

K-12 PROFESSIONAL'S AND HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR'S
PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

by

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May, 2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, without whom, none of this would have been possible. To my grandmother, Margie Heaton, who prayed for me day in and day out and made this endeavor possible in so many ways. To my dad, Jim Smith, who instilled in me a love for learning and the drive to achieve greatness. To my mom, Vickie Smith, my constant encouragement when I felt defeated and wanted to give up. To my nephews Matthew and Mason Smith, thank you for being my “why”. I pray you benefit from the outcomes of this work. Last, but certainly not least, my amazing husband and best friend, Andy Graves. Thank you for your unwavering support of anything I have ever aspired to do. I know this journey brought you countless days and nights spent alone as I read research and wrote this dissertation, but never once did you complain. Despite all the doubts, tears, and bouts of wanting to give up, WE MADE IT! You all were right! There WAS light at the end of the tunnel, and it’s beautiful.

ABSTRACT

Graves, Jennifer Leigh, *K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities to post-secondary education*. Doctor of Education (Developmental Education Administration), May, 2021, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Post-secondary education has been deemed the segue to lifelong opportunities for students graduating from high school including heightened career paths, increased occupational earnings and overall life satisfaction. The implications for successful post-secondary education are intensified for students with learning disabilities (SLD). While the numbers of students with disabilities enrolling in higher education continues to rise, the ability of those students to keep pace with that of their non-disabled peers is declining. Effective transition planning may increase student success and diminish the risk of students falling behind, especially students with learning disabilities. The purpose of this study was to understand, through a qualitative phenomenological design, the perceptions of K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators on the successful transition of students with learning disabilities to college. Sources of data included responses from eight participants, selected via purposive and convenience sampling, to open ended questions which were conducted during semi-structured video conferenced interviews.

Three themes emerged from this study: under prepared, college expectations versus high school experiences, and self-advocacy.

KEY WORDS: Students with learning disabilities, Special education, College readiness, Transition, Post-secondary education, Perspectives

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those who have supported me along this journey. Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Peggy Holzweiss for your patience, expertise, support, and ‘tough love’ throughout this journey. I will forever be indebted to you for the invaluable gift of time that you invested in me and my research. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Melinda Miller and Dr. Lory Haas. Dr. Miller, thank you for investing in my education early on when I had the privilege of being in your 2nd grade class. Dr. Haas, thank you for mentoring me all those years ago when I was a new teacher just beginning my educational journey. You both helped shape me into the person and educator I am today.

I am grateful to each of my professors who set a standard for academic excellence and demonstrated it each and every semester: Dr. Patrick Saxon, Dr. Nara Martirosyan, Dr. Suzanna Skidmore & Dr. Forrest Lane. Your knowledge, expertise and advice has been influential in this journey.

I would be remiss if I didn’t say a special thank you to Ms. Brenda Rusk. Thank you for always working diligently behind the scenes to ensure that classes were registered for, scholarships were distributed, and dissertations were scheduled. Your encouraging chats over a fresh cup of coffee made the time in this program fly by. You are definitely missed.

I would not be where I am today if it weren’t for the direction and advisement of Dr. Genevieve Brown. Thank you for gently, yet persistently, encouraging me to pursue my dreams of being an educator. I would not have chosen this path without your guidance.

Thank you to each of my colleagues in Cohort 6. You are an amazing group of talented educators who have pushed me to see education from a multitude of perspectives over the last three years. You all will always hold a special place in my heart.

I am indebted to the K-12 specials education professionals and Higher Education administrators who volunteered their time to share their experiences with me. Thank you for serving students in the manner you do. Your work does not go unnoticed, and you are appreciated more than you will ever know. It is because of you this research project was able to take place. I hope this serves a catalyst to bring about great changes for our students.

I am forever grateful to have been accepted into and given the opportunity to learn and grow in the Developmental Education Administration program. It has forever changed my life not only as an educator, but as a person.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Post-secondary education has been characterized as being “the gateway to the acquisition of a wide variety of marketable skills for high school graduates” (Dutta, Schiro-Geist, & Kundu, 2009, p. 10). Increases in earning potential, prospective career outcomes and overall improved quality of life have been linked to education beyond high school. The implications of a post-secondary education are even more profound for persons with disabilities (Horn & Berkold, 1999). According to a study done by the National Organization on Disability (1998), students with disabilities who graduate from college are 63% more likely to be employed than their peers who do not attend college. However, only 37% of students with a disability end up transitioning to a community college or vocational school as compared to 60% of their non-disabled peers (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Comparatively, students with disabilities enroll in 4-year institutions of higher education at a rate of only 27% as compared to 68% of non-disabled students (Wittenburg, Fishman, Golden, & Allen, 2000). While indicating success comes from perusing post-secondary education, these statistics also represent a gap in the transition from high school to post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

The term “disabled person” has been widely and loosely used for many years. However, in 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, giving a more definitive definition to the term. According to the ADA, an individual with a disability is defined as “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having

such an impairment” (US Department of Justice, 2009). Providing additional clarification as well as added protection for persons with a disability is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This civil rights law goes deeper to define a physical impairment as “any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss” and a mental or psychological disorder as “mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, or specific learning disability.” Furthermore, this law prohibits discrimination against persons whose “physical or mental disability substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as...learning” (US Department of Education, 2020).

The pursuit to conclusively define “learning disabled” is ongoing. However, the American National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada have embraced similar definitions. Both organizations have outlined that students with learning disabilities (SLD) are cognitively able individuals who possess varying levels of difficulty within certain academic areas such as reasoning, listening, speaking, reading, writing and/or mathematics which directly impact their ability to learn (Harrison, 2003). SLD are rapidly becoming one of the largest sectors of the disabled population within higher education (Kerka, 2000). Lauffer (2000) reports that SLD account for almost 32% of disabled post-secondary students.

Research indicates that students with learning disabilities display differing characteristics than those of their non-disabled peers (Abreu-Ellis, Ellis & Hayes, 2009). Students with a learning disability are conveyed as having higher levels of anxiety, taking less ownership for their own learning, and having fewer learning strategies and study skills (Kovack & Wilgosh, 1999). However, SLD are found to be more optimistic of their

college success than their non-disabled counterparts. Some of the most common learning disabilities affecting college students today are Dyslexia, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, and Processing Deficits.

While the numbers of SLD enrolling in higher education continues to rise, the ability of those students to keep pace with their non-disabled peers is declining. Researchers found that within six years of high school graduation, only 29% of SLD had persisted to completion of college as compared to 42% of their non-disabled peers. Within eight years, the number rose slightly to 34% of learning-disabled students persisting to graduation compared to 51% of those students not identified as having a learning disability (Newman, et al., 2011). These persistence and graduation rates are a result of the difficulties that impede SLD's progress in the traditional higher education setting (Hadley, 2007; Skinner, 2004). Some of the difficulties reported by SLD are feeling overloaded, inability to prioritize tasks, writing intensive assignments, lack of study skills, deficits in their organizational abilities, ability to effectively take notes, and test taking (Hamblet, 2014).

Problem Statement

Multiple researchers examined SLDs in post-secondary education. Troiano, Liefeld, and Trachtenberg (2010) focused on the relationship between the use of academic support centers and success in SLD and determined that students who utilized the assistance of the academic support centers had higher grade point averages and higher graduation rates. Harrison (2003) conducted a study assessing policies and practices needed to create a successful learning environment for students with disabilities. In doing so, it was found that instructors have to reassess their instructional practices to ensure an

environment that fosters learning and prepares all students, including SLD, to meet the growing demands of the workforce. Multiple studies have been conducted that concentrate on factors that contribute to success in SLD (Dowds & Phelan, 2006; Field, Sarver, and Shaw, 2003; Showers & Kinsman, 2017; Skinner, 2004;).

There are very few studies, however, that focus on the perceptions of K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators. There are even less that specifically concentrate on the Office of Disability Services (ODS) and their successful use of transition plans to support SLD in the progression from high school to college. Most studies reveal factors that would aid in supporting students once enrolled in college such as registering with the Student Success Center (Troiano et al., 1999), seeking instructional accommodations (Hadley, 2007), and becoming a self-advocate (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). None however seek to define transitioning from the vantage point of K-12 special education professionals and Higher Education administrators on both sides supporting students with disabilities. This is an important lens to consider as a lack of shared ideology or even a lack of knowledge around transition planning between K-12 special education professionals and higher education ODS administrators could be a potential barrier to the successful college transition of students with disabilities. K-12 special education professionals bear the responsibility of facilitating the creation of a transition plan for all special education students. This process is legally mandated to begin when a student turns 16 years of age and is intended to prepare students with disabilities for positive, post high school successes in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2012).

Transition planning for K-12 students with disabilities has never been more important (Landmark & Zhang, 2012). With the increase in enrollment of students with disabilities into postsecondary education, it is even more imperative that all parties involved, including higher education ODS administrators, K-12 special education professionals, families, and students, become increasingly mindful of creating and fostering effective partnerships (Fowler, Getzel & Lombardi, 2018). While higher education ODS administrators do not have a role in developing the transition plan, they do have a role in potentially implementing the accommodations prescribed for a student with disabilities. Mpofu and Wilson (2004) report that students with disabilities exhibit a high drop-out rate during their first post-secondary year due to lack of transitional support services. A study by Dutta et al. (2009) found there to be “a general lack of sensitivity to and awareness of the seriousness of the need for accommodating [post-secondary] students with disabilities” (p. 15).

To ensure success for SLD, it is imperative for K-12 special education professionals to understand the perspective of higher education ODS administrators so students can be adequately prepared to advocate for themselves in the post-secondary environment. It is also necessary for higher education ODS administrators to gain insight into the perspective of the K-12 special education professionals in order to fully understand the importance of providing support and accommodations to students with disabilities at the post-secondary level.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college SLD from secondary to higher education. The interviews will give all persons an outlet to begin the dialogue of building a common language and shared vision around ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with special learning needs. The method of inquiry will include non-directive video conferenced interviews with K-12 special education professionals who work both directly and indirectly in the transition planning of SLD as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services who support SLD.

Significance

One of the most pivotal transitions for students with disabilities is the transition from high school to postsecondary education due to the impact of a college education on a person's future (Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009). However, this transition is one in which students are the most inadequately prepared for and lack the most support in, which therefore results in a high first-year dropout rate (Dutta et al., 2009). Research indicates that focused, intentional collaboration in preparation for postsecondary education is more apt to bring about successful transition outcomes for students (Test et al., 2009).

Not found in literature is any particular association between K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Office of Disability

Services regarding their perceptions of college transition readiness of the SLD they commonly serve. By determining the perceptions of these two groups, a shared vision and common language could be developed to support a more effective approach to college transition for students with special learning needs. The results of this study could be applied in the K-12 system to build a more robust transition plan and better prepare students, prior to graduation from high school, to navigate college as a student with a learning disability. In addition, this study could be applied at the post-secondary level in making policies as well as helping to inform future practice in the sense of providing better guidance to SLD during their first year and thus seeking to close the college transition gap and, persistence and graduation rates for these students.

It has been shown that a successful transition from K-12 to post-secondary education and use of support services while enrolled will better prepare persons with a disability for the transition from school to work and the establishment of a new life within their community (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2012). Even so, only 28.5% of college graduates with a disability were employed in 2018 compared to 75.5% of non-disabled graduates (Bureau of Labor & Statistics, 2019). These statistics can be overcome by implementing strategies from a collaboratively designed K-12 transition plan into the higher education setting and on into the workplace (Allarakhia, 2019). Collaborative transition planning does not just have an implication for disabled students moving from K-12 to post-secondary education; it has lasting effects that continue to manifest long after graduation has occurred.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to drive this study:

1. How do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the connection between secondary transition planning and higher education student success for students with learning disabilities?
2. What do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities feel would strengthen secondary transition planning to improve post-secondary student success for students with learning disabilities?

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory serves as a framework for exploring and understanding the perceptions of transitions (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This theory was established on the necessity to aid adults in understanding transitions and guiding them to the assistance they needed to manage the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 213). Often classified as an adult development theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is also applicable to students transitioning to the collegiate level (Evans et al., 2010). Transition theory is a standard that allows researchers to value the means by which people move from reaction to an event (transition) to implementing the event into their daily routines (adaptation) (Byrd, 2017). Schlossberg categorizes transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. If disabled students can better understand the transition they are

experiencing, it will have great effects on how they perceive their current life situation and ultimately how they incorporate it into their daily processes.

Definition of Terms

Accommodations. Tools or methods used to provide students with disabilities equal access to teaching and learning. These processes do not change the learning goal or learning objective of the student.

Admission, Review, & Dismissal (ARD) Committee. A group of K-12 school personnel and the student's parent or guardian, who come together to determine a student's eligibility for special education services and develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A law enacted in 1990 preventing persons with a disability from being discriminated against in all areas of public life including education.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). An educational right of all students with a disability guaranteed under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure education programs are tailored to fit the specific need of a child qualifying for special education.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An education plan personalized to a student with disabilities that includes their present level of performance, annual goals, specific supports, dates of services, and evaluation procedures.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A federal law that ensures all students with a disability are afforded access to free and appropriate education (FAPE) as well as related services.

Modifications. Modifications change the curriculum which alters what a student with a disability is taught or required to do.

Office of Disability Services (ODS). An office on the campus of colleges and universities whose goal is to promote equal access to educational and extra-curricular programs for students with disabilities.

Office of Disability Services (ODS) Personnel. Professional staff in the ODS offices on college and university campuses who are dedicated to serving students with disabilities on their respective campuses.

Post-Secondary. The time period after which a student has completed their high school education.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. An anti-discrimination civil right of all students with a disability which allows for their needs and educational access to be met at the same level as those students without a disability.

Transition. The move of a student with a disability from high school to the post-secondary realm. Federal law requires planning for this move to begin at age 16.

Transition Plan/Planning. The section of a student's IEP that designates what supports will be provided for students with disabilities to help them reach their post-secondary goals. This process and supports are agreed upon by a student's ARD committee and are required by federal law to begin when the student turns 16 years of age.

Delimitations

The aim of this study is to understand the perceptions of K-12 special education professionals who have worked in the transition planning process of students with learning disabilities as well as higher education administrators in Offices of Disability Services who support SLD in their transition to post-secondary education. K-12 special education professionals in this study must have had direct work in the transition planning process for SLD as either a classroom teacher or a participant on the ARD committee. ARD committee participants could include campus principals, diagnosticians, district level special education personnel, or special education consultants from an education service center. Higher education administrators must have done direct work with a student with learning disabilities as a service professional in the Office of Disability Services at a college or university. All professionals included in this study will be located within East Central Texas and Southeast Texas.

Limitations

The sample population of this study will be limited to the perceptions of K-12 special education professionals to include teachers and ARD committee members in public school systems within East Central and Southeast Texas. ARD committee members can be comprised of campus principals, diagnosticians, district level special education personnel or special education consultants from regional education service centers serving the schools encompassed by this research study. The study will additionally be limited to the perceptions of a sample population of higher education ODS administrators working in the institutions included in this research study within East Central and Southeast Texas. While these professionals will all bring a wealth of

knowledge to the study, by limiting to these individuals, there are certain perspectives that may not be included. Additionally, by limiting the study to these specific regions within Texas, the study has to the potential to not be applicable to other contexts. This study also focuses mainly on SLD which limits understandings of transitions for students with a disability other than a learning disability. Random sampling will not be considered which will present some limits to the study. Personal bias is a constraint in any qualitative study as well as this study. Data collection method will be limited to video interviews which could pose a limitation as participants could not be forthcoming with their responses or could lack in cooperation with the study. Time will be a limitation, especially since member checking will be used which will require participants to be available multiple times for interview and transcript review.

Assumptions

This study will be conducted based on the assumption that all participants have had direct working relationships with SLD in either a K-12 or higher education setting. It will be assumed that participants will be forthcoming and truthful with in their responses.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation will be comprised of five chapters. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance, research questions, theoretical framework, definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and the organization of the study. Chapter II is a literature review of the development of transition planning, laws relating to transition planning and transitioning as well as current research on transition planning for students with disabilities. Chapter III describes the research questions, research design, researcher's role, participants, data

collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter IV will describe in detail, the results from the interviews conducted. Chapter V will outlay the findings of the research in relation to the research questions, literature, and theoretical framework as well as implications of this study on future research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

College-bound students with disabilities are rarely prepared for the trials that await them at the postsecondary level (Skinner, 2004). In a study conducted by Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000), it was discovered that 80% of students with learning disabilities (SLD) do not graduate within five years of completing high school compared to 56% of their non-disabled peers. SLD now make up the largest percentage of students with an identified disability at 46% (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). The number of students with a learning disability enrolling in postsecondary education is on the rise (Harrison, 2003). Despite the mandates of federal law, SLD continue to face issues that make learning and the learning environment difficult (Barga, 1996). SLD show difficulty in many areas before and during their postsecondary education including trouble with the increased demands in reading and writing, difficulty with the shift from an engaged learning environment to a direct teach or lecture style environment, and inability to effectively manage their time (Connor, 2013). Research shows that successful people with learning disabilities possess certain sets of success skills, such as self-awareness, perseverance, the ability to set goals, and effective support systems, that lead them to constructive life outcomes (Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, & Herman, 2002).

This review will synthesize information and research strategies for K-12 and postsecondary students with any identified disability to ensure the student's success. This chapter will address how the literature for this review was identified and the following areas will be more thoroughly discussed: history of disabilities in the US; transition of

disabled student from high school to college; profiles of students with disabilities; support for disabled student success; and barriers to disabled student success.

Literature Selection Method

This review analyzed published research articles reporting on the transition, success and success strategies of students with any identified disability. Articles reviewed were published over a 47-year period (1973-2020). Typically, this time frame would be too extensive; however, with the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the mandate for postsecondary institutions to adhere to such, the period selected for review includes the enactment year up to current time.

Articles for this review focused on the following areas: (a) supports for disabled student success in K-12 education, (b) transition of students with disabilities from high school to college, (c) support for disabled student success in higher education, and (d) barriers to disabled student success at all levels of education. The research reviewed encompassed institutions that included public K-12 school systems, four-year public and private universities and two-year colleges.

Most literature regarding the transition of students with disabilities is broad in the sense that it encompasses all disabilities, including learning disabilities, when discussing “students with disabilities.” While this study will focus on SLD, much of the literature reviewed was general to the entire population but did include SLD as part of the population.

The research phase began with the Educational Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), Education Source, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Engine Orange. Descriptors included disability, transition, student success, and postsecondary

education. Initially, 250+ articles were located, reviewed, and assessed. From articles obtained using this method, 131 were selected for further analysis and included in this review.

Educational Opportunities for Students with a Disability

Approximately 25% of high school students with a disability will enter college upon graduation (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Adjusting to college life is difficult for all students; however, this transition is exponentially more demanding for students with disabilities as it brings about the responsibilities of managing their own accommodations in addition to their academic coursework (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). One of the main changes a student with a disability experiences is the manner in which they will receive disability services (Burdge, 2012). Students with a disability must learn the difference between the IDEA services that were put in place and required to be provided for them in high school and the ADA or Section 504 laws they must self-advocate for while in college (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009).

Studies have been conducted that focused on SLD success at the high school and higher education levels (Field, Sarver & Shaw, 2003; Harris & Robertson, 2001; Showers & Kinsman, 2017), managing the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities (Connor, 2013; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Skinner & Lidstrom, 2003), and successful post-secondary learning environments for SLD (Hadley, 2007; Harrison, 2003; Mull, Sitlington & Alper, 2001) while other studies focused on SLD's perceptions of academic success (Dowds & Phelan, 2006; Milsom & Dietz, 2009). However, there is little research that focuses on the perspectives of K-12 faculty or higher education professionals that serve students with a learning disability.

These two perspectives are important to understand as it will allow K-12 educators to better prepare SLD for the transition from high school to college and give higher education professionals the capacity to ease these students into a vastly different learning environment. A knowledge gap exists between K-12 faculty and higher education professionals around the role each other plays in the successful transition of SLD from high school to college. A study of this nature would bring to light these discrepancies and bridge two educational worlds that have historically been on different trajectories intending to accomplish identical goals. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) contended that sharing concerns of the staff at both levels of education (K-12 and higher education) would help to improve the quality of transition by students with disabilities. Bridging the transition gap from the protected, safe secondary environment to the rigorous college setting should be a priority of all transition teams serving disabled students (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

This literature review will evaluate the successful transition from secondary to postsecondary of SLD. In doing so, an in-depth analysis of Schlossberg's Transition Theory as it pertains to the transition from secondary to postsecondary education settings will be completed; the history of disabilities in the U.S. and the laws that protect educational opportunities will be reviewed; the transition from high school to higher education and the various supports available will be examined; and the barriers that students with disabilities in both the K-12 and higher education levels will be assessed.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory serves as a framework for exploring and understanding the perceptions of transitions (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This theory was established for understanding transitions and guiding people to the assistance they need to manage the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 213). Often classified as an adult development theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is also applicable to students transitioning to the collegiate level (Evans et al., 2010).

