skills. Some participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) chose bi-weekly collaboration around assessments, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants who selected bi-weekly collaboration with instruction and opportunities to practice skills. Monthly collaboration on instruction was selected by 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants and 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants selected collaboration around instruction, assessments, and opportunities to practice skills at a frequency of 1–3 times per semester.

To assess if the IEP team implemented positive predictors of post-school success identified by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (2020), the survey asked participants about the frequency of implementation of the predictors. The data demonstrated that 100% ($n = 3$) of participants implemented self-advocacy, self-care, and social skills development strategies daily. Some participants (66.7%, $n = 2$,) provided daily support with inclusion in the general education setting, career awareness, and student support, followed by 33% ($n = 1$) of participants who provided daily support with occupational courses and paid employment and vocational education. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) provided weekly instruction of the predictors of vocational education, community experiences, and parent involvement, while 33.3% ($n = 1$) provided weekly instruction of self-advocacy. Community experiences, high school diploma regulations, and travel skills are predictors that 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants implemented bi-weekly. Each month 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants implemented predictors of occupational courses, work-study, career awareness, interagency collaboration, parent expectations, student support, and travel skills. Participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) supported the predictors of parent expectations and program of study 1–3 times per week, while 33.3% ($n = 1$)

of participants supported paid work, work-study, interagency collaboration, parent involvement, and travel skills 1–3 times per week. That data demonstrated the predictors of occupational courses, interagency collaboration, and program of study did not apply to 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants and 33.3% ($n = 1$) never implemented paid work experiences.

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (2019) also provides evidence-based practices to guide professionals supporting youth, and adults, with disabilities. These evidence-based strategies were incorporated in the study survey. Participants (66.7%, $n = 3$) implemented computer-assisted instruction and self-management skills daily, while 33.3% ($n = 1$) implemented time delay strategies, prompting strategies, and simulation techniques daily. All participants ($n = 3$) provided weekly community-based instruction; 66.7% ($n = 2$) implemented video modeling weekly, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) who implemented prompting strategies and self-management skills weekly. Some participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) selected bi-weekly for simulation strategies and 33.3% ($n = 1$) implemented video modeling monthly. The evidence-based practices implemented 1–3 times per week were mnemonic strategies (66.7%, $n = 2$), followed by prompting (33.3%, $n = 1$). Some participants (66.7%, $n = 2$) did not select a frequency for implementing time delay strategies, and 33.3% ($n = 1$) did not select a frequency for computer-assisted instruction and mnemonic strategies.

The final section of the survey addressed potential factors that impacted implementation of skills within the transition programs. All participants ($n = 3$) implemented person-centered plans. A participant (33.3%, $n = 1$) implemented career development plans, integrated trial work experiences, benefits planning (individual and small group work incentives), and collaboration with vocational rehabilitation. When asked how often the participants collaborated with families and teachers to identify cultural and linguistically diverse values that influence employability,

66.7% ($n = 2$) of participants selected 1–3 times per semester, followed by 33.3% ($n = 1$) who chose bi-weekly and never. A participant (33.3%, $n = 1$) shared they accessed new resources on teaching employability skills with a frequency of weekly, monthly, and 1–3 times per semester. When asked how often they evaluated implemented vocational experiences to ensure essential program characteristics and curricula are included, 33.3% ($n = 1$) of participants selected bi-weekly, 33.3% ($n = 1$) monthly, and 33.3% ($n = 1$) less than monthly.

Participants identified resources that may improve student employability skills. The resources include more collaboration between transition programs, education for others around the goals and concepts of transition programs, access to community resources and agencies, access to public transportation, and time to identify the students' specific interest areas and skills. The interests and abilities of the students would drive the instruction and development of skills appropriate to everyone. Participants also identified that student's voices would improve the placements and the success within the work experience.

Indicator 14 Data Demographics

According to the data compiled from the teachers in Site A and through the RIDE website 2017-2018, three full time students (one with significant intellectual disabilities and two with autism) and three part-time students (two with autism and one with significant intellectual disabilities) were supported by two paraprofessionals and one special education teacher. In 2018-2019, five full time students (three with autism, one with intellectual disabilities/autism, and one with significant intellectual disabilities) were supported by two paraprofessionals and one special education teacher. In 2019-2020, seven full time students (two with significant intellectual disabilities, one with multiple disabilities, one with intellectual disabilities/autism, two with autism, and one with other health impairment/speech and language impaired) were supported by

two paraprofessionals and one special education teacher. Lastly, in 2020-2021, five students (three of which participated in person and two were through distance learning), were supported by one paraprofessional and one special education teacher.

According to the data compiled from the teachers in Site B and through the CSDE website, in 2017-2018 there were two full-time students supported by one paraprofessional and one special education teacher. In 2018-2019, two full-time students were supported by one paraprofessional and one special education teacher. In 2019-2020, 10 full-time students were supported by one paraprofessional and one special education teacher. Lastly, in 2020-2021, 10 students (one was in person, three were hybrid, and six through distance learning), were supported by one paraprofessional and one special education teacher.

Indicator 14 Post-School Outcomes Data

Site A and Site B displayed post-school information statewide rather than by district. Both states had not collected and depicted the data for the school year of 2018-2019. To include sufficient post-school information in this study, the school year for 2015-2016 was included in the study data. This allowed for a 3-year comparison within each site.

