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## Secondary Administrators' Perspectives on their Involvement in and Barriers to Supporting Secondary Transition Programs for Students with Disabilities

Dottie H. Brown

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Secondary Administrators' Perspectives on their Involvement in and Barriers to  
Supporting Secondary Transition Programs for Students with Disabilities

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to all individuals living with disabilities and to all educators including teachers, administrators, and support personnel who dedicate their lives and careers supporting individuals with disabilities.

This is also dedicated to my family, Todd, Weston, Elizabeth, Londyn, and McKenna, for their never-ending love, support, and encouragement as well as their understanding when work took me away from them. Without their love and support, this would never have been possible. Words can never express the enormous love and gratitude I have for them!

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## **ABSTRACT**

To address disparities in post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, federal legislation mandates appropriate education programs to include transition planning and programs for students with disabilities. Because administrators are held responsible for ensuring appropriate educational programs for all learners including those with disabilities, it is important to understand their perspectives on secondary transition; however, research on administrators' involvement in secondary transition activities is limited. Using a single-state survey, this study examined the perspectives of secondary school administrators on their involvement and engagement in providing effective transition programs and services for students with disabilities and their perceptions of barriers to providing and supporting transition efforts. Frequency of responses show the majority of administrators indicated they were highly involved in including parents and families in transition processes and attending IEP meetings and never directly involved with collaborating with community agencies to be actively involved with students with IEPs or in conducting secondary transition programs. Frequencies of responses also show the majority of administrators identified families not prepared to participate in transition processes as a significant barrier and absence of real-life instructional contexts (e.g. paid/unpaid work experiences) and lack of effective supports for students with IEPs from outside agencies as significant or moderate barriers. Implications for practice and future research are provided.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM**

*Transition* is referred to as a movement from one phase of life to another and the period of time when adolescents prepare to exit high school and enter adulthood, and research supports the challenges students with disabilities face as they prepare for this transition (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Oertle & Seader, 2015; Wehman, 2020). Planning for transition early in a student's education is a crucial step in preparing youth with disabilities for transitioning out of school and into adulthood and for helping youth with disabilities obtain desirable post-school outcomes (Miller-Warren, 2016; Plotner, et al., 2020; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). In schools, transition planning and programming involves supporting students with disabilities as they progress from high school to postsecondary education or employment. Effective transition planning and programming is a multi-phase, multi-stakeholder collaborative process that encompasses addressing students' academic, social, and career goals (Fowler et al., 2014; Halpern, 1983 & 1985; Kohler & Field, 2003; Miller-Warren, 2016; Noyes & Sax, 2004; Oertle & Seader, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Plotner et al., 2020; Wehman, 2020).

Unfortunately, postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities have consistently lagged behind outcomes for students without disabilities (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Kohler & Field, 2003). In fact, findings from the National Longitudinal

Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2, 2011) show 55% of students with disabilities continued with some type of post-secondary education compared to 62% of students without disabilities. Additionally, 85% of students with disabilities reported being productively engaged in their community either through employment, post-secondary education, or job training compared to 95% of non-disabled peers (Lipscomb et al., 2017). In the 42<sup>ND</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2020), the U.S. Department of Education (2020) reported in 2017-2018, 72.7% of students with disabilities exited high school with a regular high school diploma compared to 85% for all students (Hussar et al., 2020) while 16% of students with disabilities dropped out (US DOE, 2020) compared to 5.3% for all students (Hussar et al., 2020).

As is the case nationally, post-school outcome data for students with disabilities in South Carolina also reflects disparities when compared to outcomes for non-disabled students according to the South Carolina Department of Education's 2019 annual report card. The state's District LEA's Profiles (2017-2018) and the SC State School Report Card (2019) shows on-time (4 year) graduation rates for students with disabilities being near 55% compared to about 80% for all students, and shows 43.5% of students with disabilities are scoring *career ready* compared to 72.5% of all students. Given these reported postsecondary outcomes for graduation and career readiness for students with disabilities across the country, national and state level emphasis has been placed on improving and strengthening special education and transition services (DiPaola et al.,

2004; Kohler & Field, 2003; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Templeton, 2017; Wang, 2017).