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) define transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). One's perception can have a key role in Schlossberg's theory, as a transition can only exist if the person experiencing the transition defines it as such (Goodman, et al., 2006). Transitions can have multiple outcomes that are positive, negative, or neutral (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998). One may find themselves better off than where they began, worse off, or find no significant difference is evident.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory categorizes transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. An anticipated transition, or an event that is predicted to occur, could be graduation from high school for a senior student. An unanticipated transition, or an event that is not predicted or scheduled, could be a car accident involving the same senior student. Non-event transitions are transitions that are expected to occur, but do not (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quayle, 2016). This could be the senior student expecting to gain acceptance into college only to find out their admission was not granted.

The transitions that occur for high school senior students with disabilities are anticipated transitions. These students, with the guidance of special education faculty and staff, have fulfilled all the requirements to receive their high school diploma, been assisted in filling out applications for their carefully chosen colleges, and have accepted admission to various colleges and universities. Their special education faculty and staff have given them the necessary tools to transition to higher education, and thus begins the journey of navigating their post-secondary education.

The 4 S's of Transition. Known as the 4 S's of Transition, Schlossberg identifies four major sets of factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). Resources available to help people cope with transitions may change at any time. This could explain why students facing similar circumstances experience their transitions differently (Goodman et al., 2006). It is essential for faculty and staff to keep this in mind this when working with disabled students.

Situation. Situation encapsulates the broad picture of what is occurring in a transition, why it is happening, and what it means. Schlossberg (1981) identified eight areas that are vital to fully understanding a person's transition. They include: Trigger: what led up to or caused the transition? Timing: Is the transition considered 'on-time' socially and is the transition seen as occurring at a "good" or "bad" time for the individual involved? Control: What does the individual perceive to be within their ability to control? Role Change: Does the individual have to undergo a role change and if so, is it perceived as a "gain" or a "loss"? Duration: How long will the transition take place? Previous experience: How effectively did one cope with a previous transition and how

does that affect the current transition? Concurrent stress: What other sources of anxiety are present? Assessment: What or who is seen as being responsible for the transition and how does this affect the individual experiencing the transition? (Evans et al., 1998).

One of the most prevalent challenges disabled students face is the transition from high school to college. During their high school years, disabled students have a vast support system who regularly advocate for them; while in college, disabled students are expected to self-advocate and request needed supports and accommodations. Early high school transition planning for students with disabilities is most effective in easing the timing, control, and roll change triggers that come from the transition from high school to college (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Through the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) put together by a student's ARD committee and support from college and career counselors, SLD can more adequately prepare themselves for the change. Research shows that disabled students who regularly sought counseling prior to their transition from high school to college were more successful and had a more optimistic outlook on college (Ciocco, 2011).

Self. Self refers to the internal abilities a person possesses in order to manage change. Self is divided into two categories (a) personal and demographic characteristics, and (b) psychological resources (Evans et al., 2010).

Personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity, stage of life, and state of health all affect how a person views life. Psychological resources, means that aid in coping, are ego development, life outlook (more specifically optimism and self-efficacy), commitment and values, spirituality, and resiliency (Patton et al., 2016).

With the transition from high school to college comes more independence and the ability to make more choices. This, however, is difficult for students with disabilities who are already struggling to accept the transition from high school to college. Throughout their K-12 education, disabled students have been accustomed to others advocating on their behalf (Coccarelli, 2010). At the higher education level, these students must now advocate for themselves and be able to communicate their needs in order to be successful (Layton & Lock, 2003). Helping disabled students learn self-advocacy skills early in high school can help them manage the change that comes with transitioning to a higher education setting and achieve greater success (Allen, 2010).

Support. Support encompasses the resources which a person in transition can rely and depend upon for assistance. These can be external or social supports that are available. Support during transition is vital and has the ability to influence an individual's ability to adjust to transition. Support can come from a network of friends, family units, intimate relationships, and institutions or communities the individual is involved with. The functions of the support system include affect, affirmation, aid, and providing honest feedback (Evans et al., 2010).

Students with disabilities seek and receive support from multiple individuals including family, friends, high school counselors and teachers. However, many times students do not reach out to their higher education institutions for support for fear of being labeled 'dependent' or experiencing insensitivities due to their disability (Skinner, 1998). By understanding the college supports available to them early on during their high school years, students with disabilities can become familiar with and learn to advocate for timely accommodations. This one step alone can bring about greater college success and

ease the transition stress from high school to college for students with disabilities (Allen, 2010).

Strategies. The last S in The 4 S's of Schlossberg's Transition Theory is strategies. Strategies are the methodologies individuals use to cope with change. The methods fall into three categories: (a) methods that alter the situation, (b) methods that control the meaning of the situation, and (c) methods that help in handling the anxiety that is a result of the situation (Patton et al., 2016). In addition to the methods, there are four coping mechanisms that can be employed by an individual in transition: (a) information seeking, (b) direct action, (c) inhibition of action, or (d) intrapsychic behavior. Those who cope effectively with change will exhibit flexibility and utilize multiple strategies and coping mechanisms during transitions (Evans et al., 2010).

Students with disabilities may have trouble utilizing previously learned coping skills during transitions in life, especially one as dramatic as the move into higher education. They may look to counselors or to their support system for strategies that best fit their transitional needs as a student with a disability (Skinner, 1998). To help make the transition from high school to college easier, it is important for students with disabilities to learn flexibility and have multiple strategies available to them to manage the stress of college transition (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

By understanding Schlossberg's Transition theory, we are able to better grasp the difficulties and challenges that students face when transitioning from high school to higher education and, in turn, better direct them to the needed services and supports to aid them in their transition. Because disabled students look to their institutions for guidance on the issues they face around their transition (Hadley, 2011), it is imperative that

educators at both the secondary and higher education levels have an understanding of the history and laws that safeguard students within K-12 and higher education institutions.

History of Disabilities in the U.S.

There are many legal mandates that act as a safeguard for students with disabilities. These mandates vary greatly as K-12 education is compulsory and every student must be served, while higher education is discretionary, and many students will not qualify to receive services (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). These mandates change based upon the phase of a student's life. From birth to high school graduation, or age 21, students fall under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 and its subsequent amendments in 1997 and 2004. While students with disabilities are enrolled in public school systems, their educational rights are guaranteed whereby schools must identify students and provide appropriate programs and educational accommodations (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). K-12 students may also be covered under the Section 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which guarantees students are not denied access to education based solely upon their disability, and they are given equal access to educational opportunities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1999).

When students transition to postsecondary education, they then become safeguarded under Subpart E of Section 504 as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (Madaus, 2005). Section 504 was the first regulation applied to higher education for students with disabilities. This mandate required post-secondary institutions to provide access and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities while safeguarding them from discrimination based upon their disability (Rehabilitation

Act, 1973). This civil rights law was reinforced by the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law a piece of legislation guaranteeing all students with a disability the right to a free and appropriate public education that would meet their individualized need as a person with a disability, protect their rights as a person with a disability, and protect the students' parental rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Public Law (PL) 94-142 was designed to improve the method in which children with disabilities were identified and educated (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2000). PL 94-192 became known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (IDEA, 2004).

In 1990, PL 94-192 went through an amendment process that resulted in a change in name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 or IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990). Furthermore, this revision added mandates that at age 14, a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) would include an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) to aid high school students in the transition to post-secondary life (University of Kansas, 2020). This law was amended again in 1997 to include access to the general curriculum for all students (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997) and reauthorized by Congress in 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The latter amendment included the word 'Improvement' and the law would become known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (U.S. Office of Special Programs, 2000).

The laws of IDEA apply to students in Kindergarten through graduation from high school. Public schools are required to provide evaluations and services to disabled students during this time. These evaluations and services are documented in a student's IEP and are agreed upon by an IEP team consisting of the student, the parents, school administrators, educators representing general education and special education, and a transition specialist (Kauffman, 2005). The IEP is a formal contract that outlines the services and supports a school is required by law to provide a student with a disability in order for the child to benefit from the educational programming (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019). It must be reviewed and updated annually as long as the student remains eligible for special education services.

IDEA recognized the need for decisions regarding transition to be made around the student's interests and preferences (Rowe, 2004). Therefore, the IDEA 2004 stated that,

beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16 and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include (1) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and (2) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. (IDEA, 2004)

All of these mandates remain intact for students with disabilities. However, once a student graduates, the protections under IDEA are terminated. As students transition into higher education, Section 504 and ADA protections are afforded, however, at a lesser standard than that of IDEA.

Section 504 and Americans with Disabilities Act. In 1973, the first federal civil rights protection for people with a disability was signed into legislation. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 says, “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall solely on the basis of his handicap, be excluded from the participation, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). Section 504 was based on previous civil rights laws that originally protected women and minorities. Society had placed a longstanding negative stereotype on people with a disability; so much so that even persons with a disability themselves did not realize the hardships they faced in their daily lives was a result of societal prejudice and discrimination (Cone, 1993). Cone (1993) goes on to say that “If I thought about why I couldn’t attend a university that was inaccessible, I would have said it was because I couldn’t walk, my own personal problem” (p. 1). Prior to the enactment of Section 504, the concern of the effects of a disability rested solely with the person with a disability rather than being a public responsibility. Section 504 radically changed that perception both legally and societally.

Today, Section 504 ensures educational institutions are not discriminating against students due to their disabilities. This law also allows for reasonable accommodations to be provided to disabled students in order to gain equitable access to programs, services, facilities, and activities. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) defines reasonable accommodations as ones in which the school does not have to change the basic structure of the program or succumb to unjustifiable financial exigencies. These accommodations

could include reduced assignments, providing hard copies of class notes, extending time for students to take assessments, equipping computers with speech to text software, or providing students with an alternate place to test.

The addition of Section 504 into the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 accomplished what previous attempts at providing protections for Americans with disabilities could not (Wilcher, 2018). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a turning point in the history of disability rights. Most of the safeguards enacted under Section 504 were eventually expanded to be inclusive of all public service organizations regardless of whether or not they received federal funds by the authorization of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Mayerson, 1992).

First introduced in 1988 during the 100th congress and prompted by a draft bill organized by the National Council on Disability, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) went through multiple drafts, edits, discussions, and amendments to get to the version in existence today (Mayerson, 1992). The ADA was signed into law in 1990 by President George H.W. Bush and banned the discrimination of people based upon a disability in the areas of employment, public accommodations, public services, transportation and telecommunications (Department of Justice, 2010). The foundational legislation of the ADA protected the rights of citizens regardless of race, color, or creed. Since that time, safeguards have been extended to include women and older Americans. However, with the passage of Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, this legislation brought about educational protections to individuals with disabilities which had not previously been provided (Gordon & Keiser, 1998).

Today, the ADA ensures that persons who are otherwise qualified for educational opportunities or jobs will not be denied access solely on the basis of an identified disability. What it does not guarantee is that a person with a disability will find success in their educational endeavors or potential job (Gordon & Keiser, 1998). ADA is a civil rights law. Except for accessibility to buildings and modification or accommodations in testing, the ADA provides limited safeguards and minimal assistance to students with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2017).

Differences between IDEA and Section 504 or ADA. An important facet in the transition from high school to college for a student with a disability is understanding the protections and safeguards that are in place for them. The laws that covered students with disabilities and the provisions afforded to them in K-12 public schools are vastly different compared to those that apply in higher education (Scott, 1991), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1*IDEA in K-12 versus Section 504 & ADA in Higher Education*

	IDEA (K-12)	Section 504 & ADA (Higher Education)
Who is eligible?	All K-12 students with an identified disability until they graduate from high school or turn 21 (whichever comes first).	All students with a disability, provided they meet admission and enrollment requirement of their institution.
What rights are guaranteed?	Access to free, appropriate public education (FAPE).	Protection from discrimination solely based upon a disability.
How is a disability assessed?	K-12 public school is responsible for identification and evaluation of students.	Students are required to provide documentation of disability to their higher education institution.
How are accommodations made?	K-12 public school develops and follows a student's IEP.	Student must initiate request for accommodations to their institution's disability office.
Who is responsible to provide specialized equipment should it be needed?	K-12 public schools will distribute all necessary devices and aids.	Students are responsible for securing any needed devices or aids.
Is there parental involvement?	Yes, parents are actively involved in the process.	No, students over 18 are considered adults according to the law.
What happens if a school violates a student's rights?	There is an appeal process or legal action may be sought.	There is an appeal process or legal action may be sought.

Note. Adapted from "The Americans with Disabilities Act and Your Rights as a College Student" as presented on studentcaffe in May 2019 and retrieved from <http://studentcaffe.com/prepare/students-with-disabilities/ada-your-rights-college-student>

Section 504 and the ADA replace the protections of disabled students in K-12 education since IDEA does not apply to students in post-secondary studies. These laws are

primarily anti-discrimination laws rather than explicit education laws that allow for equal access to an education and ensure schools do not discriminate against students based upon their disability (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

If students with a disability meet academic or other standards for higher education admission, they must be considered for enrollment (Madaus, 2011), cannot be graded poorly, or treated any differently than that of their non-disabled peers based solely upon their disabling condition (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Section 504 also prohibits discrimination in the areas of athletics, exams and assessments, housing, financial aid and counseling (West et al., 1993). Students may, however, seek reasonable accommodations from their institution's Office of Disability Services in order to gain equitable access to their higher education academics and programs (Legal Aid at Work, 2020). This all differs greatly from the guaranteed, legally bound safeguards required for students under IDEA in public K-12 education systems.

Transition from High School to College

One of the most pivotal transitions for students with disabilities is the transition from high school to postsecondary education due to the impact of a college education on a person's future (Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009). The number of students with a disability enrolling in postsecondary education is on the rise (Harrison, 2003). In 2003 to 2004, 11.3% of undergraduates reported having a disability (NCES, 2007). Most recently in 2015 to 2016, 19.4% of undergraduate students reported having a disability (NCES, 2019). Although there have been multiple laws put into place to ensure equitable access to a postsecondary education by providing accommodations to students with disabilities,

these students are not graduating at levels commiserate with that of their non-disabled peers (Showers & Kinsman, 2017).

While higher education enrollment for students with disabilities continues to rise, many students do not avail themselves to the disability services institutions provide or even know how to access them (Gil, 2007). One study by Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte and Trice (2012) revealed that SLD who did not immediately seek disability services upon their enrollment to a college or university felt there was not sufficient time to go through the process of accessing services. Burdge (2012) cited multiple reasons disabled students did not seek disability services including no longer feeling their disability affected their learning, not wanting to disclose an identified disability, and not having adequate time to pursue services. Peters (2011) suggested students with a learning disability may not have the necessary skills to properly advocate for themselves, thereby impeding their ability to acquire needed services.

One of the main changes a student with a disability experiences is the process by which they receive disability services (Burdge, 2012). Students with a learning disability must understand the difference between the IDEA services they were provided in high school and the ADA or Section 504 laws they must advocate for while in college (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009). SLD who do not completely grasp the disparities between accommodations at the secondary and postsecondary levels may begin to falter, resulting in substandard academic performance (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Gil, 2007). Many students with a disability do not realize the need to disclose their disability and request accommodations (Novakovic & Ross, 2015). This is primarily because transition services in K-12 education systems focus on the curriculum students need to move on to

higher education rather than developing the necessary skills required to be successful (Burdge, 2012), such as knowledge of their disability, self-advocacy, and the ability to convey to disability services' staff the accommodations needed to ensure their successful academic performance (Boyd-Bradwell, 2014).

All students advancing from high school to college will face some type of challenge related to their transition. For the first time, students are experiencing an independence from their family which is unlike anything they have ever experienced before (Conley, 2007). When students step into classrooms, the student-teacher relationships, relationships between peers, as well as the expectations for student engagement and class work will all be much different. Outside of the classroom, students are expected to be independent, self-motivated learners who acknowledge when they are struggling and know when and how to seek assistance (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). Compound these changes with a learning disability such as attention deficit disorder or dyslexia and a picture develops of the challenges a student with a learning disability may face. On top of acquiring skills to adjust socially and academically, students with a learning disability must understand and be able to adequately communicate about their disability, learn to self-advocate, and learn which accommodations to ask for and ensure they are implemented. Disabled students must learn to use a plethora of strategies, from learning strategies to coping strategies, to be successful in their higher education journey (Conley, 2007).

Successful Transition for all Students. Students who are academically and socially involved early on in their college career experience a smoother transition into college and are more likely to be successful in higher education (Tinto, 1998). Research shows that while the rigor of high school curriculum weighs heavily into the determination of a high school student's successful transition into college (Adelman, 2002), there are many other factors that contribute to this transitional success (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005) such as academic advisement, college orientation, and first-year experience courses (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Pascarella (2005) found that admission counselors, teachers, and family members also largely contribute to student's successful transition to college. A study by Kim and Schneider (2005) concurs with Pascarella's findings in that parental support helps to facilitate successful transition to college for all students.

Conley (2007) studied 38 high schools that successfully prepared students to transition to college. He focused specifically on competencies that affected a student's performance and he came up with four that students should have to achieve college success including (a) cognitive strategies, (b) content knowledge, (c) self-management skills, and (d) knowledge of postsecondary education. Conley (2007) reported that colleges expect students to be higher level thinkers and have good cognitive skills. He contended that students will find more success if they can,

formulate, investigate, and propose solutions to nonroutine problems; understand and analyze conflicting explanations of phenomena or events; evaluate the credibility and utility of source material and then integrate sources into a paper or project appropriately; think analytically and logically, comparing and contrasting

differing philosophies, methods, and positions to understand an issue or concept; and exercise precision and accuracy as they apply their methods and develop their products. (p. 7)

Conley (2007) built upon this strategy by finding that students who transitioned well and were successful had a good grasp of content knowledge. As such, students were able to take key concepts and organizing principles and make connections to the big ideas being presented. This competency allowed student's learning to be scaffolded and built upon in their postsecondary education thus leading to successful student outcomes.

The third competency Conley (2007) identified was effective self-management skills. In college, students are inundated with information around deadlines and priorities. Students had to know how to organize themselves and schedule their time in order to fulfill all their student responsibilities. This included how to study independently as well as with a group, when to seek assistance from college support services, and even when to drop a course. This competency did not develop quickly, required much practice, and usually came with many rounds of trial and error.

The last competency Conley (2007) revealed was knowledge of postsecondary education. This encompassed choosing an institution, applying for admissions, acquiring financial aid, and then making the transition to college life. All of these required specialized knowledge and skills such as understanding the financial aid system, when to fill out application and documents to meet deadlines, entrance exam timing, and perhaps most important, the ability to recognize the differences between high school and college.

Making the transition from secondary to postsecondary educations is an arduous process. Navigating it successfully requires a solid foundation that must be started earlier

than a student's final year in high school and includes a strong academic background, skills to manage themselves in a more independent setting, a working knowledge of their institution, and a network of support from counselors, teachers, professors, admission officers, academic advisors, friends, family and a student's community (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2008).

Successful Transition for Students with Learning Disabilities. Secondary to postsecondary transition is difficult for most students, but even more so for those students with a learning disability (Lipka et al., 2020). Couple under preparedness with any type of disability, more specifically a learning disability, and students are at a severe deficit for achieving success in postsecondary education. In order for a student with a learning disability to be successful, it is imperative that strategies are put into place during different phases in the student's life. That is why transition strategies and services are so important. Students, however, cannot stop after their transition. SLD must continue to acquire new strategies to utilize during their enrollment in higher education.

To identify strategies that facilitate the academic success of college students with a learning disability, Skinner (2004) looked at what it takes to be a successful SLD in postsecondary education. Results identified eight major themes that contributed such success. Those strategies were student's knowledge of their disability, evaluations pertaining to their disability, and laws that protects students with disabilities. Then there is the importance of self-advocacy, available accommodations and which ones are appropriate for their needs, structured support systems, self-perseverance, and the importance of goal setting.

In line with Skinner's (2004) study, Dowds and Phelan (2006) identified several common themes as to what students with a learning disability felt contributed to their academic success. Those attributes were competition, curiosity, goal setting, knowledge and use of available resources, perseverance, self-awareness, time management, and support systems. Of all the qualities, participants conveyed self-awareness as the major factor that contributed to their success. Self-awareness allowed students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and subsequently utilize their strengths to overcome their weaknesses, thus achieving their desired academic outcome.

Three years later, Milsom and Dietz (2009) examined the college transitional success of SLD by generating an all-inclusive list of sources that contributed to such. Some of the highest rated items (i.e., confidence, persistence, self-determination, self-discipline) were not academic skills but personal characteristics that showed a student's drive and determination despite their learning disability. The next set of rated skills were those dealing with self-knowledge and understanding what accommodations were available and pertinent to their individual needs as a student with a learning disability. The third area of the top skills were success skills such as knowledge and willingness to self-advocate. The last of the identified readiness skills were grouped as academic skills. These were attributes such as time-management, study skills, and the knowledge that college is different than high school (Milsom & Dietz, 2009).