Rhode Island (Site A) categorized post-school information through a results indicator, which is the percentage of youth who are no longer in secondary school and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school. The results indicated whether the student was: (a) enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education, or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, and (c) enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program, or competitively employed or in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school (RIDE, 2018). For the 2016 school year, 897 of youth who had IEPs at the time of exiting school responded to the

Indicator 14 survey. Data demonstrated that 28.43% ($n = 255$) of youth enrolled in higher education, 70.01% ($n = 628$) were enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, and 80.49% ($n = 722$) were enrolled in higher education, or in some other postsecondary education or training program, or were competitively employed or in some other employment. Of the 897 responses, 411 had a learning disability, 125 had an emotional disability, and 42 had an intellectual disability, (RIDE, 2018; See Appendix D).

RIDE found, for the 2017 school year, 906 youth who had IEPs at the time of exiting school responded to the Indicator 14 survey. Data demonstrated that 29.03% ($n = 263$) of youth enrolled in higher education (1), 69.43% ($n = 629$) were enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school (1+2), and 79.47% ($n = 720$) were enrolled in higher education (or in some other postsecondary education or training program) or were competitively employed or in some other employment (1+2+3+4). Of the 906 responses, 371 had a learning disability, 129 had an emotional disability, and 67 had an intellectual disability. (RIDE, 2019; See Appendix D).

The report data for the 2018 school year is demonstrated differently than the previous two years and is broken down further (see Figure 1). RIDE (2020) stated 855 youth who had IEPs at the time of exiting school responded to the Indicator 14 survey. Data demonstrated that 32.05% ($n = 274$) of youth enrolled in higher education (1), 33.33% ($n = 285$) were competitively employed within 1 year of leaving high school, 5.50% ($n = 47$) were enrolled in some other postsecondary education or training program within 1 year of leaving high school (but not enrolled in higher education or competitively employed), and 6.32% ($n = 54$) of youth were enrolled in some other employment within 1 year of leaving high school (but not enrolled in

higher education, some other postsecondary education or training program, or competitively employed; RIDE, 2020). The 2018 report did not include the breakdown of disability categories.

Figure 1

Number of respondent youth (RIDE 2020)

Number of respondent youth who are no longer in secondary school and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school	855
1. Number of respondent youth who enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school	274
2. Number of respondent youth who competitively employed within one year of leaving high school	285
3. Number of respondent youth enrolled in some other postsecondary education or training program within one year of leaving high school (but not enrolled in higher education or competitively employed)	47
4. Number of respondent youth who are in some other employment within one year of leaving high school (but not enrolled in higher education, some other postsecondary education or training program, or competitively employed).	54

Site B also included the data about post-school outcomes for the school years of 2016, 2017, and 2018; the 2019 school year data was not available. The disability category percentages, provided by the Connecticut State Department of Education (2020), demonstrated the 2016 school year included youth with 32.6% ($n = 216$) with a learning disability (LD) and dyslexia, 21.0% ($n = 139$) with other health impairment (OHI) and OHI-Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), 15.5% (103) with autism, 12.8% ($n = 85$) with emotional disturbance, 6.0% ($n = 40$) with an intellectual disability, 4.8% ($n = 32$) with speech or language impairment, and 7.2% ($n = 48$) with “other” (i.e., multiple disabilities, hearing impairment, TBI, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, and deafness or blindness). When asked the question, “Since leaving high school, have you enrolled in any type of school for at least one term (including a quarter, semester, inter-session, summer or online)?”: 43.3% ($n = 287$) of youth were full-time students, 16.9% ($n = 112$) were part-time students, and 35.7% ($n = 237$) responded they were never enrolled in postsecondary education or in a training program. When asked, “What type of school did you attend?”: 51.0% ($n = 206$) attended a 4-year college or university, 35.4% ($n = 143$) attended a 2-year community college, 7.0% ($n = 29$) attended a vocational, technical, or trade school, 1.2% ($n = 5$) attended a postgraduate or college prep

program, 1.5% ($n = 6$) attended a short-term education or job training program, and 2.7% ($n = 11$) responded “other.” When asked, “Since leaving high school, have you been employed for at least 3 months?”: 12.7% ($n = 84$) responded they had been employed full-time, 23.1% ($n = 153$) were employed part-time: 20-34 hours, 22.6% ($n = 150$) responded they were employed part-time for less than 20 hours, and 31.2% ($n = 207$) had not been employed. Site B also included the career fields participated in by students. When asked to select the best description of their most recent job, 77.5% ($n = 307$) selected they worked for an employer (e.g., in a company with people with and without disabilities), 1.5% ($n = 6$) selected they were in the military, 5.8% ($n = 23$) worked for a family business, 5.1% ($n = 20$) worked in supported employment, 3.3% ($n = 13$) worked in sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities), and 5.3% ($n = 21$) selected “other” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020).

The disability category percentages within the 2017 school year included 33.4% ($n = 209$) with a learning disability and dyslexia, 22.8% ($n = 143$) with OHI and OHI-ADD/ADHD, 15.2% ($n = 95$) with autism, 11.8% ($n = 74$) with emotional disturbance, 6.2% ($n = 39$) with an intellectual disability, 3.2% ($n = 20$) with speech or language impairment, and 7.3% ($n = 46$) with another disability (e.g., multiple disabilities, hearing impairment, TBI, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, and deaf/blindness). When asked, “Since leaving high school, have you enrolled in any type of school for at least one term (including a quarter, semester, inter-session, summer or online)?”: 39.6% ($n = 248$) of youth were full-time students, 16.5% ($n = 103$) were part-time students, 5.6% ($n = 35$) enrolled but did not complete a full term, 37.2% ($n = 233$) were never enrolled in postsecondary education or in a training program, and 1.1% ($n = 7$) did not respond. When asked, “What type of school did you attend?”: 45.3% ($n = 160$) attended a 4-year college or university, 37.7% ($n = 133$) attended a 2-year community college, 7.9% ($n = 28$)