In line with Skinner (2004), Dowds and Phelan (2006), and Milsom and Dietz (2009), Conner (2013) identified attributes that SLD felt contributed to their academic success. Connor (2013) concluded that personal attributes such as using student's strengths and managing weaknesses, developing positive academic traits such as focused

study habits, and internal and external motivating forces all contributed to the postsecondary success of SLD.

Showers and Kinsman (2017) tested the relationships between family background and student attributes and how they contributed to the postsecondary success of SLD. The researchers demonstrated that a student's family background had a strong influence on a student's personal attributes, which had a direct correlation to their postsecondary success. Showers and Kinsman (2017) contended that this information is helpful to institutions as they are not able to manipulate factors such as family background or student attributes, but programs can be put in place to better support SLD during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers face similar challenges when transitioning from high school to college (Lipka et al., 2020). However, SLD face additional challenges that come about as a result of having a disability. What most researchers seem to agree upon as a major factor that contributes to the transition success of SLD from high school to college is self-determination (Skinner, 2004; Dowds & Phelan, 2006; Milsom & Dietz, 2009; Conner, 2013; Showers & Kinsman, 2017). Moore and McNaught (2014) define self-determination as "the behavioral characteristics that are made up of decision-making, problem-solving, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy, self-awareness and self-regulation" (p. 247). While these skills are ones all students should possess to ease the stress of transition from high school to college, it is imperative for SLD to be taught these skills and put them into practice to ensure success during that pivotal time.

Profiles of Students with Disabilities

Types of Disabilities. All students have very different needs as they transition from high school to college. This is no different for students with disabilities. It is even more important to consider a student's type of disability, such as a learning disability, when determining the best individualized accommodations to aid them in their transition and subsequent coursework. This section will address the laws differentiating between supports for K-12 special education students and higher education disabled students; types of disabilities; graduation rates of student with disabilities; institutional enrollments by students with disabilities; and the educational impact of a student with a disability.

According to the 2000 Census, 50 million Americans, approximately 19% of the population, reported having some type of disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Of those 19%, approximately 4% reported a visual or auditory impairment; 8% reported a physical condition; 5% reported a learning disability that limited their ability to concentrate, remember or learn; and 3% had a mental or emotional condition (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

While census data is valuable for reporting disability statistics within the overall general population of the United States, there are limitations of the data when exploring educational opportunities for students with disabilities as disability categories are not consistent between secondary and postsecondary education. For example, in secondary education, a speech impairment/language impairment is a recognized disability category and requires services for students. In postsecondary education, speech impairment is not a recognized disability category and thus would fall under the category of "Other Health

Impairment.” Despite the limitations of the census data, the extent to which disabilities exist in the United States can still be accurately depicted.

The IDEA law requires disabled K-12 students under the age of 21 to be served by programs receiving federal funding. These federally supported programs for students with disabilities have seen steady increases in numbers of students served in recent years (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). In 2000, approximately 6 million, or 13% of school students, were served in federally funded programs due to a disability. In 2018, that number climbed to over 7 million or 14% (NCES, 2019). This increase can be attributed to higher incidences of disabilities, more advanced testing and disability identification measures, and greater compliance with federal regulations around services for students with disabilities. Disability categories as well as percentages of students receiving that specific diagnosis are listed in Table 2.

Table 2*Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Disability Category*

Disability Diagnosis	Diagnosis Percentage
Autism	1.5%
Developmental Delay	1%
Emotional Disturbance	1%
Intellectual Disability	1%
Other Health Impairment (asthma, diabetes, heart conditions)	2%
Speech or language impairment	3%
Specific Learning disability (dyslexia, dysgraphia, reading comprehension deficit)	5%
Deaf-blindness, hearing impairment, physical impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment	<1%

Note: Table adapted from National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. (2019). NCES 2019-144: *The condition of education 2019*.

As students transition from K-12 to postsecondary education, IDEA has a requirement that all students with a disability have a transition plan as part of their IEP to help prepare students for higher education, the workforce, or to live independently (IDEA, 2004). While the majority of students with disabilities have been shown to enter the workforce directly after high school, there is still a large number that choose postsecondary education as their next step (USGAO, 2009). In 2000, high school graduates with a disability enrolled in higher education at a lower rate than that of their non-disabled peers at 73% and 84% respectively (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). As noted in Table 3, a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) indicated that in

2013, 64% of high school students served under IDEA enrolled in higher education institutions. This is a 9% decrease from 13 years prior.

Table 3

Enrollment in Higher Education by Students with Disabilities, by Type of Institution

Type of institution	Percentage of students enrolled
4-year institution	18%
Private or Non-profit 4-year institution	8%
2-year public or private non-profit institution	30%
< 2-year public or private non-profit institution	2%
For profit institution	6%

While there are many students with disabilities who graduate high school and continue on to college, very few (9% of the disabled student population) reported their disability to their higher education institution (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2000). Of students who did report their disability, those percentages are noted in Table 4 by disability type.

Table 4

Disabled Students who Reported Having a Disability to their Institution, by Disability Type Reported

Disability type reported	Percentage of students reporting disability
Physical Disability	29%
Mental Disability	17%
Other Health Impairment	15%
Hearing Impairment	7%
Attention Deficit Disorder	6%
Visual Impairment	5%
Learning Disability	5%

A person's disability has the potential to significantly impact their daily routines. For persons with a physical disability, this can mean a limited ability to navigate places that those without a disability can freely access. For those with a mental disability, this may make leaving the house a task that requires extra planning and positive self-talk to accomplish. For persons with a learning disability tasks like focusing, reading, writing and remembering become more arduous. While most disabilities seem to have a single limiting factor that is based upon the specific disability, all disabilities, whether physical, mental, or cognitive limit a person's ability to access higher education in the same manner as that of their non-disabled peers.

IDEA (2018) defines a specific learning disability as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in

the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Since these deficits are primarily evident in the academic world, they have the potential to significantly inhibit a student's academic ability and their performance. Students with a learning disability can have difficulties in reading (Runyan, 1991), written expression (Vogel & Adelman, 1992), and math (Dunn 1995). These difficulties may manifest themselves in a reading comprehension disability, reading fluency disability, dyscalculia (inability to understand math concepts), dyslexia (letter reversals and lack of language comprehension), and dysgraphia (difficulty in forming letters). Other learning disabilities, although their affect is not limited to the academic setting, include Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Jessamy, 2012).

Impact on Education by Disabilities. Students with disabilities continue to seek higher education opportunities and are faced with many challenges. These challenges can be difficult for all students with disabilities but are evident on a greater scale for those students with a learning disability as their disabilities become even more apparent in the academic realm, thus impeding the student's academic capacity and performance (Butler, 2011). Harrison (2004) defines SLD as individuals with disabilities who are intellectually sound individuals yet have varying degrees of academic difficulties in one or more areas of reading, writing, mathematics, listening, speaking, and reasoning. These academic deficits could create struggles with organizational skills, social skills, and formation of perspectives (Harrison, 2004). SLD can also be easily distracted, have subpar time-

management skills, and have difficulty understanding and following directions (Barga, 1996).

SLD also face the challenge of adjusting to college responsibilities. They are moving from high school, where they were more dependent upon others for services regarding their disability, to higher education where they must take an active role in advocating for needed supports (Hadley, 2009). Past research has found that SLD in higher education are not prone to seek out support from their institutions or instructors (Trammell & Hathaway, 2007). Many times, this is because students do not adequately understand their disability and how it affects their academic performance (Brickerhoff, 1996).

If SLD do not adequately adjust to their new setting, many face the risk of dropping out (Adams & Proctor, 2010). Research suggests SLD in higher education graduate at lesser rates than that of their non-disabled peers. In a study conducted by Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000), 80% of SLD did not graduate within five years of completing high school compared to 56% of their non-disabled peers. Ten years after graduation, 56% of SLD had not graduated compared to 32% of non-disabled students. Differences also exist between students with and without disabilities in the types of degree that each group attains and where those degree were earned (Table 5).

Table 5*Percentage of Degrees Attained by Disability Status and First Institution Attended*

	None	Certificate	Associates	Bachelors
Total	48.5	12.3	10.3	28.9
Non-disabled	47.7	12.5	10.0	29.8
Disability	57.7	12.7	14.7	15.0
Public, 4-year				
Non-disabled	39.2	2.6	4.1	54.1
Disability	55.5	8.9	7.6	28.0
Private, 4-year				
Non-disabled	26.2	1.9	2.9	69.1
Disability	33.8	1.0	2.4	62.8
Public, 2-year				
Non-disabled	62.9	10.6	16.0	10.5
Disability	68.1	6.4	21.6	3.9
Other Institutions				
Non-disabled	38.3	49.6	9.8	2.3
Disability	46.4	43.5	9.4	0.7

While this data encompasses students with any type of disability, it should be noted that SLD face additional challenges within the postsecondary education setting that can reduce their rate of degree attainment over a student with a mobility disability or a

speech disability. Of significance is the number of disabled students who attain a bachelor's degree at a private institution. This number could be attributed to smaller professor to student ratios and students being more comfortable in disclosing their disability. Additionally, there tends to be more interactions amongst peers in a smaller campus setting. Numbers of this magnitude can give students with disabilities a confidence boost in knowing that they have equitable opportunities for achieving their degree at a private institution as that of their non-disabled peers.

A research study on the beliefs and attitudes of postsecondary service providers found that 35% believe SLD transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education have been over-accommodated at the secondary level (Wolforth & Harrison, 2008). For SLD who do persist through the transition from high school to college, many still find a need for academic supports and accommodations.

In order to receive accommodations in higher education, SLD must first self-identify as a student with a learning disability with their institution's Office of Disability Services (Hadley, 2007). Most institutions then require students to submit documentation of their learning disability prior to being considered for accommodations or support services. However, many do not specify the requirements for what the documentation must contain, nor the guidelines of what testing must be included for diagnosis of the learning disability (Madaus, Banerjee & Hamblet, 2010). A 2011 report from the National Center for Education Statistics disclosed that 88% of 2- and 4-year colleges in the U.S. had enrolled students with disabilities in 2008-2009. While a multiplicity of disabilities was disclosed by students, the majority of the reported disabilities were learning disabilities. This report cited the most widely utilized accommodations in higher

education were note-taking assistance, extended time on exams, or varied assessment formats. The main difference noted between the accommodation's SLD received in high school and their accommodations in higher education was that in college, SLD were required to self-advocate for their accommodations whereas in high school they were provided automatically (NCES, 2011).

A disability, and more specifically a learning disability, has many impacts on a student's postsecondary educational experience. Not only must SLD learn to adjust to new set of rules that comes with their increased independence, they also must learn to navigate the disability services system in order to self-identify as a student with a learning disability. If they find success in these areas and are able to persist through to the classroom, SLD must then self-advocate to receive their approved accommodations from their professors. SLD will face many of the same challenges moving from high school to college as their non-disabled peers. However, SLD face a compounded task due to the complexity of managing higher education and their learning disability simultaneously.

Support for Students with Learning Disabilities Success

The number of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education has increased exponentially over the last three decades (Barnard-Beck, Lechtenbergen & Williams, 2010). With this surge in numbers of students with disabilities entering college, there becomes an increased need for supports and accommodations for these students. These needed supports are dependent upon the individual's unique makeup and characteristics. Research has cited a robust support community as one of the key factors in the success of students with disabilities at the higher education level (Lock & Layton, 2001; Paul, 2000). Literature points to a number of sources that SLD can turn to for

support including their institutions, family, as well as the self-supports they have been learning throughout their life as a student with a learning disability.

Supports Instilled by K-12 Institutions. K-12 systems are bound by the IDEA laws to identify students with potential disabilities, administer assessments to determine eligibility to receive special education services, and provide services up through graduation or the age of 21, whichever comes first (IDEA, 2004). Almost all (98%) of K-12 special education students receive at least one disability-based accommodation and 59% receive at least one modification (Newman & Madaus, 2015). McLaughlin (2012) defines an accommodation as a support that neither changes the content nor reduces the academic achievement expectation for a student with a disability, whereas a modification makes such changes. Accommodations and modifications in the K-12 system are decided upon by an IEP team consisting of a group of educators and the student's parents with minimal involvement by the student (Martin, Portley & Graham, 2010).

Norris and Vasquez (1998) and Smith (1998) categorize accommodations into three broad areas: curricular, pedagogical, and technological. Curricular accommodations group students with disabilities together with the same instructor and provide training to teachers on how to effectively provide instruction to students with a disability in their classrooms such as in K-12 special education inclusion classrooms. Pedagogical accommodations alter how a student with a disability completes their assignments or assessments. For students with a learning disability, these could be accommodations such as use of a learning support center, alternate testing location, extended testing time, oral testing, or note-taking assistance. Technological accommodations are those advances in

technology that students can utilize to access the curriculum or instruction such as books on tape, audio recorders, or magnification devices.

One of the main differences in the supports and accommodations of the K-12 system and postsecondary institutions is the structure of the support system. The supports in the K-12 realm are highly structured due to legal requirements of IDEA and the mandate of having IEPs for students with disabilities (Harris & Robertson, 2001). However, some of the differences are also philosophical in that K-12 special education teachers typically provide an environment that is more nurturing and supportive of students with disabilities than that of the postsecondary realm. Many SLD become accustomed to the freely provided, mandated supports of the K-12 special education system which causes them to experience greater difficulties upon their transition into a more rigorous and less structured postsecondary environment (Coccarelli, 2010). This transition difficulty is a byproduct of the legal requirements of K-12 institutions to identify the need for, decide upon, and provide services to SLD versus the higher education civil rights legislation requiring students to self-advocate for their needed learning accommodations at the postsecondary level.

These studies are important as they provide insight into the required supports K-12 SLD are accustomed to receiving. These studies also help to explain why students who avail themselves to academic supports at the secondary level do not continue to do so in higher education. What these studies fail to address is a solution to help SLD understand the need to self-advocate in order to continue to receive services related to their learning disability at the postsecondary level.

Supports Instilled by Higher Education Institutions. Upon a SLD's high school graduation, their protections under IDEA ends. Higher education institutions are expected to provide SLD equitable opportunities to engage in the higher education experience as their non-disabled peers do (NCES, 2009). However, ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to programming and are able to fully participate in their higher education experience has been identified as one of the top challenges in the future of postsecondary education and in the transition for these students (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2003). Students with disabilities are required to attain the same admission standards as students without disabilities, as higher education institutions are not required to lower their admission standards; institutions only need to provide accommodations to ensure equitable access for students with disabilities (United States Government Accountability Office, 2010). At the postsecondary level, students with learning disabilities are covered by civil rights legislation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This legislation states:

No qualified handicapped student shall, on the basis of handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any academic, research, occupational training, housing, health insurance, counseling, financial aid, physical education, athletics, recreation, transportation, other extracurricular, or other postsecondary education aid, benefits, or services to which this subpart applies (§104.43(a)).

Under such legislation colleges must provide academic adjustments or accommodations to student with disabilities to ensure their access both physically and instructionally (Office for Civil Rights, 2007). The legislation goes on to specify that postsecondary

institutions must provide accommodations for student assessments to ensure that students are evaluated based upon their achievement level and not the impact of their disability and “impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills” (§104.43(c)). This could be provided as a reduced course load or extended testing time for a student with a learning disability (Office of Civil Rights, 2007). Postsecondary institutions must also provide SLD with educational aids or services. This might be in the form of note-taking assistance, recorded texts, ability to use recording devices, speech to text devices, and other adaptive computer technologies (§104.43(d)).

Another provision often provided by a postsecondary institution is the availability of a learning support center. A 2010 study by Troiano, Liefeld, and Trachtenberg was conducted to determine if there was a connection between usage of learning support systems by SLD and college success. More specifically, the study looked at whether two predictors (the amount of time spent in a learning support center and a student’s gender) could be a predictor of college graduation. Findings indicated that SLD who consistently attended sessions in a learning support center had higher rates of success (graduation) than those who either did not attend or did not attend regularly. These results support the theory that the degree of learning support is a good predictor of college success (graduation) in students with a learning disability. Moreover, students who attended on a regular basis tended to have higher grade point averages than students who did not attend or attended inconsistently. This study supports the need for supports and accommodations for SLD at the higher education level.

Family Supports. One of the most important factors in a SLD's successful transition from high school to college is family support, especially support of a parent (NCES, 2010; Gardner, Chapman, Donaldson & Jacobson, 1998). The substantial role families fulfill in the lives of college students with disabilities is iterated over and over again in disability studies as students rely on their families for support and services they fail to receive elsewhere (Stodden & Conway, 2002). Parents and family members are an essential part of the vast support system SLD require to succeed in higher education.

Getzel and Thomas (2008) reiterated the imperative role parents played in the lives of students with disabilities "by encouraging, supporting, and understanding them and the issues they face in college" (p. 81). While still underscoring the significant and encouraging role parents played in their student's college life, Dorwick, Anderson, Heyer and Acosta (2005) ascertained that some family members can be too supportive and overbearing which may have a negative impact and discourage students with disabilities from pursuing postsecondary studies. This is understandable as many parents have been involved in supporting their SLD and their educational goals since they entered special education services; yet, no one ever asks parents where they see their student within the next five years (Ankeny, Wilkins & Spain, 2009). This leaves parents devoid of being able to provide the proper level of support as their student transitions from high school to college because plans for doing so were never discussed or implemented.

Parents have an imperative role in the transition process for SLD. They are usually relied upon to maintain a student's past evaluation records, expected to help teach their SLD organizational skills, and give their student opportunities to understand and practice self-reliance and personal advocacy skills. These skills can enrich a student's

progress. Until a SLD gains confidence in their independence, it is usually their parents who they will turn to most for direction and advice (Georgallis, 2015).

Student Self-Supports. In recent years, there has been a move to further develop postsecondary programs and supports for SLD in higher education (Hart, Zimbrich & Parker, 2005). But even before SLD seek out programs and supports from their perspective institution, they must have developed within themselves a set of personal skills to aid their own success. These must be skills such as an understanding of their disability, knowledge of the laws concerning their disability, ability to convey information regarding needed accommodations, and self-advocacy skills (Skinner, 2004).

Adapting to higher education is difficult for all students, but even more so for a student with a learning disability who is not aware how their disability affects them and their educational experience (Milson & Hartley, 2005). In order for SLD to have a good understanding of their disability, they must begin early on in their K-12 setting taking an active role in their transition planning (Connor, 2012; Hughes & Carter, 2011). Bringing awareness of a student's own disability is a necessary and integral part of discussions in IEP meetings (Townsend, 1995). Much effort should be placed on making students aware of their disability and how it impacts their learning (Hildreth, 2013; Pocock et al., 2002). This awareness will not only aid a student with a learning disability in their college life, but it will also assist them past higher education into future employment.

As students are able to understand how their learning disability impacts their educational experience, they must also gain the knowledge around the laws that safeguard them and grant them equitable access to their education (Skinner, 2004). In the K-12 system, it was not necessary for SLD to understand the IDEA laws governing their

education as these pieces of legislation were mandated for all students with disabilities. That is not the case in higher education. SLD at the postsecondary level are subject to being safeguarded by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but only if the student has knowledge that they must self-identify as a student with a disability and request accommodations with their institution's Office of Disability Services (Hadley, 2007). Only then does a student have protection and a guarantee of equal access to their education as a student with a learning disability.

Self-advocating requires a behavioral shift on the part of the SLD from an inactive and reliant role to that of an active and more independent one (Hadley, 2009). Self-advocacy skills will allow a SLD to effectively convey to their institution their needed accommodations (Wehmeyer, 1995). Under IDEA, the K-12 institution and a student's parents were the advocates, and it was their responsibility to ensure supports were provided to SLD. In higher education under Section 504 and ADA, the student with a learning disability carries the primary responsibility for advocating for their needed accommodations and education supports (Gordon & Keisler, 2006; Walpole & Chaskes, 2011). Self-advocacy is a difficult shift for many students with a learning disability as most have become familiar with the very structured K-12 special education environment and therefore do not transition well to the less structured and more rigorous higher education setting (Coccarelli, 2010).

Higher education is expected to provide students with disabilities equitable opportunities to a rigorous and engaging postsecondary experience (NCES, 2010). However, intuitions are not required to alter their recruitment efforts or lower their admission standards for students with disabilities (USGAO, 2009). Therefore, it is the

collaborative responsibility of the SLD's K-12 institution to adequately prepare them for transition; the responsibility of the student's postsecondary institution to provide opportunities for accommodations in higher education; the responsibility of the student's family to encourage and support their efforts as they transition to and persist in higher education; and the student's responsibility to be a self-advocate and speak up for their own needs that will aid them in finding success in higher education.

Barriers to Students with Learning Disabilities Success

The National Council on Disability (2004) reported:

...it should come as no surprise that an overwhelming number of [students] with disabilities are under educated, under qualified for today's job market or unemployed, and underprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education (p. 23).