attended vocational, technical, or trade school, 2.3% ($n = 8$) attended an adult education program, and 5.1% ($n = 18$) chose “other” and attending a school of a different type. When asked the question, “Since leaving high school, have you been employed for at least 3 months,” 15.2% ($n = 95$) were employed and at full-time status, 22.5% ($n = 141$) were employed and at part-time status between 20-34 hours, 22.0% ($n = 138$) were employed part-time and below 20 hours, and 29.4% ($n = 184$) had not been employed. Site B also included the career fields of respondents. When asked to select the best description of their most recent job, 76.5% ($n = 315$) selected they worked for an employer (i.e., in a company with people with and without disabilities), 3.4% ($n = 14$) were self-employed, 3.2% ($n = 13$) worked for a family business, 5.6% ($n = 23$) worked in supported employment, 3.2% ($n = 13$) worked in sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities), and 5.3% ($n = 22$) selected “other” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020).

The disability category percentages within the 2018 school year include 33.0% ($n = 148$) with a learning disability and LD/dyslexia, 22.5% ($n = 101$) with OHI and OHI-ADD/ADHD, 17.0% ($n = 76$) with autism, 12.3% ($n = 55$) with emotional disturbance, 5.4% ($n = 24$) with an intellectual disability, 2.2% ($n = 10$) with speech/language impairment, and 7.6% ($n = 34$) with another disability (multiple disabilities, hearing impairment, TBI, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, and deafness or blindness). When asked, “Since leaving high school, have you enrolled in any type of school for at least one term (including a quarter, semester, inter-session, summer or online)?”: 38.8% ($n = 174$) of youth responded they were full-time students, 18.1% ($n = 81$) were part-time students, and 36.8% ($n = 165$) had never enrolled in postsecondary education or in a training program. When asked, “What type of school did you attend?”: 48.5% ($n = 130$) enrolled in a 4-year college or university, 29.9% ($n = 80$) enrolled in a 2-year

community college, 9.7% ($n = 26$) enrolled in a vocational, technical, or trade school, 3.7% ($n = 10$) enrolled in adult education, 3.0% ($n = 8$) enrolled in short-term education or job training program, and 2.6% ($n = 7$) responded “other.” When asked the question, “Since leaving high school, have you been employed for at least 3 months?”: 17.2% ($n = 77$) responded they were employed and at full-time status, 21.0% ($n = 94$) were employed part-time and between 20-34 hours, 20.8% ($n = 93$) were employed part-time and below 20 hours, and 34.6% ($n = 155$) had not been employed. Site B also included the career fields of respondents. When asked to select the best description of their most recent job, 79.3% ($n = 222$) worked for an employer (i.e., in a company with people with and without disabilities), 2.5% ($n = 7$) were self-employed, 4.6% ($n = 13$) worked for a family business, 3.2% ($n = 9$) worked in supported employment, 3.6% ($n = 10$) worked in sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities), and 3.9% ($n = 11$) selected “other” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020; See Appendix E).

Chapter V

Interpretations of Findings

The study's two main components were the teacher survey and Indicator 14 post-school outcomes. The teacher survey questions were designed to gather special education teachers' perspectives on implementing evidence-based practice and employability frameworks in their district. This data was utilized to gain insight into transition program services. The interpretations of the findings are presented according to responses of special education teachers and the evidence-based practices and employability frameworks implemented in their transition program. In the last section of this chapter, essential themes have been identified based upon the teacher survey. The following guiding research questions were used to identify common themes and determine which data was needed to complete the study:

Research Question 1: What are the evidence-based practices that Site A and Site B are implementing as part of the Transition Program?

Research Question 2: How often are Site A and Site B incorporating the skills identified in various employability frameworks?

Research Question 3: How are Site A and Site B utilizing the post-school outcome rubrics to identify if students are participating in employment opportunities and/or enrolled in higher education to prepare for employment?

Data for the first two research questions were addressed by three special education teachers across two states in the New England region who worked directly in transition programs. The teachers completed a Google Form survey to provide the perspectives of professionals supporting youth with disabilities in a transition program. The teacher survey showcased evidence-based practices and employability frameworks being implemented in the

different transition programs. The Indicator 14 Post-school Outcomes Survey identified the employment rate of students with disabilities who exited the programs. I was the sole keeper and interpreter of the data.

Implications

The findings of this study support the National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012. There is a lower percentage of individuals with disabilities who are employed in comparison to their typical peers. The data showed special education teachers all identified additional resources that would positively affect their ability to reach the various needs of their students. When implementing direct instruction of employability skills, the teachers indicated there are often inconsistencies in schedules and expectations that hinder their ability to develop students' skills. Teachers also identified factors that hinder community-based instruction. They usually have limited access to community experiences because there may be restrictions placed by the school or employment placement. There is insufficient time to collaborate, and teachers cannot plan for equitable access to supports and services based on the wants and needs of each student. Some transition program placements and service providers are part-time, which causes inconsistency and limited time to practice and develop skills. The teachers identified that professional development and time to collaborate would improve their effectiveness in meeting their post-school goals. With additional access to resources in the community, teachers would enhance their interagency collaboration and develop a cohesive transition plan for each student. The program would provide transition services to be completed in a real-world setting, reinforcing their learning and transfer skills. Public transportation and access to travel-training activities would prepare the students for post-school success in various areas of adult life, including employment, higher education, community engagement, social interactions, and becoming an

active member of society. The teachers also stated that incorporating student voices in the school setting would enhance self-determination and self-advocacy for students.