The transition from the secondary to postsecondary setting and the differences between the two systems in terms of supports for SLD creates additional challenges for these students. There are many common barriers that SLD face as they move through the K-12 special education system and into the higher education realm such as negative attitudes from faculty and staff, stereotyping, and inaccessibility (Copfer-Terreberry, 2017). However, there are additional barriers that students face that are unique to the K-12 and postsecondary settings.

Barriers in K-12 Education. Parents of student with disabilities play a key role in ensuring success for SLD in the K-12 special education system. While IDEA safeguards SLD in the K-12 educational environment, research shows that these students and their parents still face hardships when seeking support and services at the primary and secondary levels. One of the main reasons cited is that students with disabilities in

the K-12 education system receive diminished special education services due to lack of funding or inadequate funding (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). Many public K-12 school systems battle with managing the rising costs of providing special education supports and services and thus may begin to propose what services they can provide from a financial standpoint versus what they should ethically do to support and enhance a disabled student's educational experience (Leiter & Krauss, 2004).

Another barrier cited in research for SLD in the K-12 system is lack of parent knowledge or ability to sufficiently advocate for their student. Parental advocacy may require parents to develop a stern disposition which is contrary to their daily demeanor and is not always comfortable, but necessary to ensure their student receives services and supports (Allen & Hudd, 1987). Parents, however, may be hesitant to demand the services their student needs for fear of jeopardizing relationships with the school or special education staff (Engel, 1991). Even if parents are able to adapt a more demanding attitude, that may be to no avail if they do not have adequate knowledge of supports that are available to their student or are not aware of their rights to ask for such services (Silverstein, Springer & Russo, 1992). A research study by Plunge and Kratochwill (1995) found that 20% of parents were unaware that K-12 school systems should be providing related services such as counseling and transportation to their student. While many parents are willing to advocate for their student with a learning disability, some are not able as they do not possess the level of knowledge required to confidently demand the necessary services for their student.

Barriers in Higher Education. When a student with learning disabilities transitions from K-12 to higher education, the educational barriers that existed at the secondary level do not go away, they simply change. Higher education brings about a whole new set of challenges for students (Tinto, 1993), but for a student with a learning disability the most common hurdle is their increased responsibility for managing their own needs as a student with a disability (DaDeppo, 2009; Shaw, 2009). Students must move from the more individualized academic support they received in K-12 special education programs to a more generalized, less structured, and less accommodating postsecondary environment (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Wolforth and Harrison (2008) found that 35% of postsecondary support service providers felt that SLD transitioning into higher education had been over-accommodated at the K-12 level which hindered their ability to self-advocate in the postsecondary environment.

SLD also cited an absence of understanding and empathy from higher education faculty and administrators around their issues and concerns as a barrier to their academic success (Greenbaum et al., 1995). This claim was additionally supported by Janiga and Costenbader (2002) and Wilson et al. (2000). Other researchers found that while higher education facilities have been adequately prepared to accept students with disabilities, the professors within these institutions are not sufficiently prepared to accommodate students with disabilities (Sheppard-Jones, 2002). While Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) partially corroborates students' claim of lack of understand and empathy from faculty, they additionally reported that students' experience in obtaining accommodations were contingent upon the particular faculty member.

Differences in the secondary and postsecondary classrooms and instructional settings also create an additional barrier to success for SLD as they must acquire new academic and social abilities to succeed in higher education (McGuire, 2010). In the secondary setting, SLD automatically received individualized instructional accommodations provided by their classroom teachers (DaDeppo, 2009). In higher education settings, students must not only self-identify with the Office of Disability Services, but they must also then self-advocate with each of their professors to seek out the instructional accommodations they need for each content area (Shaw, 2009). For most SLD, this is a difficult, very foreign, yet necessary process to ensure their academic success (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Denhart (2008) expressed “the most striking finding of this study was the overwhelming reluctance of [SLD] to request or use accommodations” (p. 493)

Other barriers that SLD often face in the postsecondary setting are challenges around decreased instructional time, lecture style teaching, higher academic expectations, less frequent opportunities to formatively demonstrate mastery of academic content and heightened anxiety around assessments (McGuire, 2010). In the secondary setting, instruction time in the classroom is more narrowly focused to specific topics and teachers spend a greater amount of time covering those topics. In postsecondary education, instruction is broader and typically covers whole units of material in a shorter amount of time. While this is a common shift in higher education, a change like this is often overwhelming for a student with a learning disability. With an adjustment, such as putting the course materials online, the effects of this change on students with a learning

disability can be lessened (McGuire, et al., 2006). This adjustment would allow a student more time with the course material to be able to process it at their own pace.

Another hurdle SLD may encounter is the move from a more differentiated learning environment in high school to a lecture style learning environment in higher education. While this is again an adjustment that most students make with ease, it can be quite difficult for SLD. This difficulty, however, could be remedied by professors presenting lecture information in a more visual format such as PowerPoint or Google Slides, providing visual aids to illustrate important points, and using videos to demonstrate abstract concepts.

There will always be challenges around transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. For SLD, these challenges become magnified and bring about barriers that are distinct to this group of individuals. However, with minor adjustments to instructional processes and assessment procedures, SLD can experience greater ease in the transition from high to higher education.

Conclusion

Living as a person with a disability is difficult at best, but for a student with a learning disability there are complex layers that become superimposed by adding educational stresses to their daily life. Fortunately, there is legislation that was passed to provide safeguards and help to alleviate the inequities faced by all students with disabilities. For students in the K-12 system, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act brought about mandates that ordered public schools to seek out, assess, and provide services and supports for students with disabilities. While the protections were not nearly as stringent nor as readily forthcoming for students in higher

education, the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act provided opportunities for accommodations that would give equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Despite all these mandates of legislation and the supports and services that came about because of them, research still found that the support of a SLD's family plays an important role in their success. As SLD progress through the years in education, naturally the support of their family changes and they must learn to become more self-reliant and advocate for their own educational needs. Regardless of all the mandates and support at the institutional, family and personal level, there will always be barriers that SLD must overcome.

All of the research reviewed in preparation for this study provides the history of, supports for, and barriers facing students with disabilities, more specifically learning disabilities, at the K-12 and the postsecondary levels. What research is void of is studies focusing on the views of the K-12 educators who prepare SLD to transition to postsecondary education as well as the professionals within higher education institutions who support these students as they make the transition. This is important as research indicates a disconnect in the support SLD receive as they transition from secondary and postsecondary education. Studies are needed to determine why this disconnect exists and what can be done by each institution involved to alleviate the gap. This study seeks to identify and understand all of these perspectives and use them to bridge the gap for SLD between secondary and postsecondary education. SLD represent a group of students with invaluable resources and vast skills. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to take a

vested interest in these students and assist them in tapping into their full potential as a postsecondary student.

CHAPTER III

Method

A strong transition system is one that functions interconnectedly as one unit to support students in their movement from secondary to higher education (Markie-Frost, 2017). Students with disabilities are apt to transition more successfully when there is collaboration between the student, their family, and the educational community when designing an effective transition plan (Dutta et al., 2009). The perceptions of secondary special education personnel as well as that of personnel within the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on effective transition planning are important. These beliefs can have a direct impact on the time spent by secondary educators in the creation of a successful plan to ensure the seamless transition of disabled students, as well as the amount of effort devoted by ODS personnel in the post-secondary environment to implement the plan once presented. The intent of this study was to determine what kind of connection exists between secondary and higher education professionals as relates to the transition readiness of disabled students. The following sections are addressed in this chapter: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) the role of the researcher, (d) participants, (e) data collection procedures, and (f) data analysis.

Research Question

The following research questions will be used to guide the study:

1. How do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the connection between secondary transition planning and higher education student success for students with learning disabilities?

2. What do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities feel would strengthen secondary transition planning to improve post-secondary student success for students with learning disabilities?

Research Design

Qualitative and quantitative research methods vary greatly in terms of data collection and analysis. While quantitative studies focus on testing theories by examining relationships among variables, qualitative studies seek to understand the meaning that individuals or groups of people give to social problems (Creswell, 2014). Since I am seeking perceptions of those involved in providing support in the transition of students with a learning disability, a qualitative study was the most appropriate choice.

In this qualitative study, a phenomenological design was employed. Such design is characterized by real-life experiences as described by participants (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological studies are centered around a central phenomenon and usually involve the practice of personal interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing this design allowed the researcher to acquire first-hand knowledge and experiences from those working directly or indirectly with students with learning disabilities (SLD) that have not been previously documented in the literature.

The phenomenon examined by this study was the transition of SLD from high school to college. This transition has been identified as one of the most crucial shifts for disabled students (Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009). Teachers and administrators at both the secondary and higher education levels put effort into the writing and implementation of transition plans for SLD, yet each may not have

an understanding of the part the other plays in the process. My hope is that by discovering the perceptions of those involved in this vital process, improvements can be identified to increase successful transition for SLD.

The Role of the Researcher

Within a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary data collector and interpreter (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Moustakas (1994) recounts the work of Husserl and describes the term *Epoche* or *bracketing* as letting go of the beliefs of the researcher, to the greatest extent possible, in order to see the phenomenon in a new light (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). It is imperative to understand and reflect upon my own potential biases, values and experiences at the onset of the study in order to approach it with a clear and open mind.

My perceptions of SLD have been shaped from my personal experiences. I first served as a classroom teacher who taught low performing, middle school and high school disabled students. During this time, I was responsible for ensuring my students received the accommodations and modifications their ARD committee had put in place to guarantee they received an equitable educational experience. I later served as a public-school administrator who was tasked with overseeing the special education and 504 programming at the high school level. One of my main roles was to facilitate the ARD committee process and oversee the development of IEPs, including transition plans, for students at the secondary level. Most recently, I served as the principal of a school within a state correctional facility for incarcerated men who sought to earn their high school equivalency or GED. Most of my students had some type of disability, predominately blindness or deafness, as well as learning disabilities stemming from drug abuse. My job

was to provide professional learning opportunities for their teachers to help them instruct in a manner that was conducive for learning for disabled students.

Currently I serve as a leadership development and school improvement specialist at a regional service center working with low performing schools within the State of Texas. One area of focus is seeing that disabled students are afforded equal opportunities to a public education as that of their non-disabled peers. These experiences have led to me a high level of understanding of the needs of SLD as well as the role of the instructor, administrator, and the institution in meeting the needs of disabled students.

Due to my previous experiences with SLD at the secondary level, I understand that I have preconceived notions that I bring to this study. As someone who spent time preparing students for transition to the post-secondary setting, I developed a sureness that secondary professionals do a thorough job collaborating on the transition of SLD. I also recognize I cultivated an unfounded belief that professionals in higher education do not adequately support SLD. These beliefs were developed by working from only a single vantagepoint, that of the secondary education professional. However, I do not believe that there is any single person or entity that bears all the responsibility. I recognize that both institutions are working to support SLD to the best of their abilities.

The real issue at hand is communication. Secondary school teachers feel they are writing transition plans that are robust and will support a SLD well into their post-secondary journey. Higher education institutions are either not provided transition plans from the student, or if they do receive them, the plan does not contain the needed information to support the student. If there were an open dialogue between secondary

and higher education institutions centered around the expectations of transition plans for SLD, support for these students could increase at all levels.

Although every effort was made to ensure that this study was approached with neutrality, I understand that my knowledge and partiality may have shaped the way data were collected and the manner in which themes emerged. In order to combat this potential bias, a reflexive journal was utilized to record my thoughts and emotional reactions as I begin the interview process.

Context of the Study

This study was comprised of K-12 and higher education systems within a 60-mile radius around a large, public research institution in Southeast Texas. This radius was chosen for multiple reasons. First was my familiarity with and professional interest in the school districts within this geographic area. Second, within this area were multiple universities and community colleges as well as varied types of school districts that fed into those higher education institutions. School districts within this radius encompassed suburban, rural and urban typologies, as designated by the Texas Education Agency. Having multiple typologies allowed for the greatest representation of various perspectives among K-12 special education professionals. Higher education institutions within this area were comprised of two large four-year universities, one large two-year community college and one very large two-year community college (CCIHE, 2017). This diversity also contributed to multiple opportunities for varying perspectives among higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services.

Participants

One of the most important tasks in qualitative research is identifying the persons to participate in the study (Sargeant, 2012). Qualitative research requires uniform procedures and indiscriminately selected contributors to ensure the least amount of influence by external variables. Qualitative research is deliberate in explaining the depth of an experience rather than being a representation of multiple experiences. Conversely, subject selection in qualitative research must be purposeful, in that, those selected can deliver information that can best apprise the research questions and bring about a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). Participants were selected after determining (a) the sampling strategy, (b) the sample size, (c) the attributes that will meet the criterion set based upon the research questions, and (d) the method for selecting participants.

Sampling Strategy. Purposeful sampling is frequently used in qualitative research as it provides information-rich participants with knowledge related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2013). Purposive sampling, also called expert sampling, is a non-probabilistic method used to create a small sample assumed to be reflective of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). This is a preferred method for phenomenological studies as it ensures varied perspectives of persons with knowledge of the research topic, it is economical, and it avoids any unnecessary or irrelevant participants from being selected.

Another non-probabilistic sampling strategy used in both quantitative and qualitative research is convenience sampling (Given, 2008). To draw a convenience sample, the researcher collects data from those people or other relevant elements to which

they have the most convenient access to (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). This is commonly used as it is uncomplicated, economical, and incredibly prompt. As a result of the professional connections I have made working in the field of education, convenience sampling was additionally employed in this study.

Possible participants were identified utilizing multiple methods. Potential contributors were first identified utilizing personal contacts I had developed working in surrounding K-12 school districts in the course of my educational career. If a more diverse pool were required, a plan was put in place to seek other contacts by requesting a list of K-12 special education directors in surrounding public-school districts from the local education service center. Due to response numbers being adequate, this plan did not have to be implemented. Higher education ODS administrators were identified using contacts of trusted colleagues as well as the ODS websites of the four higher education institutions to obtain contact information for the ODS director of the institutions this study encompassed. Following identification, emails were sent to those identified for participation in the study. The email explained the purpose of the study, the extent of involvement required, and request for their participation. Those who were interested in participating in the study were asked to respond back to the email to indicate their willingness.

All participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure a well-rounded sample with opportunities for multiple perspectives. Maxwell (2013) describes purposeful sampling as the methodical selection of particular locations, people, or activities that lead to information that is relevant to the research goals. Utilizing the suggestion of Creswell (2014), potential contributors were identified that allowed for

representation of multiple perspectives. Potential K-12 candidates were selected as to include personnel from both small and large schools, rural, urban, and suburban schools, and schools that receive heavy financial support as well as those who are majority self-funded. Typologies were confirmed by the database of the Texas Education Agency. Potential higher education candidates were from two-year public community colleges and four-year public universities that serve as feeder institutions from the K-12 public school systems included in this study on the basis of geographic proximity.

From those persons who indicated an interest in participating in the study, their institution's geographic location, typology, and demographic information were researched and noted. Those institutions were then sorted using the criteria and participants were chosen using the sorted lists to ensure a well-represented purposive sample.

Individuals who volunteered for the study were then contacted and ensured of their confidential participation, sent a consent form to review, and a video conferencing interview was arranged. Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the means by which participants organize their experiences and make sense of their world (Hatch, 2002).

Sample Size. In qualitative research, adequate numbers of appropriately selected participants are critical (Morse, 1991). Researchers, however, are conflicted on the number of participants to be included in a phenomenological study. Creswell (2009) suggests a minimum of five participants while Alder and Alder (1987) suggest anywhere from 12 to 60 with the average participant number being 30. Charmaz (2006) advises researchers to understand what excellence looks like in their field of study and conduct as

many interviews as it takes to achieve it. An adequate or sufficient sample size is reached when interviews no longer identify new trends, thus data saturation has occurred (Sargeant, 2012).

For this study, K-12 special education personnel and higher education ODS administrators within a 60-mile radius of the researcher's geographic location constituted a pool of over 50 participants. These potential participant names, job titles, and email addresses came from personal network contacts, the websites of the four higher education institutions, and personal network contacts of trusted colleagues within higher education. In accordance with Creswell's (2013) guidance to choose participants who will give multiple perspectives, 28 potential participants were contacted via email to solicit interest. Of those, 10 responded with an interest in participating in the study. Eight interested participants were then selected via purposive and convenience sampling methods to ensure a diverse and well-rounded sample with multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Five participants were K-12 special education professionals and three participants were administrators from Offices of Disability Services within higher education institutions. These numbers were chosen based upon research by Creswell (1998) which states five to twenty-five participants is an acceptable sample size as well as the research of Morse (1994) who suggests a minimum participant size of six. These numbers also allowed for inclusion of multiple K-12 school systems of varying sizes that feed into the four higher education institutions within a 60-mile radius of the researcher. The goal was to interview enough participants such that "new categories, themes, or explanations stop emerging from the data" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). This goal was met with the interviews of the eight selected participants.

Criteria. There was a minimum criterion that participants needed to satisfy (Palinkas, et al., 2015). Contributors were personal contacts, network contacts, or contacts of trusted colleagues and organizations. K-12 special education professionals have worked directly with K-12 students as an ARD committee member, special education teacher or school administrator, or indirectly as a district level special education director or education service center personnel who supports the transition of students with disabilities within the 60-mile study radius that encompasses East Central and Southeast Texas. Higher education personnel all have a direct professional working relationship with disabled students as a staff member in the ODS within a two-year community college or four-year university in the 60-mile study radius of East Central or Southeast Texas. These criteria were necessary in order to gain the knowledge required to adequately address the phenomenon and be able to draw valid conclusions.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in this phenomenological study was conducted via individual interviews with selected contributors (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). I, the researcher, served as the primary instrument through which data was collected and analyzed. Due to current world health concerns and protocols surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, one-on-one video conference interviews were utilized for this study. Semi-structured, audio recorded interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method because although I approached the interviews with pre-scripted guiding questions, this method allowed for latitude to “follow the lead of the informant and...probe into areas that arise during interview interactions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94).

Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the researcher and the participant and lasted less than 60 minutes. This not only allowed time for the interview but also for time prior to the interview to establish a rapport and become acquainted, which is an important factor in qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). Because of the nature of the video conferencing platform, I as the researcher, as well as the participants were able to choose a private and convenient location for the interview which provided a level of comfort for the researcher and the participants (Hatch, 2002). Interviews were audio recorded via Zoom's recording feature to capture the participant's words as well as their emotions through voice inflections and gradations (Patton, 2002).

As a novice researcher, I utilized Creswell's (2014) interview protocol form (see Appendix). The protocol was used for asking questions and recording responses. Creswell (2014) recommends the researcher actively take notes in the event there is a malfunction with recording equipment. The use of the protocol form provided space for this to occur. Also included in the protocol was a standardized procedure to ensure consistency between interviews and a final statement reminding me to acknowledge participants' time and thank them for their participation (Creswell, 2014).

I utilized an amended version of Creswell's (2014) observation protocol to help organize participant information (see Appendix). This form included the date and time of the interview, descriptive traits of the participant, demographic information, and reflective notes which Creswell (2014) described as "the researcher's personal thoughts, such as speculations, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p. 194).

Prior to the conclusion of the interview, participants were informed of the member checking process and notified of follow-up communication. This follow-up communication was conducted via email to account for the busy schedules of all participants and occurred within one week of the initial interview. This communication reviewed initial themes, sought clarification on any items that were unclear from the interview and asked any follow-up questions that may have been necessary to fully answer the research questions.

Utilizing this interview process allowed me to capture the knowledge and experiences of the K-12 special education faculty and higher education ODS administrators. Through it, I am able to better understand, from their perspective, the role they play and their responsibility in the transition process and making connections to successful outcomes for disabled students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a means to visualize patterns, themes and relationships; cultivate explanations; and create understandings (Hatch, 2002). Hatch further explains that “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others” (p. 148). Qualitative data analysis is complex in that it not only involves the researcher understanding the world but also making sense of how they fit into that world and therefore discovering things about themselves as they uncover new truths about their research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

As suggested by Creswell (2014), data analysis for this study ran concurrently with data collection and the write-up of findings. Because qualitative data is complex, not all data was relevant and able to be used in the study. Guest, MacQueen and Namey

(2012) recommend the researcher focus in on key parts of the data and deprioritize other parts. This process was utilized in this study in order to aggregate data into a small number of themes (Creswell, 2014).

After each interview was completed, I organized and prepared the data for analysis. This process involved utilizing the Zoom platform to transcribe the audio recorded interview as well as typing up any field notes taken during the interview. When the transcription was complete, the document was uploaded to the researcher's personal password protected computer and stored in a password protected file. The audio files were listened to and compared against the transcription and editing took place to ensure 100% transcription accuracy. The whole transcription document was then read and open coding took place, in which notes were made in regard to any bits of information that seemed relevant to answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). This process allowed me to reflect on the overall meaning of the information, internalize the data, begin to develop a coding system, and start coding the data.