Limitations

This research was a qualitative case study. The purpose of the study was to gather data through a teacher survey and Indicator 14 Post-school Outcomes Survey for each of the two school districts (one in Rhode Island and one in Connecticut) with the goal of identifying the efficacy of transition programs. The COVID-19 global pandemic occurred during data collection. The pandemic closed all the schools and communities, which caused unemployment for many individuals, including neurotypical and those with disabilities. Access to the data and willing district participants limited the overall findings. Many districts declined participation in the study process due to the implementation of distance learning, lack of teacher coverage, and the uncertainty around potential COVID–19 exposure. Larger districts with multiple transition programs for the youth of all abilities would not allow outside agencies to collaborate with their staff.

Site A is a small rural district that combines three towns into one regional school district. This site did not provide an abundance of data since there is a small number of students who participate in the transition program each year. There are limited resources and positions available for employment in this rural area, which is a potential factor in post-school jobs for the youth of all abilities. The post-school outcomes data on a district level was not attained. Site A and Site B implemented a survey and displayed the data statewide rather than by district. This limited my ability to analyze the specific transition programs' efficacy.

It is also important to note I am a district administrator (Director of Pupil Services) in a neighboring district in Connecticut, which potentially resulted in bias while I was designing and conducting the study.

Findings Related to Literature

The literature review of this study highlighted the nationwide issue of individuals with disabilities remaining at a disadvantage in finding and securing gainful employment opportunities. The National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012 (NLTS 2) identified 40% of youth with a disability have participated in a recent paid work experience compared to 50% of youth without a disability (Lipscomb et al., 2017). In 2016, the data identified that 41.6% (373 respondents) of youth were competitively employed within one year of exiting high school. This data supports the data depicted in the NLTS 2, as it stated that 40% of youth with an IEP have participated in paid work experience. The data also demonstrates that 42 of the respondents had an intellectual disability, accounting for 4.68% of the responses (RIDE, 2020). For Site B, in 2016, 6% of the respondents have an intellectual disability, similar to the 6.2% in 2017 and 5.4% in 2018 (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020). These percentages relate to the number of respondents with intellectual disabilities in Site A. This information is comparable to the NLTS 2; 33.3% and 40% are similar percentages. Site B demonstrated a similar percentage of 35.8% of respondents who participated in full-time or part-time employment in 2016. In 2017, 44.5% of respondents were enrolled in part-time or full-time employment, and in 2018 38.2% of respondents participated in post-school employment (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020). This data demonstrates the percentages of competitively employed youth with disabilities has not been improved, even with new mandates presented by the Rhode Island Consent Decree.

The literature review identified research-based employability frameworks that indicated positive post-school predictors and evidence-based practices promote post-school success. The teacher survey assessed each transition program's implementation of these frameworks and evidence-based practices. Though there were some inconsistencies, which may be due to the limitations and lack of resources of the transition programs, many of the skills were implemented at a daily, weekly, or monthly frequency. Insufficient data and documentation did not allow synthesis of the relationship of implementation of skills and the post-school outcomes. The literature review identified the skills that would enhance the efficacy of the transition program, but the lack of data hindered the application of the research.

The post-school outcomes survey demonstrated the low percentages of youth that are competitively employed, supporting the data depicted in the National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012. The representation of youth with intellectual disabilities is an extremely low percentage rate. Additional information around the specific employment rates of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities that participated in transition programs, compared to those that did not participate in transition programs, would provide additional data and insight to the efficacy of transition programs.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this study was to gather data, analyze data, and document the findings. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to have a breakdown of the data by each participating district in the regional site and their qualifying disability category. This would allow for the identification of patterns and themes in terms of who is gaining employment opportunities compared to other districts, as well as the performance levels of individuals with more specific disabilities. The district would be able to utilize the data and identify the shortcomings of their

programs. This would allow for direct modification to the program to enhance its efficacy. Administration could analyze the data and suggest specific evidence-based practices or employability skills to implement in the programs and assist youth with preparing for post-school success. If the data suggests that students would benefit from additional opportunities to practice their skills in a community-based setting, stakeholders could advocate for modifying the transition program to incorporate additional community experiences.

The teachers could identify specific resources that would enhance their effectiveness and administration could supply the resources and develop inter-agency collaboration to provide supports when appropriate. The development of a scope and sequence of research-based skills would provide a guideline and direction for instruction for all staff supporting youth of all abilities. The scope and sequence would decrease the inconsistencies demonstrated by the data in the teacher survey. Utilizing identified strategies, such as universal design for learning, will adhere to learner variability and provide equal access to educational and vocational opportunities. These suggestions would create a cohesive learning environment for all youth participating in transition programs.

Given that the global pandemic played a significant role during this study, there was limited access and willingness to participate. A recommendation would be to continue the study and collaborate with the states to gather specific information of neighboring districts of Sites A and B. Additional information would provide the districts with opportunities to assess their effectiveness on a district level, compared to a state and national level. Utilizing literature, such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012, identified employability frameworks, predictors of post-school success, and evidence-based practices, would provide guidance and direction of skills and strategies that prepare youth and maximize their potential.

Recommendations for Further Study

Future research on this topic should include additional participants to expand the data and should incorporate districts with a variety of demographics and regions. The study should be followed up within 3 years to assess whether the gap is closing for individuals with disabilities compared to typical peers related to gainful employment. The COVID–19 global pandemic may continue to play an immense role and hinder youth with disabilities from accessing employment opportunities. Additional studies within small districts and updated longitudinal studies that include comparisons of data and employment percentages of youth with a disability and their typical peers, would be beneficial.