Coding involves meaningfully analyzing the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by connecting the pieces and writing a word or words that represent a category (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). For this particular study, I employed a qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose, to aid in the coding process. Using this software, codes were assigned and used to generate categories or themes for analysis (Creswell, 2014). This process was then repeated for all interviews conducted.

At the culmination of the data collection and analysis, I made an interpretation of the qualitative results using the overarching question of 'what were the lessons learned from the study?' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results of the data analysis and the three

themes that emerged are presented in Chapter IV. The subsequent description of the phenomenon being studied is reviewed in the findings section of Chapter V.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the amount of confidence regarding the data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality and rigor of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). In every qualitative study, protocols and procedures should be established which deem the study worthy of consideration by readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established criteria for trustworthiness that are accepted by many qualitative researchers. These include *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability*. Nine years later they added *authenticity* to the criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The following techniques were used to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

Credibility. Credibility of the study, or the certainty of the truth of the study and more specifically the findings of the study, is the most important criterion (Polit & Beck, 2014). This is synonymous with internal validity in quantitative research. To enhance the credibility of the study, I collected data from different participants through individual interviews. I also used member checking in that I provided copies of each participant's transcript to them to ensure their words and thoughts were accurately captured and to check for anything they felt may be void (Connelly, 2016). Additionally, participants were given a copy of the major findings and themes that emerged from this study and afforded an opportunity to provide comments on them (Creswell, 2014).

To increase the validity and enhance the accuracy of this study, I engaged with a peer debriefer. Creswell (2014) defines this a "locating a person who reviews and asks

questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (p. 202). This process involved meeting with the Executive Director of the Garrett Center for Transition at Sam Houston State University, Dr. Vickie Mitchell. The Garrett Center is a renowned center on the transition of students with learning disabilities. Dr. Mitchell and I met to review the themes that emerged from this study and compare them with her professional experiences as well as findings of studies conducted by the Garrett Center.

Dr. Mitchell and I met via Zoom. Prior to our meeting, Dr. Mitchell was provided with a copy of the findings of the study. During our conversation, I reviewed the findings of this study and inquired about any similarities between the outcomes and the work of the Garrett Center for Transition. Dr. Mitchell affirmed that the themes that emerged from this study were accurate and were depicted frequently in the work she engages in with both transition professionals and students with disabilities. When presented with the recommendations for practice and implications for future research, Dr. Mitchell concurred with all recommendations presented. Avenues for improvement were discussed at both the K-12 and higher education level as well as the implications for SLDs if the recommendations were implemented with fidelity.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the stability of the data over the course of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). This is similar to reliability in quantitative research. Dependability of this study was enhanced by the use of a reflexive journal. This journal consisted of my notes of all activities that happened during this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) including decisions about all aspects of the study such as whom to interview (Connelly, 2016), and notes during the data coding process (Saldaña, 2015).

Confirmability. Confirmability is the neutrality of the study and to what extent the findings of the study are consistent (Connelly, 2016). The purpose of confirmability is to prevent researcher bias during the course of the study. To increase the confirmability of the study, I conducted debriefing sessions with trusted colleagues who are experts in the field to clarify my biases and maintain awareness of such on my research. I also shared my reflexive journal at several point throughout the data collection and data analysis to increase the confirmability of my study (Merriam, 1998).

Transferability. Transferability is the extent to which the study findings are useful to readers in other settings or contexts (Polit & Beck, 2014). Transferability of this study was dependent on my ability to richly describe how K-12 special education faculty and higher education administrators feel they contribute to the success of student with disabilities in transition from high school to college. Transferability was also dependent upon my transparency about the analysis and trustworthiness (Amankwaa, 2016).

Summary

In summary, this chapter describes the research methods that were employed to conduct this study. A qualitative phenomenological study design was used to explore the experiences of K-12 special education faculty and higher education administrator's experiences as they pertain to assisting students with disabilities in successfully transitioning from high school to college. Data was collected through individual audio recorded interviews and member checked for accuracy. Multiple rounds of coding were conducted and following coding, analyzation of codes identified themes. Findings that emerged from the data analysis of this qualitative phenomenological study are discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities (SLD) from secondary to higher education. The interviews provided all persons an outlet to begin the dialogue of building a common language and shared vision around ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with special learning needs.

The following research questions were used to guide this study: (1) How do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the connection between secondary transition planning and higher education student success for students with learning disabilities? (2) What do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities feel would strengthen secondary transition planning to improve post-secondary student success for students with learning disabilities?

Methods in Context

My intentions for this study were to interview eight to ten participants, four to five from K-12 education and four to five from higher education, selected via purposive and convenience sampling. Through my own personal contacts, contacts from some trusted colleagues, and school websites, I invited more than 30 individuals to participate

in the study. Some individuals responded immediately while other participants required multiple emails before a response was received. For one potential participant, a voicemail message was left requesting participation. Email communications with this participant had been filtered to her spam email folder and were not reaching her. After receiving the emails, she agreed to participate.

The time of year interviews were conducted brought about some challenges as well. IRB approval was received in mid-December which meant both K-12 and higher education institutions would be releasing to Christmas break within the week. K-12 participants proved to be easier to acquire, more than likely related to the professional connections I had with the participants from my career in K-12 education. I was able to obtain 5 participants from K-12 systems. Higher education participants were more of a challenge. After initial emails were sent, 3 follow-up emails were sent requesting participation. I was then able to acquire one participant. At one point in the process, I even obtained more emails of higher education administrators who would have been right outside the geographic radius of this study. Luckily, those individuals were not needed for the study. I was finally able to acquire 3 higher education administrators who agreed to participate in this study. These individuals rounded out my eight desired participants for my study.

Epoché

In order to alleviate the biases I brought to this study as a result of my experiences related to the research topic, a reflexive journal was kept during the data collection process. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994) both encourage researchers to engage in this process to better understand the biases they bring to their research. This

journal helped to ensure my opinions and feelings based upon my own experiences did not skew the results of the data. That proved to be more of a challenge than originally expected as I have vast experiences working with SLDs. The journal did prove to be a valuable tool in which I could record my observations, feelings, and reactions to participants' responses.

The use of my journal allowed me to identify and account for my opinions regarding the methods in which SLD are prepared for transition to higher education. This was challenging because as a former high school administrator, I had my own methods in which my team prepared SLDs for transition. I noted ways in which I disagreed with the methods being implemented by the participants as well as my opinion on how I would have done it differently if I were still in that position. Writing this in my journal allowed me to see my biases and keep them in the forefront of my mind as I focused on the responses of the participants.

Because participants were discussing a world that I had previously lived, there were many times when statements were made, or experiences were shared that resonated with me and I could relate to and agree with. Writing about this made me realize if I interjected any of these sentiments in an interview, I could potentially influence a participant's response. Realizing this early on allowed me to choose my follow-up questions to participant's responses carefully as not to validate or disclaim their opinion or experience.

To increase the confirmability of the study, I conducted two debriefing sessions throughout the data collection and analysis process with trusted colleagues who are experts in the field to discuss my biases and maintain awareness of such on my research.

During these sessions, my colleagues listened and provided feedback regarding my self-identified biases. These sessions were beneficial as they gave me an opportunity to verbalize the opinions and emotions that I had written about. By doing such, there were instances that other underlying viewpoints surfaced that I was then able to document in my reflexive journal.

Participants

To understand K-12 special education professionals' and higher education administrators' perspectives of the successful transition of SLD from high school to college, I conducted semi-structured video conferenced interviews. Each participant was asked the same six questions with minor variances between the K-12 and higher education versions to account for the educational differences. When needed, additional questions were asked to further explore areas that required a deeper understanding. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the video conferencing platform Zoom. Transcription verification began immediately after the first interview. Participant confidentiality was preserved by assigning all participants and their respective organizations pseudonyms.

A total of eight participants were interviewed. This number is consistent with Creswell's (1998) research which states five to twenty-five participants is an acceptable sample size as well as the research of Morse (1994), who suggests a minimum participant size of six. Of the eight participants, five represented the K-12 professional's perspective and three represented the higher education administrator's perspective. All eight participants were female. A snapshot of the demographic information about the participants in this study is represented in Table 6. Gender, institution typology,

institution enrollment, number of years in their current position and highest level of education are represented.

Table 6

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Institution typology	Number of years in current position	Highest level of education
Kelly	Suburban ISD	11	Master's degree
Stacy	Rural Distant ISD	11	Master's degree
Kristy	Non-metropolitan ISD	11	Master's degree
Cassie	Rural remote ISD	8	Doctoral Student
Leslie	K-12 Education Support	4	Master's degree
Tiffany	Large 4-year university	12	Master's degree
Sarah	Very large 2-year college	4	Master's degree
Ashley	Very large 2-year college	.5	Master's degree

Kelly is an Executive Director for Special Education and 504 services at a suburban school district with almost 9,000 students. A quarter (26%) of the students served in this district are economically disadvantaged and 8% receive special education services. Kelly has over 40 years of experience in special education ranging from a self-contained special education teacher, speech therapist, educational diagnostician, and most recently Executive Director. She has been directly involved with the transition of SLD from high school to college at multiple districts within the locale of this study.

Stacy is a third year Special Services Director that oversees special education and 504 services for her district of almost 2,000 students. This rural, distant district serves a

population of students who are 71% economically disadvantaged and 10% receiving special education services. Stacy has over eleven years' experience as a special services director as well as experience working as a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP). In all her capacities, she has worked directly with SLD transitioning from high school to college.

Kristy has served as a campus principal for the last 11 years in a non-metropolitan, rural fringe district of more than 1,000 students. Within her district, 50% of students are economically disadvantaged and 8.4% are served in special education services. With over 30 years of public education experience, Kristy served as a classroom teacher and assistant principal where she had direct work with students as they planned for their transition from high school to college as a SLD.

Cassie has served for the last 8 years as a district level administrator in a rural remote school district with an enrollment of more than 600 students. Of those students, 49% are economically disadvantaged and 8.5% are served in special education services. Prior to her position at the district level, Cassie served as a high school diagnostician facilitating ARD meetings for SLD and facilitating transition services for students going on to college.

Leslie is a Special Education consultant at an educational service center serving schools in the geographic area of this study for the last four years. For 16 years prior to that, Leslie was a special education teacher, a special services coordinator at a charter school, and a counselor in a correctional institution serving adults. She is well versed in the transition of SLD from high school to college and works now to help support special education personnel as they facilitate transition services for these students.

Tiffany is an Assistant Director for Disability Resources at a large four-year university with an enrollment over 20,000 students. She has served in the disability resources office for 8 years but comes from a background in higher education administration, having worked in both residence life and student affairs. She currently works with and supports students with disabilities at her institution.

Sarah is the Director of Disability Services and Mental Health Counseling at a large two-year college with an enrollment over 10,000. She has held her current position for 3.5 years but been with her institution for 8.5 years serving in different higher education administration capacities. In addition to working with students with disabilities at her higher education institution, Sarah also holds a certificate as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC).

Ashley is the Director of Accessibility Services and Resources at a large two-year college system with an enrollment of over 150,000 students spread across seven campuses in the study's geographic location. Ashley has a vast background in disability services including work with both visual and auditory impaired persons and serving as a case manager working directly with students with disabilities at one of the campuses of her current institution.

Interview Responses

All interviews were conducted in December 2020 and January 2021. I met with each participant remotely via the video conferencing platform Zoom due to constraints stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty potential participants were contacted via email. Ten responses were received, and eight participants met the criteria and were

selected for participation in the study. Findings are presented from the K-12 perspective followed by the higher education perspective.

Interview Question 1. I asked each participant what constituted successful transition from high school to college for students with learning disabilities.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly voiced that a student's ability to advocate for themselves and use their accommodations to effectively learn would constitute transitional success for a SLD. Kelly explained, "students need to tell us what they need to learn best because by the time they reach high school and into college, most of them can do that. And when they tell us, we need to listen." She mentioned that students sometimes fail in the area of self-advocacy because of the stigma of being a SLD. Kelly expressed "some students request their accommodations and others don't simply because they're embarrassed."

Stacy discussed transitional success as SLDs being knowledgeable of and able to obtain the supports that are available to them at the college level. She additionally went on to describe a student's ability to advocate for themselves at the college level as another aspect of successful transition. Stacy said, "success for students with learning disabilities means going to college and making sure that they understand about how colleges have the Office of Disabilities, and how to advocate with them for whatever it is they need."

Kristy coaches high school students on the qualities that lead to a successful transition to higher education. To her, a top quality of success is the ability of SLDs to effectively communicate in order to get their needs met both academically and socially. She maintained "socially, students need to be able to make new friendships. They have to be able to communicate with not only people their own age but professors as well."

SLDs' level of independence was another factor she cited that contributes to transitional success. Kristy conveyed "students need to be able to manage being independent like how to go to the doctor or where to get their car fixed. Not that they're paying for it, but they know how to get these services if they need them. I call that being independent."

Cassie spent many years preparing students for the transition from high school to college and says, "the student needs to understand how their disability impacts their learning, whether it's a processing issues, short or long-term retrieval or whatever and how they've learned to compensate for that." She explained that students are better set up for success if they are well versed in their disability and can articulate the accommodations they need to achieve their goal.

Leslie compared different perspectives of her time as a special education professional. From her experience, she mentioned SLDs have to "understand the difference in expectations. They need to understand that it's not the same in college as it is in K-12 education. It's not an entitlement." She also cited self-advocacy skills as a contributing factor to the success of SLDs when transitioning from high school to college. Leslie commented "students have to self-advocate. They have to understand the things they need and express that to the disability office. But they have to self-advocate."

Higher Education Perspective. Tiffany works daily with SLDs at the higher education level and reports self-awareness, advocacy and independence as the major predictors to transitional success of SLDs. She discussed,

"Students need to be self-aware of what their needs are and be willing and able to communicate that on their own. Those who are more independent know what they need and are able to communicate that efficiently without relying on their parent."

She expressed that while there are always extremes, in the recent past she has seen “more and more students who are much more self-aware and parents who are better preparing and coaching them for success.”

Sarah has worked in many facets of higher education supporting SLDs and has seen students who are very well prepared to transition, those who are not, and lots of students in between. She describes successful transition for SLDs as being less dependent on their parents as well as being able to effectively communicate with those at the collegiate level. She asserted,

“Parents have typically done a lot for students in their K-12 years and when they get to college that stops due to FERPA. So, when I see students with learning disabilities communicating effectively and being involved in this process themselves, I consider that a success.”

Communication cannot stop with the disability office, however. Sarah says students must also learn to communicate with their professors as well because “it’s very different than communicating with a teacher in K through 12th grade.”

Ashley conveyed her idea of a successful transition as one in which “students don’t feel like they’re having to climb over a bunch of additional hurdles and barriers that their peers in college are not also experiencing.” She mentioned that she felt all students new to a college campus will face challenges, but in her role, she wants to ensure that SLDs “have a smooth transition.”

Summary. Overall, participants agree that a SLD has been “successful” in their transition from secondary to post-secondary if they had knowledge of their disability and could effectively communicate that to be able to self-advocate for their own needs. Both

parties also concurred that SLDs need to have well-developed communication skills to be able to communicate not only with peers but also those people in positions of authority. Additionally, mentioned at both levels were life skills necessary to be a successful adult. Those were skills such as time management, organizational skills, and money management. Literature reviewed supports the participants' opinions that SLDs' knowledge and ability to self-advocate are necessary skills to find success in higher education (Coccarelli, 2010; Skinner, 2004; Wehmeyer, 1995).

Several K-12 participants pointed out that if a SLD could effectively utilize their approved accommodations, that constituted a successful transition. Others noted that having knowledge of and utilizing available resources for SLDs was a marked success. Others pointed out that having a working knowledge of how college processes would differ from what SLD's experienced in high school would set them up for a successful transition. One higher education participant touted success as being able to communicate with their professor and being less dependence on others and being more self-reliant would be a mark of successful transition.

Interview Question 2. I asked each participant how the transition differs for students with a learning disability versus a student with a physical disability or an emotional disability.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly discussed that for SLDs, their disability is often unseen whereas with a student with a physical disability, you can look at them and know they will face some challenges. She expressed concern that sometimes SLDs are mistakenly characterized as lazy or as not wanting to do something when in fact their disability presents an unseen struggle. Kelly said "I think the challenge is the mindset from the

educator's perspective. Just because you can't see a student's disability doesn't mean one doesn't exist."

Stacy took more of an academic approach when evaluating the differences in SLDs and those with a physical or emotional disability. She reports that she sees more SLDs venture towards "community colleges or junior colleges" than other disabled students. Stacy attributes this to the fact that in a junior college "students can do the same types of courses and they can end up getting a degree or they can work towards an industry certification. Sometimes if they're 'done with school' they like the option of the work force certification."

Kristy believes that transition is more difficult for SLDs than for students with a physical or emotional disability. She expressed "transition is more difficult because if they have a learning disability, they are more than likely going to find the material more difficult to get into long term memory than a student who is autistic or physically handicapped." She also discussed students needing to know how to access the disability services office and expressed that this can be more difficult for SLDs than for other students with disabilities because they "may not know what they need whereas a physically handicapped student knows their mobility needs."

Cassie expressed the evidence of the disability in someone who is physically disabled and sometimes those who are emotionally disabled versus a learning disability that "is a little more invisible" as a main difference. She also noted a main difference between physical disabilities and learning disabilities is the focus surrounding the student's transition. Cassie said,

“for a kid with a physical disability you’re looking at making sure everything is ADA complaint and that they have a first-floor dorm room, a possible peer to help them navigate the classroom, those kinds of things. But when you’re looking at a learning-disabled kiddo, you’re looking at how they learn, their professors, and the overall fit of the college.”

Leslie expressed the main differences goes back to the level of self-advocacy skills and self-awareness students with differing disabilities have. She described how students with a physical disability, for example blindness, are taught early on how to seek accommodations that will help compensate for their inability to see. She feels this is similar to students with emotional disabilities. Leslie expressed “in a lot of cases, students with emotional disabilities have quite a lot of support to help them be aware of what triggers they may have; that self-awareness.” She further stated, “but I don’t really think we do that for students with a learning disability.”

Higher Education Perspective. Being on the higher education side of things, Tiffany reports that students with physical and emotional disabilities are many times more prepared for the transition from secondary to post-secondary education than SLDs. She said “students with super significant disabilities like visual and hearing disabilities are usually on top of things. Students who are mild, it kind of depends. How well were they prepared? How well were they coached?” She explained that contrary to students with physical disabilities, many times SLDs do not even know what they need or how their learning will be impacted until after they are well into the semester. Tiffany additionally noted “sometimes they just don’t know what they don’t know.”

Sarah expressed that from her perspective, she does not see there are many differences because all students must go through the same process to request services and accommodations. She added,

“they all have to submit their documentation to our office for whatever their disability is whether it is a learning disability or a medical or psychological disability. This paperwork tells us what their disability is. It doesn’t tell us how their disability affects them. We want to hear that from the student.”

Ashley discussed that while accommodations will look different for SLDs versus students with a physical or emotional disability, the process for obtaining them is the same. She conveyed that most of her mobility students “come straight into our offices and are approved to get the same accommodations they did in high school.” However, “many of our students with disabilities don’t know the process to get their accommodations.” She went on to explain that those who do, “aren’t able to articulate what accommodations they need to be successful.”

Summary. Participants varied on the idea of differences in the transition for a SLD and a student with a physical or an emotional disability. K-12 participants tended to take a more academic perspective when discussing potential differences such as where SLDs attend higher education and their ability to understand academic content. They discussed aspects such as the difficulty of the academic content, how SLDs are sometimes wrongly characterized as “lazy” due to their unseen disability which stems from the mindset of the educator. They additionally noted that students with a physical disability have a more innate ability to self-advocate than a SLD due to the nature of their disability and the necessity of accommodations to be provided.

Higher education participants spoke more from the accommodations perspective and indicated that while they do not see a lot of differences between students with physical disabilities and SLDs, students with physical or emotional disabilities will have accommodations that look differently at the higher education level than those accommodations for SLDs. Both groups did note that students with a physical disability do tend to be more prepared to transition from secondary to post-secondary education and are more able to express their needs than SLDs. They pointed out this is usually due to the fact that students with physical disabilities know what they need to be successful in the task at hand.

Interview Question 3. I asked each participant how SLDs are prepped at the secondary level or supported at the higher ed level to make the transition from high school to college.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly believed that while K-12 does not do this as much as they should, there needs to be more “pull back of the accommodations while still providing support.” She followed this up with noting students need to be encouraged also. She remarked “students need people to say, ‘we truly believe you can do this without some of these accommodations so we’re going to try this and watch you succeed’ and then support students as they do.” She expressed that many times K-12 educators feel they are ‘prepping’ students for post-secondary education when in fact they over-accommodate them and, in a sense, enable their dependency on unnecessary accommodations.

Stacy, being from a small rural school district, expressed that the preparation for student’s transition is not as much programmatic as much as it is person dependent. Because of the small, intimate setting they are in, staff are able to get to know SLDs well.

She conveyed, “we know their needs, their family situations, and their support systems. We have it very individualized” but reports that if not done correctly, this can sometimes be a hindrance as students can become “enabled”. Although she and her staff work to prepare students by teaching them advocacy skills, Stacy said, “I don’t feel like we always do a real good job in helping our kids self-advocate.”

Kristy passionately expressed that SLDs are “not prepared to transition to college. I can’t state that enough.” She went on to add that she feels this is not just the case for SLDs, but that all students are not adequately prepared; it is just magnified for SLDs. She discussed how all areas, such as academics, social skills, and life skills, are all interconnected and it could be one of those areas or multiple areas contributing to a student’s lack of success. Kristy stated, “if kids cannot make friends at college, it kills their grades. If they don’t know how to talk to professors, the same thing happens.” For her, preparation was not just about being prepared academically, but being socially prepared for the transition as well.

Cassie had mixed beliefs about how SLDs are prepped for the transition to college. She expressed her conflict by asking “in theory or in real life practice?” Theoretically speaking, she felt students are adequately prepared for the transition to college if they have learned how to advocate for themselves and make connections at the college level to ensure they have the needed supports in place. In practice, she feels that K-12 does not do a good job in teaching SLDs the necessary skills to navigate the transition to higher education and many times “it gets overwhelming and so, they just don’t do it.”

Leslie expressed that overall, SLDs are not well prepared to make the transition to college. She remarked, “I don’t think we’ve prepared them enough to be self-reliant.” This, she believes, is a societal problem in which parents have become “like a helicopter” and hovered over a SLD’s K-12 education and eventually there will come a time when that will not be accepted at the higher ed level. She continued, “and so, knowing that is the end game, I don’t think we have done enough to intentionally prepare our students with learning disabilities to be advocates for themselves and know what their needs are.”

Higher Education Perspective. Tiffany expressed her views regarding supports SLDs receive at the post-secondary level once they make the transition from high school to college. She remarked, “support is kind of an interesting word because we don’t look at ourselves as support service. We are a resource department for students.” She explained that one of the “best resources available” and one that is highly utilized by SLDs is their testing center. Tiffany noted, “it has a lot of different tools and equipment and resources in there to support student’s needs.” One support she mentioned needed improvement was helping new students acquire life skills such as time management and managing their own needs while at college. She mentioned “they come here, and the biggest challenge isn’t about being in class, it’s about how they manage their environment away from the classroom.”

Sarah discussed the Office of Disability Services (ODS) also as being a resource for students as well as an advocate for SLDs if they experience difficulties with professors. While she did preface that it is the student’s responsibility to communicate directly with their professor regarding their approved accommodations, she also explained, “we can walk them through how to effectively meet with an instructor when

they have difficulty or maybe disagree with something the professor is doing, or not doing.” She expressed that the ODS sees these times as learning opportunities for SLDs “not just for college, but when they’re out of college and in the workforce.”

Ashley held high regards for the support she felt SLDs were offered at higher education institutions. She stated, “at [the institution] we have many resources that students have access to, one of our most popular being our academic resource center.” She explained the many supports student can obtain at the academic resource center including tutoring, a math lab, and writing assistance. Ashley noted, “many of our students with learning disabilities also utilize the center for taking their tests.”

Summary. Responses were well delineated between K-12 and higher education participants. K-12 participants overwhelmingly and very adamantly expressed that SLDs are not prepared to successfully transition to college. They all agreed there is more K-12 institutions can be doing to prepare SLDs for college. Higher education participants all spoke of the ODS as being “a resource” for SLDs on the college campus. They discussed available supports at higher education and how SLDs need to avail themselves to those resources, but many times do not. Research by Hadley (2009) and Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000) support these ideas reported by both K-12 and higher education participants.

Both groups mentioned, whether explicitly or implied, that they are a resource for SLDs. However, it was interesting to discover that K-12 participants feel more invested in supporting SLDs than higher education participants do. This could be attributed to an old mindset that students should be taught everything they need to know to go to college before they get to higher education. This also could be connected to legalities, in that K-

12 systems are under strict IDEA laws when it comes to providing services to students with disabilities. Because of such, those participants feel more compelled to provide services to SLDs than higher education participants where the 504 laws that guide them are not as rigid.

Interview Question 4. I asked each participant what role or responsibility their respective organization has, as well as other organizations, parents of SLDs and the student themselves, bare in the transition of SLDs from high school to college.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly viewed the roles of all involved as more of a partnership. She remarked, “we first had to establish a relationship with the parents and then find common ground amongst them and the school in order to understand what everyone needed to be doing to support the student with a learning disability.” She expressed that many times in her experience she had parents who wanted the school district to bare most of the responsibility in transitioning a SLD, but “that is not the role of public education. Our role is to partner with the parent and give students the tools they need to access education and be successful at it.” She went on to express that higher ed entities “certainly need to be more involved than what we often see them doing” but added that students have to take the initiative to seek out those services because “they’re not going to go out and find you.”

Stacy viewed the K-12 responsibility from more of an academic standpoint. She believed the responsibility for a SLD’s transition was more about helping them prepare to get to college by ensuring they are aware of and can meet the requirements of TSI testing to gain access to higher ed. As far as the student’s responsibility, she feels their responsibility is to gain self-help and advocacy skills that will benefit them in college.

Stacy stated, “if they’re going to do well in college, they have to know how to ask for help and how to navigate the system and we have to model that for them.” From her perspective, higher education needs to be more open to “coaching students through the new avenues that college life brings about” by ensuring SLDs are able to login and access the campus’ learning management system, find their assignments, or order the books they need for a course. She stated, “they’ve never had to do that before” and she reports this newness can be overwhelming for a SLD.

Kristy pointed to the K-12 responsibility as giving SLDs training in being more independent learners and advocates for their needs as well as assistance in acquiring life skills. She noted that this responsibility has to be shared by the parent because “students are not gaining the independence they need when they leave” but that it is “not really being taught in either place.” While she feels like higher education is doing a great deal to help SLDs, “the numbers just don’t work out. There’s no way the college can hold a student’s hand through every part of the process.” She expressed that the assignment of an academic coach for SLDs could potentially alleviate some of the hesitance of students to seek out and acquire services. Kristy pointed out “students have to initiate the support and a lot of students aren’t secure enough in themselves or confident enough to do that without help.”

Cassie cited K-12 transition responsibility as being a teacher for not only the SLD but for their parents also. Cassie expressed,

“we have to do a better job at providing more support to students as they transition. I think sometimes we have to educate the parents too and maybe even

check up on them after they graduate to make sure they make it through the first semester.”

She went on to say that while this would be ideal, the time constraints of a transition specialist more than likely will not allow for this. As far as higher education is concerned, she expressed the ODS at those institutions should have a bigger role in building relationships with SLDs and their parents. “Higher ed is not always the easiest to deal with and getting accommodations is sometimes difficult.” She did voice, however, that SLDs need to be more of their own leaders and advocate for themselves at the higher ed level. Cassie stated, “if we’ve done our job, we’ve taught them what their disability is, we’ve taught them how it impacts their learning, we’ve taught them some self-advocacy skills then by the time they’re a senior, they should be okay.”

Leslie described the responsibility of K-12 as one that should “prepare students to move from one arena to the next.” She goes on to describe this as helping SLDs answer questions such as ‘how do I learn best? How do I navigate challenges when they arise?’ She conveyed that K-12 educators have a responsibility to teach SLDs self-awareness of their disability and advocacy skills. She iterated that “we have to start early. We can’t wait until a SLD is 14 years old to start having these conversations.”

Higher Education Perspective. Tiffany, being involved in the higher education setting, feels their responsibility is to properly orient SLDs to the processes of the ODS and help them understand how resources at the college level are different from those at the high school level. She discussed how it would be beneficial for K-12 systems, as part of their responsibility, to start discussing the differences in secondary and post-secondary

supports and start weaning SLDs down from so many accommodations, especially ones that cannot be implemented at the post-secondary level.

Sarah, another higher education representative, reiterated the role of higher education as being one that “communicates the process to them. How to obtain their accommodations, and communicating with them that if they need help, they need to reach out to us.” She also explained a lot of time in the ODS is spent helping professors understand the accommodations that new SLDs have been afforded. Sarah expressed, “we many times have to go over with professors what that accommodation looks like.” She discussed how it would be beneficial if K-12 systems were responsible for “pulling back accommodations a little when students are juniors and seniors.” She explained that over accommodation is a problem that ODS sees on a regular basis. Sarah conveyed “parents need to be involved in this process too because it’s much different at the college level. Many times, when students with learning disabilities get here, the parents don’t know how to help their children.”

Ashley asserted how “it would be helpful if high schools proactively helped students to understand they have to request disability services and accommodations.” She further elaborated that “many students with learning disabilities somehow don’t understand that applying to college and registering with disability services are two separate processes.” Moreover, she mentioned if students do not start this process early, “it often puts them climbing uphill for the rest of the semester because they don’t have any accommodations in place.”

Summary. While participants all agreed on the idea that their institution has a responsibility in the successful transition of SLDs, the role they play was varied. K-12

participants saw their roles as more of a partnership with SLDs and their families to teach them the next steps in transition to college. Most higher education participants contended their role was to communicate and orient SLDs to the processes of registering with the ODS as an incoming student. While there was no literature reviewed that specifically addressed roles and responsibilities, studies by Lock and Layton (2001) and Paul (2000) address the idea of “multiple communities” supporting SLDs for successful transition.

It was interesting to see, based upon participant’s responses, the delineation of perceived responsibility. It was evident that K-12 participants feel fully accountable to educate SLDs of their responsibilities in the higher education realm prior to the student’s departure from secondary education. Higher education participants conveyed their responsibility as more of an “offered support” approach. While both groups contended they have a responsibility for supporting SLDs in successful transition the level of responsibility is perceivably unbalanced and the majority is falling to the K-12 educators.

Interview Question 5. I asked each participant what they perceived to be the greatest challenge of successful transition for SLDs from high school to college and what could be done at each level to diminish these challenges.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly conveyed that the student’s lack of understanding of their disability, knowledge of how it truly impacts their learning and what supports they need to be successful are the greatest challenges SLDs face as they transition to higher ed. She stated, “the kids that I’ve seen that are the most successful are the ones who learn to be responsible for their own education.” Moreover, she discussed how this is not an easy process for students and the K-12 system has to be more intentional around it and begin early on. Kelly conveyed “we can’t start this process at 11th grade. It has to start as early

as 7th and 8th grade and gradually increase the level of responsibility of our students with learning disabilities.”

Stacy started out by saying “our students face the same challenges that general education students face but just at a magnified level.” She finds that SLDs do not have the same degree of confidence as their non-disabled peers and therefore have more difficulty adapting to new situations. She expressed, “you have to have some level of confidence to be able to approach your professors to ask for help or even to ask a classmate.” Stacy feels this could be mitigated somewhat if SLD students were assigned a peer mentor to discreetly help them navigate their freshman experience. But these things cannot just begin in college. They have to start in high school so they can be carried over into higher education. She relayed, “there are things as a K-12 teacher we need to be teaching them like how to use a calendar, how to organize, how to utilize technology as a life tool other than texting.” She repeatedly expressed that SLDs need to be coached to help develop their confidence as they move from high school into their college years.

Kristy provided a distinction between multiple areas she feels are a challenge for SLDs. She noted, “half of it’s going to be academics and the other half is emotional.” She described students’ lack of study and organizational skills as a barrier to their transitional success and their “inability to begin to make new relationships with new people” as an emotional barrier to successful transition. Kristy remarked, “of those who are struggling academically, most times it can be traced back to not making proper connections with people, they aren’t balancing the social with the academic well.”

Cassie immediately expressed “learning to live on their own and be independent.” While she believed academics does play a part in the challenges SLDs face, “I think just

figuring out how to live independently while navigating college classes, that seems to be the hardest part.” She went on to convey a professional example that reinforced her belief around students’ independence. She felt the academic challenges could be addressed by K-12 educators by “being careful with their accommodations and modifications. I think sometimes we get check happy and over accommodate our students.” On the higher education side, she conveyed that “maybe some transitional support for the first semester in the form of a zero hour course or a seminar” would be beneficial for SLDs to help orient them with college.

Leslie discussed navigating the newness of college and figuring out the disability services process as one of the greatest challenges for SLDs. She revealed, “it’s overwhelming. It’s a sudden, drastic change for these kiddos.” She went on to express that students, many for the first time, are tasked with making their own decisions and balancing school and their social life and “they don’t know how to set boundaries for themselves.” She highlighted that K-12 educators as well as higher education staff “have to do a better job of communicating to students about the changes that will come as they make the transition from high school to college.” She discussed that due to the legal differences in services required to be offered at the secondary and post-secondary level, students and parents alike often are taken aback at the vastly different levels of support SLDs receive between high school and college.

Higher Education Perspective. Tiffany, as someone who approves accommodations for students at the post-secondary level, expressed that one of the greatest challenges is students and parents not understanding why a student does not get an accommodation they “got in high school.” She says more times than not she has to

explain to them “the accommodations do not match the disability. A diagnosed reading disability doesn’t constitute the use of a calculator.” She called on K-12 educators to take a look at students who are graduating and really evaluate every accommodation against the disability before a SLD’s final ARD or 504 meeting. She expressed, “if students and parents understand, before that last meeting, that accommodations are going to look different at college than they did in high school, that’s one less hurdle they have to overcome in the transition process.”

Sarah started out by saying “students don’t know what to expect.” Furthermore, “they get here and when you start talking to them, it’s almost this blank look because they don’t really know.” She discussed additional challenges students face, such as newfound independence, making new friends, and additional responsibilities “just makes it really hard for them.” She expressed that more communication between the secondary and post-secondary levels about the differences between high school and higher education would help to alleviate some of the challenges SLDs face “that way we all can better prepare students for what to expect.”

Ashley remarked “it’s hard to pick just one because I see it that often.” She disclosed if she had to pick just one it would be “student’s mindset of wanting to do things on their own.” Ashley indicated that she sees this mindset “on at least a weekly basis” and many students still feel their “disability and accommodations are a bad thing.” The other barrier she discussed was “student’s understanding that the accommodations they got in high school might not be appropriate in college” such as modified assignments and altered time frames for submitting assignments.

Summary. As was evident from the participant's responses, SLDs face multiple challenges as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education. K-12 participants iterated these challenges as "lack of understanding of their disability," "lack of confidence," and "lack of skills," both academic and social. Due to all of these challenges mentioned, K-12 participants felt SLDs have difficulty adapting to their new environment. Higher education participants all reported SLDs' understanding of the differences between high school and college as the main challenge they face when transitioning. Studies by Coccarelli (2010) and Harris and Robertson (2001) support these ideas that SLDs do not understand the differences and therefore will face significant challenges in transitioning. Related to that challenge is SLD's mindset that accommodations are no longer necessary at the college level. Also noted as a challenge was parental oversight, in that parents do not understand how their role has changed as their SLD progresses from secondary to post-secondary education.

Interview Question 6. I asked each participant to describe, in an ideal world, what would be the best way to prepare SLDs to make the transition from high school to post-secondary education.

K-12 Perspective. Kelly suggested, "we should make high school a little bit more like college in some ways." She went on to say,

"if we don't put kids in these situations early and let them struggle, yet still provide them the encouragement and support, they're never going to learn. It's just like practicing for a sport. If you don't practice, you're never going to be good at it."

She expressed the same sentiments for SLDs transitioning to college.

Stacy expressed providing SLDs a more “college-like experience” in their later years of high school as a way to best prepare them for their transition. She asserted,

“we have to put them in some of the same situations they will face at college and model how to navigate that situation. That’s academically, socially, and even in just their daily living. Show them how to handle these things that will come up.”

Kristy discussed her opinion of adding a course to the high school curriculum that taught SLDs basic skills they would need as they transitioned to post-secondary education. She noted, “I think it would help considerably to have a training that took place in high school that taught students how to do these things.” She continued on to define those basic skills as “daily functions” and “problem solving” more specifically “how do I call long distance? How do I find a phone number?” To be beneficial, she believes “it takes a person that has training and that understands how things work at the college level.”

Cassie excitedly stated, “the student’s senior year, they should take a class on how to be successful in life.” She went on to describe how this course should contain studies of books on success, basic life skills like managing money, and basic college academic skills such as “logging onto Blackboard or Canvas and checking their academic progress.” She expressed that “with the right instructor” students could leave the class “feeling somewhat confident because they’ve been taught what to expect heading to college.”

Leslie voiced that a high school course would be “ideal” to help better prepare SLDs. She voiced,

“I think we need to build into the typical school day a course that allows for students to experience college life and life skills in a controlled environment. That way, if they struggle or fail, they have support to show them how to get through it, to navigate how. Maybe we if do that, next time they will have the muscle memory of how to get through something tough.”

Higher Education Perspective. Tiffany conveyed her thoughts regarding SLD’s transition preparation by saying “we need to give them a chance to practice and understand that things are different at college than they are at high school.” She discussed that students need to be taught to “be more self-aware of their needs, and their accommodations, and why they need them.” She also expressed that in an ideal world, every SLD would have “a current evaluation upon transitioning to college and have read it and have a basic understanding of what it’s saying.”

Sarah had “several opinions on this one.” She believed “there should be some courses at high school level on soft skills.” For her, these would not only benefit the student at the college level but beyond into the workforce. Sarah contended “skills like communication, time management, and even basic finance.” Another improvement she mentioned was “more communication between the college level and high schools.” She expressed if communication was better there and high school counselors and transition staff received more up to date and accurate information from colleges like admission requirements and processes for students to obtain accommodations, they in turn could better prepare SLDs for their transition prior to leaving high school.

Ashley maintained that giving SLDs “a class, or a seminar, or some type of training on what the college process looks like.” She continued by noting “this would

help students to understand what to expect, what they are going to need and what they're going to do." She contended that if both secondary and post-secondary educators communicated more efficiently, SLDs would greatly benefit. "Sometimes it's not a disability issue. It's just they haven't had exposure to these types of situations, so they don't yet know the processes."

Summary. Participants unanimously expressed that in a "perfect world" a course designed to give SLDs the needed skills to be successful in their transition from high school to college would be implemented. Participants voiced that this course should be patterned to resemble college class in order to give SLDs an idea of what to expect in higher education. In it, students would be presented skills necessary to be successful during their transition and when they get to college. Skills such as how to study, how to communicate with professors, where to seek assistance, and the process to register with their ODS were all discussed by participants. Also mentioned were life skills that any student would need to know such as time management, organizational skills and a basic understanding of finances. A 2010 study by Troiano, Liefeld, and Trachtenberg supports the idea that robust student support contributes to greater transitional success.

Emerging Themes

Using the interview transcriptions, I began the data analysis process. Data analysis is a means to visualize patterns, themes and relationships; cultivate explanations; and create understandings (Hatch, 2002). Open coding took place, in which notes were made in regard to any bits of information that seemed relevant to answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, a qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose, was used to aid in coding. From those codes, clusters of meaning were developed which

were then used to generate three categories or themes (Creswell, 2014): under prepared, college expectations versus high school experiences, and self-advocacy. A description and significant statement can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Emerging Themes

Theme	Description	Significant Statement
Under Prepared	SLD are vastly underprepared to transition to college	“students of all facets are not prepared to transition to college.”
College Expectations Versus High School Experiences	Knowledge that college expectations will be exceedingly different from experiences in high school.	“they need to understand that it’s not the same in college as it is in K-12 education.”
Self-Advocacy	Knowledge and skills that enable SLD to understand their strengths and weaknesses, know what they need to succeed, and communicate that to others.	“students must be able to self-advocate and be the leader.”

Under Prepared. All students transitioning to college face challenges as they make the pivotal move from secondary to post-secondary education. Students with a learning disability (SLD) are at an even greater deficit as they begin this journey. The National Council on Disability (2004) reported:

...it should come as no surprise that an overwhelming number of [students] with disabilities are under educated, under qualified for today’s job market or unemployed, and underprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education (p. 23).

I asked questions of participants to gain their insight into the preparedness of SLD to make the transition from high school to college. Kristy explicitly stated SLDs “are not prepared to transition to college.” Leslie discussed when it comes to SLDs, “we haven’t prepared them enough to be adults.” All participants voiced SLD’s deficits in non-cognitive skills such as critical thinking, study skills, test-taking and communication.

Some participants felt that the preparation for transition starts too late for SLDs and therefore is not effective. In order for SLDs to have a good understanding of their disability, they must begin early on in their K-12 setting taking an active role in their transition planning (Connor, 2012; Hughes & Carter, 2011). Kelly expressed “you don’t start this process at 11th grade” which was echoed by Leslie who voiced “you have to start the process early. You can’t wait until they’re 14. You have to start earlier.”