Themes

One theme that emerged from findings of the teacher survey was some consistency in the implementation of evidence-based practices and employability frameworks. This may be due to the differentiated skills of the students and specific learning needs. All students have multiple intelligences and learner variability may account for the inconsistencies in implementation of skills. The survey demonstrated there were a limited number of skills implemented by all the teachers. Within each role, all teachers applied direct instruction and vocational skills in both the school and community. Community-based instruction is implemented weekly at both Site A and Site B. All the teachers implemented initial career experiences on a weekly frequency. Daily, self-advocacy, self-care, and social skill development were implemented by all teachers. Each district required students with disabilities to have a person-centered plan. Though there are some similarities, Site A and Site B implemented a variety of evidence-based practices and employability skills.

Another theme was based upon the district's use of post-school outcomes data. Since both sites did not compile post-school outcome data on a district level, they were unable to analyze their efficacy. By synthesizing the relationship between implementation of evidence-based practices and employability frameworks to the post-school employment participation of the students, the transition programs would be able to direct their instruction and alter curricula if needed. In addition, the data did not incorporate the specific employment rates within each disability classification. It did not identify whether students participated in a transition program. It would be beneficial to have the data categorized by disability, participation in transition programs or transition services, and supports and services provided to access employment post-exit.

Conclusion

Many teachers identified lack of collaboration as a potential factor that hindered their effectiveness. Lack of collaboration between states and districts to collect, depict, and analyze data was also a finding of this study. If data were more conclusive, districts may be able to direct their instruction and create a plan of action that would increase their efficacy. This study demonstrates the need for additional research. The study utilized a small sample size, and this topic would benefit from continued research with additional districts and with more participants. Diverse school settings, ethnicities and culture, and parent expectations could also be included, which would provide additional assessment variables. Data from future studies about this topic may be used to demonstrate the efficacy of transition programs and their relationship to post-school outcomes of individuals with significant disabilities within all aspects of adult life.

Although the results were inconclusive and presented a need for additional research, this was a positive and worthwhile project. By providing individuals with opportunities to explore

employment opportunities, independent living, and education and training programs, they are being provided experiences that will maximize their potential and improve their quality of life. Transition programs aim to provide students with opportunities and interest inventories to shape their career choices. Without a transition program to adulthood, many individuals with disabilities would not be afforded a chance to be gainfully employed or even work in a fulfilling and individualized capacity. Transition programs work as a bridge from school to adulthood. They work as the liaison to adult service providers such as the Office of Rehabilitation Service; Bureau of Rehabilitation Services; and Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals; guardianship; and social security. The study findings indicated individuals with disabilities are at a significant disadvantage in gaining employment opportunities compared to typical peers.

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Appendix A

United States Department of Education. Perkins Collaborative Resource Network

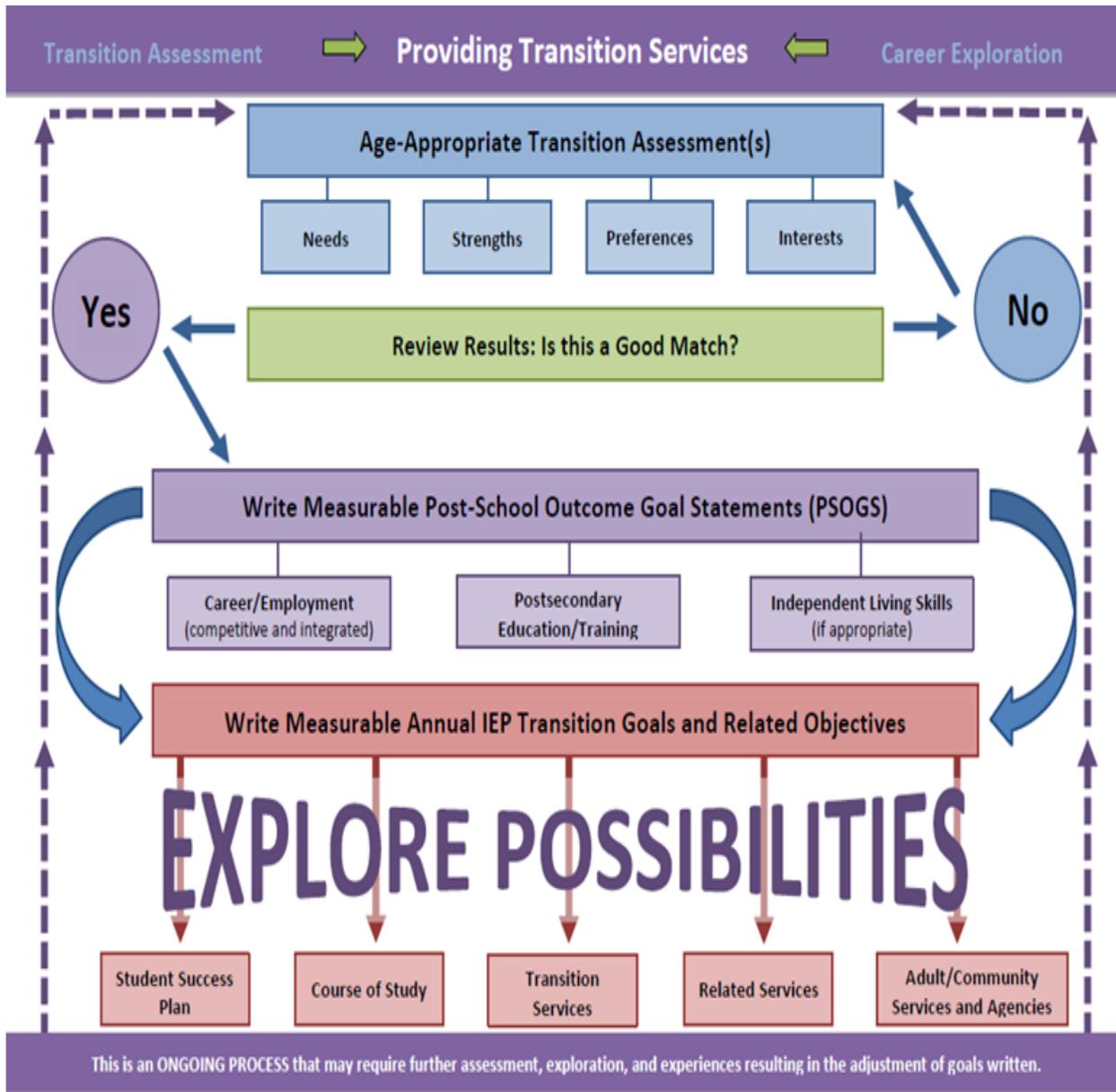
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK

Employability Skills: A Crucial Component of College and Career Readiness
Individuals require many skills to be college and career ready, including academic knowledge, technical expertise, and a set of general, cross-cutting abilities called “employability skills.”



Appendix B

Connecticut Department of Education Infographic



The Connecticut State Department of Education is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

CSDE/SERC Transition Workgroup (Revised 2020)

Appendix C

Transition Program Interview Questions

Section 1 of 5

Transition Program Interview Questions

Form description

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

Thank you for taking this survey!

The purpose of this survey is to collect information from individuals that support students with significant disabilities in preparation for post-school success. The data from this survey will be utilized to identify the effectiveness of implementing evidence-based practices to increase participation in employment placements one to three years post school exit. Resources and strategies will be identified, as well as the need for additional resources and supports. The survey should take you 15 minutes to complete and contains questions pertaining to specific services and strategies you utilize to support students, as well as the frequency in which you implement them. The questions also address the effectiveness of these strategies and your perceptions of how improvements can be made.

Your Rights

This survey is part of data collection to complete dissertation research around the efficacy of transition programs in preparing individuals with significant disabilities for employment. The research is being completed under the Department of Special Education and Disability Studies from the Doctoral Program of the University of New England (UNE). Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. The total amount of time you will spend to complete the survey is between 10 to 15 minutes.

After section 1 [Continue to next section](#)

Section 1: Demographics



Description (optional)

What is your primary role? *

- Case Manager
- Job Coach
- Coordinator/ Supervisor

Which of the following duties do you have around implementing or reinforcing employability skills? (Select all that apply) *

- Implementing direct instruction.
- Providing families with resources and instruction.
- Application of vocational skills in a school setting.
- Application of vocational skills in an integrated community setting.
- Other...

How long have you supported transition-aged students with significant disabilities? *

- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-20 years
- 20+ years



How often do practices occur?



This section will ask you to explain the frequency and implementation of specific practices .

How often do you provide instruction in employability skills in the following methods? *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times ...	Never	Not applic...
Individual	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Small Group	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Whole Class	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Are there factors that affect your ability to provide direct instruction of employability skills through independent, small group or whole class instruction? Please explain. *

Long answer text

.....

How often do you provide direct instruction in employability skills within multiple settings? *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times ...	Never	Not applic...
General Ed...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Special Ed...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Integrated ...	<input type="checkbox"/>						

What are factors that affect your ability to implement employability skills within the general education classroom, special education classroom, and the community? Please explain. *

Long answer text

.....

How often do you provide students multiple opportunities to practice employability skills throughout the school day in real-life situations using real-life materials and equipment? *

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- 1-3 Times per Semester
- Never
- Not applicable to my role
- Other...

How often do you collaborate with families, teachers, agencies, and businesses to implement employability skills within the community setting? *

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- 1-3 Times per Semester
- Never

College and Career Competency Framework

The College and Career Competency (CCC) Framework, developed by Drs. Amy Gaumer Erickson and Pattie Noonan, supports educators in systematically embedding intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies. Educators support students to become career-equipped, lifelong learners who are socially and emotionally engaged.

Image title



Please rate how often you provide instruction/ learning experiences for the following intrapersonal skills.

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times pe...	Never
initiative	<input type="checkbox"/>					
perseverance	<input type="checkbox"/>					
self-regulation	<input type="checkbox"/>					
self-efficacy	<input type="checkbox"/>					
self-care	<input type="checkbox"/>					
self-awareene...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>					
curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>					
sustained att...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
goal setting	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Please rate how often you provide instruction/ learning experiences for the following interpersonal skills *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times pe...	Never
adaptability	<input type="checkbox"/>					
assertiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>					
teamwork	<input type="checkbox"/>					
empathy	<input type="checkbox"/>					
networking	<input type="checkbox"/>					
self-awarene...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
social aware...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
conflict man...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
communicati...	<input type="checkbox"/>					