Ideas surfaced throughout the interviews on ways SLDs could be better prepared to successfully transition from high school to college. K-12 participants spoke about starting earlier with teaching students about their learning disability and how it impacts their learning. Repeatedly mentioned was having SLDs take more of an active role in their ARD meetings to teach them the self-advocacy skills required in the higher education setting. Higher education participants shared that increased communication between colleges and high schools would give K-12 educators a better understanding of the expectations at the college level so they could more adequately and accurately prepare students for the changes to come. It was unanimously indicated that the greatest preparation would come in the form of a course or class at the high school level that resembled a college class, and taught students the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be successful SLDs at the higher education level.

College Expectations versus High School Experiences. When a student with learning disabilities transitions from K-12 to higher education, the educational barriers that existed at the secondary level do not go away, they simply change. Higher education brings about a whole new set of challenges for students (Tinto, 1993) that are often not conveyed to students ahead of time. SLDs in K-12 education are safeguarded under IDEA which obligates Child Find, mandates assessments for diagnosis and requires schools to provide services for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). However, upon transition to higher education, IDEA ceases and students are responsible for seeking out accommodations from their college's Office of Disability Services.

College expectations versus high school experiences was another theme that emerged from this study. Sarah stated, "students need to be told in ARD or 504 meetings that it's going to be different at the college level." Moreover, Leslie stressed SLDs "have to understand the difference in expectations. They need to understand that it's not the same in college as it was in K-12." Tiffany contended "when students with learning disabilities move from high school to college they as well as their parents need to understand the vast differences." Sarah reiterated those sentiments by stating "the communication about college expectations and the differences in the level of disability services need to be more effectively communicated with students and high school counselors."

K-12 and higher education participants both agree that there is a marked difference in secondary and post-secondary education for SLDs. Both groups also agree that SLDs do not understand the differences in the two and many times that is because those in authority at the high school levels do not adequately understand the differences.

While K-12 participants understand and can convey the academic differences SLDs will face, higher education participants reported that many times they do not understand the procedural differences that will come about when IDEA ends for a SLD. Both groups contended that better communication between secondary and post-secondary institutions regarding the differences will facilitate more success for SLDs.

Self-Advocacy. In the secondary setting, SLDs automatically received individualized instructional accommodations provided by their classroom teachers (DaDeppo, 2009). In higher education settings, students must not only self-identify with the Office of Disability Services, but they must also then self-advocate with each of their professors to seek out the instructional accommodations they need for each content area (Shaw, 2009). Self-advocating requires a behavioral shift on the part of the SLD from an inactive and reliant role to that of an active and more independent one (Hadley, 2009). Self-advocacy skills allow a SLD to effectively convey to their institution their needed accommodations (Wehmeyer, 1995). Tiffany passionately expressed “the biggest thing is students being self-aware of what their needs are and are able to self-advocate for them on their own.” Stacy echoed that importance but remarked “I don’t feel like in general our school districts do a good job in teaching our students to self-advocate.” Leslie asserted that “student must be able to self-advocate” but remarked that “I don’t think we do enough to intentionally prepare our students how to be advocates for themselves.” All participants reiterated the importance of self-advocacy by SLDs, but many spoke of the less than adequate job that educators, both secondary and post-secondary, are doing to teach students this skill.

K-12 participants and higher education participants both agree that self-advocacy is not a strong quality of SLDs. K-12 participants expressed this is directly correlated to the makeup of the current IDEA system that mandates identification, diagnosis and accommodations. Under this system, K-12 participants reported SLDs are not required to advocate for their needs, but rather it is decided and provided for them. K-12 participants also noted that SLDs need to be taught self-advocacy skills while during their primary and secondary education years, and that this practice needs to be started sooner rather than later. All K-12 participants agreed this is not done well currently in K-12 systems.

Higher education participants echoed the sentiments of the K-12 participants regarding their opinions of self-advocacy of SLDs. They agreed that this is a necessary skill for SLDs at the higher education level as they are no longer under the safeguard of the legal mandates of IDEA. They reported that while there are some students who can express their needs and advocate to have them met, most SLDs have been reliant on a K-12 school system or a parent to do this and now do not know how to self-advocate.

Summary

To understand the principle behind K-12 special education professionals' and higher education administrators' perspective of the successful transition of SLDs from high school to college, I conducted semi-structured video conferenced interviews. After receiving the transcriptions from the Zoom platform and editing them for accuracy, I started the open coding process. From those codes, clusters of meaning were developed which were then used to generate three categories or themes (Creswell, 2014); under prepared, college expectations versus high school experiences, and self-advocacy. Overall, K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in

ODS agree that SLDs are not successfully transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education.

Three themes emerged as a result of the responses of the participants: under prepared, college expectations versus high school experiences, and self-advocacy. Participants from K-12 and higher education agreed that students are underprepared academically for the rigors of the work they will face. They also agreed that SLDs, like other high school students, are underprepared to live independently and manage the stresses of increased academics along with their social freedoms. All participants also agreed that SLDs are not prepared in that they do not understand their disability and how it impacts their learning. Participants from both realms discussed preparing students for transition earlier in their educational career would help to facilitate more success during this pivotal time. K-12 participants were more specific with remedies, stating that SLDs should begin earlier on taking a more active role in their ARD or 504 meetings in order to fully grasp the scope of their disability, how it impacts their learning, and what accommodations are appropriate to meet their needs.

Participants also agreed on the vast differences between high school and college. K-12 participants discussed academic and social differences. However, higher education participants tended to be more passionate about this theme as they were the ones who see the result of SLDs lack of understanding of the differences. Their main concern voiced was students being over accommodated at the secondary level and expecting the same level of accommodations in higher education. Second to that was their concern that SLDs do not realize they have to now take the lead and register with ODS to receive their accommodations and that it is not an automatic service provided in higher education. To

alleviate this concern, higher education participants recommended increased communication from higher education to high school staff surrounding the differences so those can be effectively and efficiently communicated to SLDs prior to their departure from secondary education.

All participants concurred that self-advocacy is a necessary skill for SLDs to possess but that it is a skill that is lacking and sometimes absent. Participants also acknowledged that while this is a skill that can and should be further developed at the higher education level, self-advocacy has to be taught to SLDs during their K-12 years, the earlier the better.

Participants were concordant in the belief that all skills needed by SLDs to be successful transitioning from high school to college could be established and cultivated through a course or class at the high school level designed to mirror the college setting and the expectations of a college campus. While all participants resoundingly expressed this resolve, some high school and college participants expressed that the instructor of this course would have a huge impact on the success of the class and needed to be carefully considered for the role.

Chapter V will further discuss these themes in relation to the phenomenon. Findings in relation to the research questions, literature and framework will be examined. Implications and recommendations for future research will additionally be addressed.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities (SLD) from secondary to higher education. As mentioned in Chapters III and IV, this study examined how K-12 special education professionals and Higher Education administrators described their experiences working with SLD and preparing or supporting them as they transition to post-secondary education. Eight participants were selected from K-12 school districts and Higher Education institutions within a 60-mile radius of my geographic location.

I chose this study because of my own experiences as a special education teacher, high school administrator and aunt to precious kids with special abilities. In all these roles, I have seen first-hand the struggle that SLD face as they prepare for the next big transition in their lives. By gaining the perspectives of K-12 special education professionals, my goal was to understand the preparation work that takes place to aid SLDs in transitioning to post-secondary education. By understanding the perspectives of higher education administrators in the ODS, I hoped to gain insight into how successful SLDs were in implementing the skills they acquired at the secondary level. By combining the two perspectives, I hoped to discern ways in which both levels could adapt their current practices to be more aligned to ensure transitional success for SLDs. Thus,

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Evans, et al., 2010) provided a framework within SLD's transition from secondary to post-secondary education could be studied.

This study resulted in three themes which include, (a) underprepared, (b) college expectations versus high school experiences, and (c) self-advocacy. Findings of this study were explicitly discussed in Chapter IV. A discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions, connections to the literature, the theoretical framework, as well as recommendations for practice and implications for future research are contained in Chapter V.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

This study was developed to capture and understand participants' perceptions of their lived experiences as they work with SLDs. The following research questions were used to guide this study: (1) How do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the connection between secondary transition planning and higher education student success for students with learning disabilities? (2) What do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities feel would strengthen secondary transition planning to improve post-secondary student success for students with learning disabilities?

Research Question 1. With regards to K-12 special education professionals' and higher education administrators' perception of the connection between transition planning and SLD success, participants overall agreed that a SLD's transitional success hinges on the fidelity of the planning process. All participants conveyed that SLDs are grossly under prepared to make the transition from high school to college. They

expressed that SLDs do not have an adequate knowledge of their disability, an understanding of how that impacts their learning, and what accommodation are necessary to ensure their success and attributed this to breakdowns in systems at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. Participants discussed the planning process does not begin early enough for SLDs thus leaving students with little confidence in their ability to be an independent SLD. Additionally, parents have not been educated on their role as a student's support as they transition to college; something that parents should be mentored on through a partnership with the K-12 institution. The majority of participants reported that SLDs are over accommodated and enabled as a result of the design of the K-12 special education system and therefore do not gain the skills necessary to successfully transition to higher education. Furthermore, participants expressed that SLDs do not have an understanding that the higher education expectations, such as self-advocating for their own needs and being self-reliant and independent, will vastly differ from their experiences as a high school student. They additionally revealed that SLDs have grown accustomed to the mandated services of the K-12 special education system and therefore have not acquired the necessary skills to effectively advocate for themselves and their needs in the post-secondary environment.

Research Question 2. In discussing with participants their remedies for strengthening the secondary transition planning process to ensure post-secondary success for SLDs, every participant discussed a class, course, or seminar designed to be integrated into the student's high school day that would resemble the makeup of a college class. This course would teach students the skills they need to successfully transition from high school to college as a SLD. Skills mentioned included communication with

both peers and those in authority; time management skills such as how to balance school with living independently; life skills like paying bills, managing money, or scheduling a doctor's appointment; and study skills. These skills are important for any student transitioning from high school to college to be proficient in. However, there are specialized abilities such as understanding their disability, the impact it has on learning, and how to self-advocate and be a proponent of their needs that SLDs must have to ensure their success. Most participants voiced that this class would benefit from a specialized instructor who can empathize with SLDs yet gently push them out of their comfort zone to learn new skills necessary for successful transition to higher education. It was additionally mentioned that this instructor should have accurate knowledge of the higher education processes to be able to adequately convey to students the methods for navigating and registering with the ODS and college life in general.

Connection to the Literature

In this study, literature was presented relating to educational impacts for SLDs, supports for SLDs, and barriers for SLDs. The numbers of SLDs enrolling in higher education is continuing to rise each year and the challenges they face in higher education are evident in the academic realm (Butler, 2011). One challenge participants discussed is the lack of skills SLDs have going into college. Kristy specifically stated, "of the 50% of students with learning disabilities that are having academic problems, we can trace it back to them not being able to make proper connections with people." This is supported in literature as studies by Barga (1996), Butler (2011), and Harrison (2004) revealed that academic deficits are expected for SLDs, but these deficits could create struggles in other areas such as organizational skills and social skills.

K-12 and higher education are not, however, devoid of supports for SLDs. Those in the K-12 system are safeguarded by IDEA which requires accommodations or modifications be provided to meet SLDs' academic, social and emotional needs (Harris & Robertson, 2001; IDEA, 2004; McLaughlin, 2012; Newman & Madaus, 2015). In higher education, IDEA is no longer in effect for SLDs. Students must now advocate for themselves and register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at their respective college to receive accommodations under Section 504 (Office for Civil Rights, 2007). Participants, especially those from higher education, discussed the vast resources and supports available to SLDs. Tiffany mentioned her institution's "testing center is one of the greatest resources." She also noted "note-taking support" is another highly used resource and "assistive technology" such as speech to text software as supports available to SLDs. Sarah noted her institution's "learning center that provides free tutoring, the writing center that assists with any sort writing essays, and the math lab" as supports that are available to all students, not just students with disabilities. Transitioning to higher education brings about various challenges for all students, therefore, higher education institutions provide many supports to nurture success for all. However, this transition is even more arduous for SLDs as they face the additional task of self-identifying with their ODS, understanding and conveying their needed learning aids, and self-advocating for their accommodations to assure their success.

In literature, a robust support community is cited as one of the key factors for SLD's success (Lock & Layton, 2001; Paul, 2000). This shift from mandated supports to self-seeking supports is one that is difficult for SLDs. As mentioned by Leslie, "it's a sudden and drastic change for kiddos." One of the most important factors for successfully

making this transition is the support of SLD families (Gardner, Chapman, Donaldson, & Jacobson, 1998; NCES, 2010). Families fill in support gaps that SLDs fail to receive elsewhere (Getzel & Thomas, 2008; Stodden & Conway, 2002). However, SLD families can sometimes be too supportive by consistently problem-solving for or speaking on behalf of their SLD which could have a negative impact and discourage SLDs from pursuing college (Dorwick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005). Kristy conveyed that SLDs are “not gaining the independence they need before they leave” which could impact their decision to attend post-secondary education. Kelly expressed that “parents need to learn to back off” and allow students to think and speak for themselves. Leslie equated parental over involvement to being like “a helicopter.”

There are many barriers SLDs will face in K-12 education, as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education, and while at the higher education level (Copfer-Terreberry, 2017; National Council on Disability, 2004). Kelly expressed, “parents many times feel like the district should have the majority of the responsibility and we can’t do that. That’s not the role of public education.” Lack of parent knowledge and ability to advocate for their SLDs is also cited in literature as a barrier in a student’s K-12 years (Allen & Hudd, 1987; Engel, 1991; Silverston, Springer & Russo, 1992). Stacy remarked, “a rural parent from a poor school district who’s never been to college is not going to know how to help their students do any of this.”

As SLDs move to higher education, the greatest challenge is their increased responsibility for managing their own needs as a SLD (DaDeppo, 2009; Shaw, 2009). Cassie stated, “the greatest challenge a student with a learning disability will face is how to live on their own and be independent.” It is necessary for SLDs to have a greater level

of independence as they must be responsible for conveying and self-advocating for their own needs as a student with a learning disability. Also cited as a barrier is absence of understanding and empathy from higher education faculty (Greenbaum et al., 1995; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Wilson et al., 2000) and inability of faculty to effectively implement accommodations (Barnard-Brack et al., 2010; Sheppard-Jones, 2002).

The participants' experiences are commensurate with what is cited in literature. Participants discussed the numerous barriers SLD face as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education and the implications not overcoming those barriers have on a student's educational experience. All participants agreed that there are numerous supports available to SLDs at both the K-12 and higher education levels, but all agree that there are improvements that can be made in both arenas. Leslie professed "it's not like people [in K-12 education] aren't working hard. They are." She pointed out K-12 educators need to pinpoint the specific skills required for SLDs to successfully transition and focus on teaching those to students. Kristy expressed "I really feel like colleges have done what they can. Students just don't try to get their services." She suggested more collaboration between secondary and post-secondary institutions to help SLDs understand the importance of availing themselves to the services of the ODS would help alleviate student's hesitance.

Connection to the Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory aids adults in understanding transitions and guiding them to the assistance they need to manage the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 213). Often classified as an adult development theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is applicable to students transitioning to the

collegiate level, which often marks the transition into adulthood for those coming from high school (Evans et al., 2010).

Schlossberg categorized transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. The physical transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to college is readily recognized as an anticipated transition. Participants, however, brought up in their responses a potential underlying unanticipated transition in that SLDs are not prepared for, and many times do not adjust well to, the challenges they will face at the post-secondary level.

Another portion of Schlossberg's Transition Theory are the 4 S's; situation, self, support and strategies. This part of the framework can also help in identifying and rectifying additional challenges SLDs will face as they accept the idea of transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education. When thinking about 'situation', participants surfaced that SLDs are not aware of the changes and challenges they will face as they move from a sheltered K-12 environment to a more independent higher education environment. If remedied, SLDs can feel more in control of their transition and be able to implement this transition effectively into their daily life.

'Self' implies the ability for SLDs to be reliant upon their own skills when transitioning from the secondary to post-secondary environment. Participants discussed SLDs decreased self-awareness and inability to effectively self-advocate as barriers to successful transition. More specific training that begins earlier at the K-12 level will facilitate SLD's ability to grasp the 'self' aspect of Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

'Support' for SLDs is necessary and should be a priority for ensured success. Participants concurred that supports are prevalent and available for SLDs at K-12, but

often unused, at the higher education level. More could be done, through a collaborative effort of secondary and post-secondary institutions, to ensure that SLDs are aware of and avail themselves to supports throughout their transition from high school to college. More support could also be provided to families to better understand their role in the transition of their SLD. Family support SLD's received in K-12 and what is provided in higher education has to be different as not to hinder a SLD's ability to be self-reliant and interfere with their capacity to self-advocate.

'Strategies' refers to the ways in which SLDs cope with the transition they are facing. Participants explored ideas such as turning to friends and family, or sometimes for SLDs who are more confident, reaching out to the ODS to acquire methods that will aid in their success in transitioning from the secondary to post-secondary level. Recommendations for a high school class to provide SLDs with more strategies for transition success were consistently mentioned throughout this study.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory states that if SLDs can better understand the transition they are experiencing, it will have positive effects on how they perceive their current life situation and ultimately how they incorporate it into their daily processes as a student with a learning disability. The transition from secondary to post-secondary education has many new situations that SLDs will find themselves in from having to self-advocate for their accommodations, to learning to communicate with peer and adults, and acquiring skills to live independently. Based the on the experiences shared by participants, and in line with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, if SLDs have a better understanding of collegiate expectations and the transition they will experience from secondary to post-secondary education, they will be more apt to embrace the transition

and find more success both socially and academically. What was lacking was support to help SLDs manage the transition and thus SLDs do not envelop the transition making it a more difficult shift than it already is.

Recommendations for Practice

Students with learning disabilities (SLDs) face many challenges when transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education. SLDs identified in primary and secondary education are safeguarded under IDEA laws that strictly mandate accommodations be provided. While these laws are intended to protect SLDs, they hinder the student's ability to be self-reliant. SLDs become accustomed to receiving supports based upon what educators feel they should have versus having to understand their own disability and identify their own needs. SLDs then move to the secondary level and do not have the basic understanding of their disability and how it impacts their learning and therefore are unable to articulate their needed supports to the ODS. Therein lies another challenge. On the occasion that SLDs do have the understanding of their disability, there is then the obstacle of compelling them to identify with the ODS to receive necessary accommodations for their continued success.

Self-Advocacy Scaffolding. Due to the makeup of the K-12 special education system, SLDs have not been required to incorporate self-advocacy into their education career. Self-advocacy is a necessary part of being a successful SLD in higher education. In the K-12 environment, special education professionals should begin no later than the student's junior high years involving SLDs in their Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) or 504 meetings to teach students the skills necessary to be self-aware and to self-advocate. Participants voiced students have to have an understanding of their disability

and therefore should take an active role in the development of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 goals. This role should begin during the junior high years in a SLD's education so that, through a process of gradual release, by the time they become juniors and seniors in high school, they are able to effectively articulate what accommodations are working, which ones are not working, and what they would like put into practice to ensure their success. Higher education administrators should continue to foster self-advocacy skills by invoking an early warning program that would notify them of SLDs who were on a path to becoming academically unsuccessful. This would then flag the necessity to revisit the SLD's use of accommodations and promote their self-advocacy skills in order to find future success prior to the end of the academic grading period.

Students transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education do not understand the differences between the expectations they will face at the higher education level and their current experiences at the high school level. It is important that SLDs are taught the expectations of being a SLD on a college campus; expectations such as self-awareness of their disability and how it impacts their learning, self-identification as a SLD with the ODS, and self-advocacy.

Educational Supports. To further prepare SLDs for success at the higher education level, K-12 educators should carefully review the student's accommodations the fall of the year of a student's anticipated graduation from high school. This would serve two-fold; one, it would be chance for SLDs, in a safe setting, to practice being an advocate for themselves. Secondly, it would give an opportunity for a SLD's accommodations to be reconsidered by their ARD or 504 committee based upon use, necessity and the ability to be carried forward into higher education. As participants at

the K-12 and higher education levels revealed, SLDs are many times overaccommodated in the K-12 system. It is recommended their accommodations be thoroughly reviewed and narrowed down to the ones most appropriate for a student's disability. By doing so, the goal is for SLDs to have a better understanding of the accommodations that are necessary for their success as well as put accommodations in place that will be familiar , translate easily as they transition from high school to college, and bolster their chances of success.

All participants mentioned a class be designed and implemented at the high school level that resembles a college course. In it, students would be taught academic skills, organizational skills and social skills needed to be a successful SLD in higher education. Here, students would gain the self-advocacy skills necessary to navigate college life as a SLD and ensure their success in the next level of their educational journey. It is recommended that the course not only be offered to SLDs but be open to any student who has applied for acceptance to a college or university. By doing so, SLDs would not be singled out and made to feel as if their disability has once again put them into a different category from their non-disabled peers. Given the curriculum requirements that high school are required to adhere to, this semester long course would be best suited to take place during a study hall time or a zero hour in which new academic curriculum would not be introduced or taught. The idea is that during the spring semester of a SLD's senior year, they would implement the skills they had learned during their success seminar into their current high school courses and have an opportunity to practice them in a safe and comfortable environment before having to translate them to the more rigorous environment of higher education.

K-12 professionals, through the ARD or 504 committee process, should also aid parents of SLDs in understanding their role in the transition process. For most of their student's educational career, the parent may have been the main advocate and decision maker for their SLD. ARD and 504 committees have to help parents comprehend and put into practice "gradual release" of control so SLDs are comfortable and confident in speaking for and making decisions for themselves prior to transitioning to higher education. To facilitate this, high schools should consider hosting a parent night for senior parents. Special emphasis should be placed on personally inviting parents of students enrolled in the success seminar. This workshop would provide parents a realistic view of the communication that can and cannot happen regarding their college student. It should also outline how parents can begin to turn over more responsibility to their students while still ensuring they are on track to be successful. There should also be a portion of the workshop that discusses students with disabilities and how parents can and cannot be involved in the ODS registration process. These processes should also be reiterated at all ARD and 504 meetings during a SLD's senior year, so parents hear it from multiple avenues.

Higher education ODS administrators should publicize the services and resources offered via the ODS and the process for gaining access to those through presentations in the success seminar, participation in college fairs at local high schools as well as at new student orientation and during welcome week activities on the college campus. At each of these events, material compiled by the ODS with contact information and information regarding the ODS process at their particular institution should be presented and discussed with SLDs and their parents. This literature should also be made available to

high school counselors so when SLDs informed them of their college of choice, information is readily available to provide SLDs on the ODS process at their anticipated college. Additionally, a generalized checklist could be compiled to provide to all SLDs, regardless of the college they will be attending, that outlines the steps for and encourages them to self-identify and self-advocate at the higher education level.

Increased K-12 and Higher Education Communication. To effectively support SLDs in their transition from high school to college, secondary and post-secondary institutions must engage in collaborative dialogue. On the K-12 side, this could entail inviting ODS administrators to speak at a beginning of the year ARD and 504 facilitation training and outlining the process as well as information that should be conveyed to SLDs during their final ARD or 504 meetings. It also could be school districts requesting packets outlining the ODS process for the college the SLD has been accepted to, and thoroughly walking through the information regarding ODS services and resources with the student and their family at the final ARD or 504 meeting.

From the higher education perspective, increased communication could involve ODS hosting professional development sessions for high school counselors and administrators that focuses on sharing pertinent information secondary institutions should know to help prepare SLDs for transitional success. This could be information such as the process for students to register with ODS, allowable accommodations at the higher education level, and documents SLDs need from their secondary institution when transitioning to higher education. To ensure information stays current and best practices are continuing to be employed for SLDs, this process should be repeated annually.

K-12 and higher education institutions are diligent in their efforts to provide SLDs a successful transition experience. Nonetheless, there are improvements that can be made in the way both sides endorse and promote self-advocacy, support SLDs and their parents, and interchangeably share information to foster greater achievement in SLDs.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities (SLD) from secondary to higher education. This study was conducted in school districts and higher education institutions within a 60-mile radius of the researcher's geographic location. Eight participants contributed to this study, five from K-12 education and three from higher education. The delimitations and findings from this study contributed to future research opportunities regarding successful transition to college for students with learning disabilities.

Future research could comprise a phenomenological study with students from the same institutions to gain their perspectives of their preparedness and success as they transitioned from secondary to post-secondary education. Since this study was limited to K-12 special education professionals and Higher Education ODS administrators, a study investigating the experiences of SLDs transitioning from high school to college and their level of preparedness and success could be conducted. Results of these studies could be compared to gain more insight into what SLDs need to be more prepared to successfully transition from secondary to post-secondary education.

Future research could also entail a phenomenological study with SLDs from the same institutions comparing those who attend college and register with ODS and those who attend college and do not register. This study could further investigate and compare the challenges that each group faced and whether resources offered to all students on campus were utilized. The results of this study could be utilized to gain more insight into the thought process of SLDs to register or not with ODS and the challenges they experienced versus their anticipated challenges. By learning this, institutions can be more proactive in their approach to getting SLDs to register with ODS prior to the start of their first academic class.

A delimitation of my study was that participants had to have directly worked with SLDs in a K-12 setting as an administrator, teacher, special education professional or ARD committee member or at the Higher Education level as an administrator in the Office of Disability Services. Future research could be extended to include higher education faculty. Since these are the professionals instituting the approved accommodations in the classroom for SLDs, their perspective could provide greater understanding on the preparedness and successful transition of SLDs from secondary to post-secondary education.

Since this study was limited to school districts and higher education institutions within East Central Texas and Southeast Texas, future research could focus on other regions to examine their experiences and compare them to the experiences of the participants within this study. This would be useful to determine if the issues brought up as a result of this study are a regional problem, or if the perspectives described in this study are synonymous across the state of Texas or United States.

This study took place in the years 2020 & 2021. During this time, the world was experiencing a global pandemic due to COVID-19. The effects of this virus were widespread and affected people both personally and professionally. Future research could encompass the effects of the pandemic on the successful transition of SLDs from high school to college. Since many aspects of education had to be altered including moving from a face to face to a virtual setting and doing many tasks asynchronously, this would be useful to know if these changes brought about more success and therefore could be incorporated into future practice in both the K-12 and higher education settings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college SLD from secondary to higher education. The interviews gave participants an avenue to begin the dialogue of building a common language and shared vision around ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with learning disabilities. From this study three themes emerged: (a) underprepared, (b) college expectations versus high school experiences, and (c) self-advocacy.

The move from secondary to post-secondary education is a pivotal transition for SLDs and one that they are many times grossly underprepared for. Participants discussed many ways in which SLDs are underprepared to transition to college such as lacking academic skills, organizational skills, social skills and life skills necessary to live as an independent student with a learning disability. Also noted was the inability of SLDs to

understand their disability, how it impacts their learning and what supports they require to be successful in the academic setting. This study revealed the correlation between the makeup of the K-12 special education system and overabundance of parental support to the unpreparedness of students' ability to successfully transition to post-secondary education.

The research also revealed that SLDs lack knowledge of the expectations of higher education as a SLD. Participants noted SLDs have a false preconception that college expectations will be similar to their experiences in high school. Participants described how SLDs lack understanding that they are no longer afforded accommodations but must self-identify as a SLD and apply to receive accommodations based upon their disability. Because many SLDs do not recognize this vast difference, lots go without accommodations and end up unsuccessful at semester's end. K-12 and higher education institutions alike must do a more effective job at conveying the differences in the educational levels for SLDs.

Lastly, the research unfolded a deficit in the ability of SLDs to self-advocate. While in K-12 education, self-advocacy is not a skill that is required for SLDs as services and accommodations are mandated. However, upon transition to higher education, self-advocacy becomes one of most necessary skills to ensure accommodations are provided for, and to facilitate success for SLDs.

Overall, K-12 special education professionals and higher education ODS administrators are working hard to make the transition less stressful and more successful for students with learning disabilities. This research was designed to be a starting point for the conversation between those two groups to create a common vocabulary and a

shared vision around what success for SLDs constitutes. The findings from this research study helped produce recommendations for practice to continue to move towards more successful transition for SLDs from secondary to post-secondary education. Moreover, this study provides future research ideas that can be added to current research that addresses transitional success from secondary to post-secondary education for students with learning disabilities.

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APPENDIX A**Sam Houston State University
Consent for Participation in Research*****KEY INFORMATION FOR K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education.***

You are being asked to participate in a research study in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Education. This consent form will provide you with information on the research study, your level of involvement required, associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you have in order to fully understand the research and make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document for your records.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study will be to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities from secondary to higher education. The study will explore ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with special needs.

Procedures

Participants will be asked to complete the following steps in order for the researcher to obtain the necessary data to comply with the approved research design:

1. Interview: Participate in a one-on-one interview conducted via the video-conferencing platform Zoom. The interview will be semi-structured and responsive in nature. All interviews will be audio recorded with the potential to last up to 60-minutes. The audio of the interview will be automatically transcribed utilizing the Zoom transcription feature and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer.
2. Follow-up emails: If necessary, the researcher will contact the participant by email to clarify any themes or ask any questions that may arise. The information gleaned from these emails will be included in the interview transcription.
3. Verification of data: Participants will be provided with a transcript of their interview to review for accuracy.

Audio Recording & Transcription

1. The one-on-one interviews will be audio recorded using the online video-conferencing software, Zoom.
2. All interviews will be transcribed utilizing the Zoom transcription feature and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer.

3. Participants will be provided the transcription of their interview to review for accuracy.
4. Audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of member checking. Transcripts will be saved in a password protected computer in password protected files owned by the researcher with no identifiable information of the participant included.

Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this study may include understanding the perspectives of K-12 special education professional's and higher education administrator's perspectives on the successful transition of students with disabilities from high school to higher education in which the information may help to close to transition gap. Your participation may support K-12 professionals as they develop more effective transition plans to aid disabled students in transitioning to higher education. Participation may also support the open dialogue between K-12 and higher education institutions in the necessary components of a successful transition plan for students with disabilities.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks of participating in this research study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Minimal identifying information will be collected as a part of this research study.

Any identifying information will be kept in a password protected file on a password protected computer owned and solely used the by researcher. Participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

Your research information, in certain circumstances, may be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Sam Houston State University. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate intent to do harm to yourself or others.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research project is solely your decision. You may choose not to participate or you may choose to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue participating in this study.

Contact Information

The person in charge of this study is Jennifer Graves, Doctoral Candidate of Sam Houston State University's Department of Educational Leadership who is working under the supervision of Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study, the contact information is: stdjls19@shsu.edu or 936-661-9457; or pholzweiss@shsu.edu or 936-294-1144. If you

have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs – Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or e-mail ORSP at sharla_miles@shsu.edu.

Sam Houston State University

Consent for Participation in Research

DETAILED CONSENT

K-12 Professional's and Higher Education Administrator's Perspective of the Successful Transition of Students with Learning Disabilities from High School to Post-Secondary Education.

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education conducted by Jennifer Graves, Doctoral Candidate in the College of Educational Leadership at Sam Houston State University. I am conducting this research under the direction of Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. You have been asked to participate in the research because you work with or have worked with students with disabilities in the K-12 or higher education setting and may be eligible to participate. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research will be to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities from secondary to higher education. The study will explore ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with special needs.

What procedures are involved?

If you agree to be in this research, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an audio recorded interview using Zoom lasting no more than sixty minutes;
2. If necessary, via email communication, clarify any information obtained during the interview; and
3. Verify the data – you will be provided a transcript of your interview to review for transcription accuracy requiring no more than 30 minutes of your time.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

There are no anticipated risks of participating in this research study.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

The potential benefits of participating in this study may include understanding the perspectives of K-12 special education professional's and higher education administrator's perspectives on the successful transition of students with disabilities from high school to higher education in which the information may help to close to transition gap. Your participation may support K-12 professionals as they develop more effective transition plans to aid disabled students in transitioning to higher education. Participation may also support the open dialogue between K-12 and higher education institutions in the necessary components of a successful transition plan for students with disabilities.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The only people who will know that you are a research participant are members of the research team. No information about you, or provided by you during the research will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:

- if necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the SHSU Protection of Human Subjects monitors the research or consent process); or
- if required by law.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If recordings of you will be used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The one-on-one interview will be audio recorded using the online video-conferencing software, Zoom.

Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of determining perspectives of K-12 professionals and higher education administrators regarding the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to higher education. Under no circumstances will you or any other participants who participated in this research be identified. In addition, your data will remain confidential.

All interviews will be transcribed utilizing the Zoom transcription feature and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer. Participants will be provided the transcription of their interview to review for accuracy. Audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of member checking. Transcripts will be saved on a password protected computer in

password protected files owned by the researcher with no identifiable information of the participant included.

What if I am injured as a result of my participation?

In the event of injury related to this research study, you should contact your physician or the University Health Center. However, you or your third party payer, if any, will be responsible for payment of this treatment. There is no compensation and/or payment for medical treatment from Sam Houston State University for any injury you have from participating in this research, except as may be required of the University by law. If you feel you have been injured, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Graves at 936-661-9457.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There is no cost to participate in this research study.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

Participants will not be paid or compensated in any way for participating in this study, nor will any reimbursement be paid for participating in this study.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs – Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or e-mail ORSP at sharla_miles@shsu.edu.

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

Agreement to Participate

I have read, or someone has read to me, the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Consent: I have read and understand the above information, and I willingly consent to participate in this study. I understand that if I should have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact Jennifer Graves at 936-661-9457 or by email at stdjls19@shsu.edu. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Your name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sam Houston State University

Consent for Participation in Research

DETAILED CONSENT

K-12 Professional's and Higher Education Administrator's Perspective of the Successful Transition of Students with Learning Disabilities from High School to Post-Secondary Education.

Informed Consent

My name is Jennifer Graves and I am a Doctoral Candidate of the Educational Leadership Department at Sam Houston State University. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study of K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education. I hope that data from this research will determine ways in which all parties can contribute to the successful planning and college transition of students with special learning needs. You have been asked to participate in the research because you work with or have worked with students with disabilities in the K-12 or higher education setting.

The research is relatively straightforward, and we do not expect the research to pose any risk to any of the volunteer participants. If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one video interview with the researcher utilizing the video conferencing platform, Zoom. Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of determining perspectives of K-12 professionals and higher education administrators regarding the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to higher education. Under no circumstances will you or any other participants who participated in this research be identified. In addition, your data will remain confidential.

This research will require about one hour thirty minutes of your time. Participants will not be paid or otherwise compensated for their participation in this project. As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. You will be provided a transcription of the recording to review for accuracy. All recordings will be deleted at the completion of the member checking process. The transcription files will be kept on a password protected computer in password protected files owned by the researcher and will not contain any identifying information. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me using the contact information below. If you are interested, the results of this study will be available at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Jennifer Graves or Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as research participants, please contact Sharla Miles, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, using her contact information below.

Jennifer Graves SHSU Department of Educational Leadership Sam Houston State Univ. Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 661-9457 E-mail: stdjls19@shsu.edu	Dr. Peggy Holzweiss SHSU Department of Educational Leadership Sam Houston State Univ. Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-1144 E-mail: pholzweiss@shsu.edu	Sharla Miles Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Sam Houston State Univ. Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-4875 Email: irb@shsu.edu
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☐ I understand the above and consent to participate.

☐ I do not wish to participate in the current study.

AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only. This is completely voluntary. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. After the interview, you will be provided a transcription of the recording to review for accuracy. All recordings will be deleted after your review of the transcript. The transcription file will be kept on a password protected computer, in password protected files owned by the researcher and will not contain any identifying information. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

☐ I consent to participate in the audio/video recording activities.

☐ I do not wish to participate in the audio/video recording activities.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Email

Study Title: *K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education.*

Principal Researcher: *Jennifer Leigh Graves, Doctoral Candidate*

December XX, 2020

Dear _____,

As key personnel who work with students with disabilities in either a K-12 setting or within an institution of higher education, you qualify to serve as a participant in the research study I am conducting as part of my dissertation that will begin January 2021.

I am researching the perspectives of K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators within the Office of Disability Services to determine the perceived connection between high school transition planning and success in higher education, as well as ways to improve the success rate of transition for students with learning disabilities.

This study will include three to five public school districts and three to five public colleges and universities within a 60-mile radius of my research institution. I will be interviewing K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators within Offices of Disability Services.

As a participant, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in an audio recorded interview using the video conferencing platform Zoom, lasting no more than sixty minutes;
2. If necessary, via email communication, clarify any information obtained during the interview; and
3. Verify the data – you will be provided a transcript of your interview to review for transcription accuracy requiring no more than thirty minutes

I would be honored for you to participate in this study which allows your voice to be heard. I am available to answer any questions, concerns, or comments you may have. Thank you in advance for your time and assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,

Jennifer Graves
Doctoral Candidate
Sam Houston State University
(936) 661-9457

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Study Title: K-12 professional's and higher education administrator's perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education.

Principal Researcher: Jennifer Leigh Graves, Doctoral Candidate

Research Questions: (1) How do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the connection between secondary transition planning and higher education student success for students with learning disabilities? (2) What do K-12 special education professionals and higher education administrators in the Offices of Disability Services at colleges and universities feel would strengthen secondary transition planning to improve post-secondary student success for students with learning disabilities?

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study will be to determine how K-12 special education professionals as well as higher education administrators in the Office of Disability Services at colleges and universities perceive the transitional success of traditionally aged college students with learning disabilities from secondary to higher education.

Participant Information

Name:	
Organization:	
Time:	
Date:	

Demographics

Pseudonym:	
Organization Pseudonym:	
Institution Typology:	
Number of years in position:	
Highest level of education:	

Descriptive Traits of the Participant:

Reflexive Notes for Research Journal:

K-12 Special Education Professional Interview Questions

1. What is your current role and how long have you been in this position?
2. Tell me how you came to serve in this position.
3. What constitutes 'successful transition' from high school to college for students with learning disabilities?
4. Within your system, who is involved with the transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to college?
 - a. What is their role in this transition?
5. How does transition differ for students with learning disabilities versus student with a physical or emotional disability?
6. How are students with a learning disability prepped at the secondary level to make the transition from high school to college?
 - a. What interventions do you feel are the most successful?
 - b. What interventions do you feel are the least successful?
7. What roles/responsibilities do K-12 systems bare in the transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to college?
 - a. Higher education institutions?
 - b. Students with learning disabilities?
 - c. Families of students with learning disabilities?
8. What do you perceive to be the greatest challenge to successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to college?
 - a. What changes could be implemented at the secondary level to diminish these challenges?
 - b. What changes could be implemented at the higher education level to diminish these challenges?
9. How well are students with learning disabilities supports at the higher education level?
10. What do you perceive to be the greatest barrier(s) for students with learning disabilities in obtaining support at the higher education level?
11. In an ideal world, what would be the best way to prepare students with learning disabilities to make the transition from high school to post-secondary education?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact with you via email when the transcript of the interview is ready for review. I appreciate your openness and willingness to participate and I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you.

Higher Education Administrators and Personnel from ODS Interview Questions

1. What is your current role and how long have you been in this position?
2. Tell me how you came to serve in this position.
3. What constitutes 'successful transition' to post-secondary education for students with learning disabilities?
4. Within your system, who is involved with the supporting the transition of students with learning disabilities to post-secondary education?
 - a. What is their role in this transition?
5. How does transition to post-secondary education differ for students with learning disabilities versus student with a physical or emotional disability?
6. How are students with learning disabilities supported at the higher education level as they make the transition from secondary to post-secondary education?
 - a. What supports do you perceive to be the most successful?
 - b. What supports do you perceive to be the least successful?
7. What roles/responsibilities do higher education institutions bare in the transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to college?
 - a. K-12 systems?
 - b. Students with learning disabilities?
 - c. Families of students with learning disabilities?
8. What do you perceive to be the greatest challenges of successful transition to post-secondary education for students with learning disabilities?
 - a. What changes could be implemented at the secondary level to diminish these challenges?
 - b. What changes could be implemented at the higher education level to diminish these challenges?
9. Have you encountered any students with learning disabilities who fail to register with the Office of Disability Services?
 - a. If so, how does success differ for those LD students who register versus those who do not?
10. What do you perceive to be the greatest barrier(s) at the secondary level in preparing students with learning disabilities for the transition to higher education?
11. In an ideal world, what would be the best way to prepare students with learning disabilities to make the transition from high school to post-secondary education?

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact with you via email when the transcript of the interview is ready for review. I appreciate your openness and willingness to participate and I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you.

VITA

Jennifer Leigh Graves

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education in Developmental Education Administration, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX, May 2021. Dissertation title: “K-12 professional’s and higher education administrator’s perspective of the successful transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary education.”

Master of Education (December 2007) in Curriculum and Instruction, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Bachelor of Science (December 2004) in Biology, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, Texas.

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Leadership Development & School Improvement Lead, Department of Leadership, Learning & Accountability, Region 6 Education Service Center, April 2018 – present. Responsibilities include assisting superintendents and principals in building internal capacity to develop instructional leaders.

Principal, Windham School District, January 2015 – April 2018. Responsibilities included ensuring rigorous instruction to incarcerated males seeking GED completion and vocational certifications.

Assistant Principal for Curriculum & Instruction, Huntsville ISD, June 2011 – January 2015. Responsibilities included helping teachers disaggregate data and make decisions for instruction based upon the data.

Classroom Teacher – Huntsville ISD, August 2005 – June 2011. Responsibilities included providing rigorous instruction to students in the area of middle school science.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Region 6 Educator of the Year, Region 6 Education Service Center, Huntsville, Texas, June 2011.

Secondary Teacher of the Year, Huntsville ISD, Huntsville, Texas, May 2011.

Educator of the Month, Huntsville ISD, Huntsville, Texas, November 2010