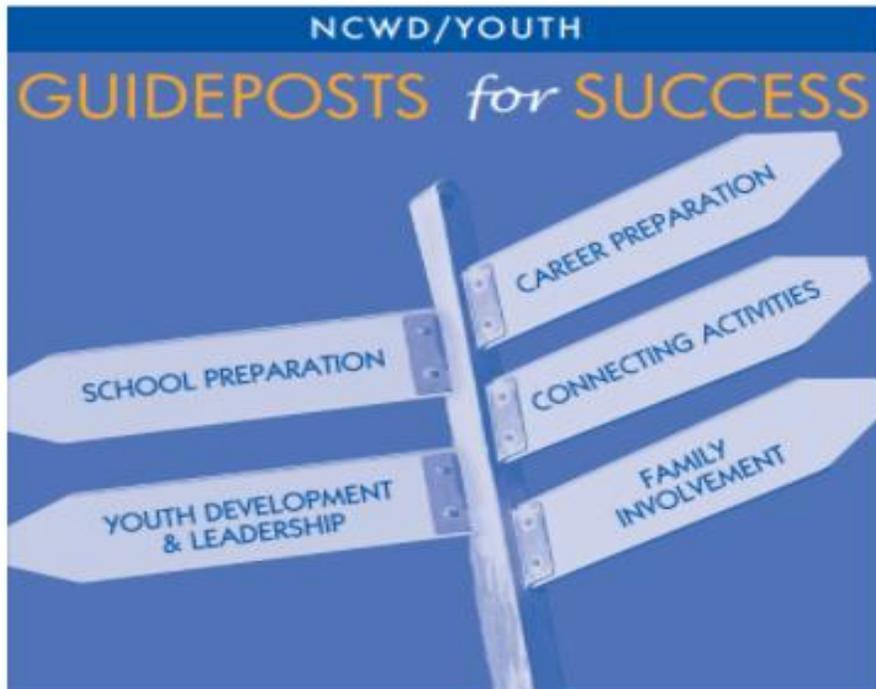
Please rate how often you provide instruction/ learning experiences for the following cognitive skills *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times pe...	Never
creative thin...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
organization	<input type="checkbox"/>					
time manage...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
critical thinki...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
problem solv...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
learning sch...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
content/ tec...	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Please rate how often you provide instruction/ learning experiences based on the Employability Skills Framework *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times pe...	Never
applied acad...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
critical thinki...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
resource ma...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
information ...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
communicati...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
systems thin...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
technology u...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
personal qua...	<input type="checkbox"/>					
interpersona...	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Image title



Please identify the frequency of implementation of the Positive Predictors of Post School Success * identified by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative.

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times ...	Never	Not applic...
inclusion i...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
occupatio...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
paid emplo...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
vocational ...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
work study	<input type="checkbox"/>						
career awa...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
communit...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
exit exam r...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
interagenc...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
parent/fa...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
parent exp...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
program of...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
self-advoc...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
self care/ i...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
social skills	<input type="checkbox"/>						
student su...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
travel skills	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Please identify the evidence-based practices you utilize to implement and support employability skills within the school or home setting. *

	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	1-3 Times ...	Never	Not applic...
time delay ...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
computer...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
communit...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
video mod...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
prompting ...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
mnemonic ...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
self-mana...	<input type="checkbox"/>						
simulation	<input type="checkbox"/>						

After section 4 Continue to next section

Section 5 of 5

Potential Factors

This section will ask you to provide information about the factors that impact effective implementation of specific practices in your program.

Does your program implement

- career development plans
- person-centered plans (MAPs, PATH, Discovery)
- integrated trial work experiences
- benefits planning (individual and small group work incentives)
- collaboration with vocational rehabilitation

How often do you collaborate with families and teachers to identify the cultural and linguistically ^{*} diverse values that influence employability?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- 1-3 Times per Semester
- Never

How often do you review new resources on teaching employability skills? ^{*}

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- 1-3 Times per Semester
- Never

How often do you evaluate implemented vocational experiences to ensure essential program characteristics and curricula are included? *

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than Monthly
- Never

What resources do you feel would positively affect your effectiveness with improving student employability skills? Please explain. *

Long answer text
.....

Thank you so much for your time! Please include any additional information you believe to be pertinent to this research.

Long answer text
.....

Appendix D

Rhode Island Indicator 14 Data

Site A

	Number of respondent youth	Number of respondent youth who are no longer in secondary school and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school	FFY 2015 Data*	FFY 2016 Target*	FFY 2016 Data
A. Enrolled in higher education (1)	255.00	897.00	31.33%	40.00%	28.43%
B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school (1 +2)	628.00	897.00	64.70%	74.00%	70.01%
C. Enrolled in higher education, or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment (1+2+3+4)	722.00	897.00	84.44%	85.00%	80.49%

(RIDE, 2018)

	Number of respondent youth	Number of respondent youth who are no longer in secondary school and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school	FFY 2016 Data	FFY 2017 Target	FFY 2017 Data
A. Enrolled in higher education (1)	263.00	906.00	28.43%	41.00%	29.03%
B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school (1 +2)	629.00	906.00	70.01%	75.00%	69.43%
C. Enrolled in higher education, or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment (1+2+3+4)	720.00	906.00	80.49%	86.00%	79.47%

(RIDE, 2019)

	Number of respondent youth	Number of respondent youth who are no longer in secondary school and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school	FFY 2017 Data	FFY 2018 Target	FFY 2018 Data	Status	Slippage
A. Enrolled in higher education (1)	274	855	29.03%	42.00%	32.05%	Did Not Meet Target	No Slippage
B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school (1 +2)	559	855	69.43%	76.00%	65.38%	Did Not Meet Target	Slippage
C. Enrolled in higher education, or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment (1+2+3+4)	660	855	79.47%	87.00%	77.19%	Did Not Meet Target	Slippage

(RIDE, 2020)

Appendix E

Connecticut Indicator 14 Data

Site B

Disability Type

Category	2015-2016 Exiters		2016-2017 Exiters		2017-2018 Exiters	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Learning Disability and LD/Dyslexia	216	32.6	209	33.4	148	33.0
OHI and OHI-ADD/ADHD	139	21.0	143	22.8	101	22.5
Autism	103	15.5	95	15.2	76	17.0
Emotional Disturbance	85	12.8	74	11.8	55	12.3
Intellectual Disability	40	6.0	39	6.2	24	5.4
Speech/Language Impairment	32	4.8	20	3.2	10	2.2
Other Disability (Multiple Disabilities, Hearing Impairment, TBI, Visual Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, and Deaf/Blindness)	48	7.2	46	7.3	34	7.6
Total	663	100.0	626	100.0	448	100.0

Question 2: *Since leaving high school, have you enrolled in any type of school for at least one term (including a quarter, semester, inter-session, summer or online)?*

Category	2015-2016 Exiters		2016-2017 Exiters		2017-2018 Exiters	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, I am a full-time student (12 or more credits per semester)	287	43.3	248	39.6	174	38.8
Yes, I am a part-time student (less than 12 credits per semester)	112	16.9	103	16.5	81	18.1
No, I was enrolled but I did not complete one full term	*	*	35	5.6	*	*
No, I have never enrolled in postsecondary education or in a training program	237	35.7	233	37.2	165	36.8
No Response	*	*	7	1.1	*	*
Total	663	100.0	626	100.0	448	100.0

Note: Responders chose one answer for this question.

* indicates use of data suppression to protect personally identifiable information.

Table B5

If yes to Question 2 (Table B4), answer Question 3: *What type of school did you attend? (Check all that apply)*

Category	2015-2016 Exiters		2016-2017 Exiters		2017-2018 Exiters	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Four-year college or university	206	51.0	160	45.3	130	48.5
Two-year community college	143	35.4	133	37.7	80	29.9
Vocational, Technical, or Trade School	29	7.0	28	7.9	26	9.7
Adult Education	*	*	8	2.3	10	3.7
Postgraduate or College Prep Program	5	1.2	*	*	*	*
Short-term education or job training program	6	1.5	*	*	8	3.0
Other	11	2.7	18	5.1	7	2.6
No Response	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total	404	100.0	353	100.0	268	100.0

Note: Responders were allowed to choose multiple answers for this question.

* indicates use of data suppression to protect personally identifiable information.

Table B6

Question 4: *Since leaving high school, have you been employed for at least 3 months (it does not have to be in a row)?*

Category	2015-2016 Exiters		2016-2017 Exiters		2017-2018 Exiters	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, Full-time (average 35 hours or more per week)	84	12.7	95	15.2	77	17.2
Yes, Part-time (average 20 - 34 hours per week)	153	23.1	141	22.5	94	21.0
Yes, Part-time (less than an average of 20 hours per week)	150	22.6	138	22.0	93	20.8
No, I have been employed, but for less than three months	*	*	*	*	*	*
No, I have not been employed	207	31.2	184	29.4	155	34.6
No Response	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total	663	100.0	626	100.0	448	100.0

Note: Responders chose one answer for this question.

* indicates use of data suppression to protect personally identifiable information.

If yes to Question 4 (Table B6), answer Question 6: *Please select the best description of your most recent job. (Check all that apply)*

Category	2015-2016 Exiters		2016-2017 Exiters		2017-2018 Exiters	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
For an employer (in a company with people with and without disabilities)	307	77.5	315	76.5	222	79.3
In the military (e.g., Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard)	6	1.5	*	*	*	*
Self-employed	*	*	14	3.4	7	2.5
In your family's business (e.g., a farm, store, fishing, ranching, catering)	23	5.8	13	3.2	13	4.6
In supported employment (paid work with services and wage support to the employer)	20	5.1	23	5.6	9	3.2
In sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities)	13	3.3	13	3.2	10	3.6
Employed while in jail or prison	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other	21	5.3	22	5.3	11	3.9
No Response	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total	396	100.0	412	100.0	280	100.0

Note: Responders were allowed to choose multiple answers for this question.

* indicates use of data suppression to protect personally identifiable information.

(Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020)

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EDUCATION

University of New England, Biddeford, Maine (current) doctoral program in Educational Leadership
Rhode Island College, Providence, Rhode Island

Special Education Administrator Certification 2014

Master of Education, Special Education Severe and Profound Disabilities ages 3-21
Graduated May 2005 **Magna Cum Laude**

Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education/Special Education Severe and Profound ages 3-21 and mild to moderate disabilities middle school/secondary
Graduated May 2003 **Cum Laude**

Community College of Rhode Island, Lincoln, Rhode Island

Associates Degree in General Studies

Graduated December 2000

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Golden Apple Award (RI Department of Education NBC 10 and Hasbro) 2014

Horace Mann Crystal Apple Award 2013

Harry S. Novack Award (The Outstanding Advanced Degree Graduate)

Kappa Delta Pi (International Honor Society in Education)

Teaching sample and student video (<http://youtu.be/UgNbdV2Mwxc>)

WORK EXPERIENCE

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 2019–present | Thompson Public School Department, Thompson, Connecticut
Director of Pupil Services for the Thompson Public School Department |
| 2015–2019 | North Providence School Department, North Providence, Rhode Island
Director of Special Education for the North Providence School Department <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee all Special Education teachers, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologist, School Psychologist, Social Workers, School Nurses and Teacher Assistants.• Maintain up to date records of all IEP's and 504's• Provide Professional Development• Monthly staff meetings with each department• Develop new programs |
| 2005–2015 | Lincoln School Department, Lincoln, Rhode Island
Special Education teacher at Lincoln High School <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case manager/Special educator of core academics• Design curriculum for individuals with significant disabilities• Youth Activation (Club Unify) Supervisor• ESY teacher• Head Coach Unified Basketball and Volleyball |
| 2003–2005 | Cumberland School Department, Cumberland, Rhode Island
Special Education teacher at North Cumberland Middle School <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop curriculum for special education severe/profound disabilities• Modify lessons for inclusion opportunities• Develop IEP's and augmentative communication systems• Teach Language Arts, Mathematics, Art, Mobility, Daily Living Skills, Developmental Reading, Science and Communication |
| 2003–2005 | Graduate Assistant at Rhode Island College in PH. D. Program |
| 2001–2004 | Spurwink of Rhode Island, Cranston, Rhode Island <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Collection, Home Based Therapy, DCYF Case Manager |