Federal legislation addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities aims to improve post-school outcomes for these students. The IDEA mandates that all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE) as developed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP: IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 [9][A-D], 2004). Further, beginning at age 16, or younger if determined by a student's IEP team, the IDEA ((IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1401 [34][A-C], 2004) requires that age-appropriate, research-based, *transition services* including assessments and coordinated transition programs, services, and supports be part of these students' educational services and are documented within their IEP's. Most states require that transition services be included in students at age 14 (Suk et al., 2020).

The IDEA also requires multidisciplinary IEP teams, comprised of special and general education teachers, a local educational agency representative (LEA), a person who can interpret the results of the evaluation, the student, and parents, to develop annual *postsecondary goals* relative to training, education, and employment for these students and include transition services, activities, and assessments that allow and measure progress towards these goals (Morningstar & Liss, 2008; Petcu et al., 2014; Yell et al., 2013; Yell et al., 2006).

In addition to the IDEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, (2015) sets high expectations and accountability measures for states and schools to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, meet state targets and expectations. ESSA

(2015) replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, but like the transition mandates under IDEA, maintains focus on improving achievement and outcomes for all students, thus, directly links to transition services for students with disabilities aimed at improving these same outcomes (Tomasello & Brand, 2018). For example, in accordance with IDEA and transition mandates, is ESSA's (2015) requirement for the use of appropriate assessments for accountability and the inclusion of career and technical education (CTE) courses and programs as part of students' well -rounded education experiences to promote students' readiness for transitioning to college and career (Poppen & Alverson, 2018; Tomasello & Brand, 2018). The ESSA also requires schools to include students' academic achievement and progress, English language proficiency, and high school graduation rates as accountability measures, all of which are similar to IDEA and transition as measures of student outcomes. Further, states and schools must issue annual reports on the performance of all schools towards these measures (ESSA, 2015; Tomasello & Brand, 2018).

As school leaders, principals are primarily accountable for the academic achievement, progress, and graduation rates of all students including those with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb, 2015; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Pazey & Cole, 2012; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Shulze & Boscardin, 2018). With federal and state legislation requiring schools to provide special and general education programs to meet the needs of all students in the least restrictive settings, school-level administrators, specifically principals, are

responsible for providing and managing special education transition efforts that meet these mandates and that meet the needs of diverse learners in their schools (Green, 2008). With increased accountability standards embedded in legislation mandates (Bartholomew, et al., 2015; Bateman, et al., 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020), schools are held accountable for quality instructional programs, improved teacher quality, and increased student achievement for *all* students, including those with disabilities, and principals play an important role in teaching, learning, and student achievement. Principals and assistant principals' perspectives on leadership and special education matter and are important to assess because their attitudes and actions influence the attitudes, expectations, and performance of their teachers and students which directly and indirectly affects learning outcomes for students, including those students with disabilities (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Roberts et al., 2018). Yet, it is unknown how high school principals perceive their role in supporting special education transition efforts. Transition programming and services are directly linked to student outcomes, and school administrators play an important role in the implementation of effective transition programming (Halpern, 1985; Will, 1984; Kohler & Field, 2003; Lehman, 2020) and are accountable for student outcomes; therefore, it is important to examine principals' perspectives on providing and leading effective transition programming for students with disabilities as there is a dearth of research specific to principals and transition programming (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Wakeman, et al., 2006).

## **Federal Legislation Focusing on Secondary Transition Planning**

In 1985, Madeline Will, wrote a seminal paper, “OSER’s Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life,” in which she asserted that students receiving special education services were exiting high school without the skills needed for adult life environments. In the IDEA Amendments of 1990, transition services were mandated for students with disabilities beginning at age 16. Moreover, documentation of these services were required to be included in the student’s individualized education program (IEP). In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized and amended. New areas of emphasis in the law included requirements regarding (a) access to and participation in general education settings, (b) participation in statewide assessments, (c) preparation for post-secondary employment and independent living, (d) requirements for highly qualified personnel, (e) development of statewide performance indicators, and (f) basing special education services on peer-reviewed research (Poppen & Alverson, 2018; Yell et al, 2013).

IDEA was reauthorized and amended again in 2004 and included the most recent definition of transition services and procedural requirements for IEP teams to follow when developing a student’s IEP, and when planning transition services as part of that IEP (Yell et al, 2013). In the IDEA, transition services are defined as a coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process focused on improving the child’s academic and functional achievement in order to better facilitate their movement from school to post-school life (IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1401 [34][A-C], 2004). As part of the student’s IEP, the IDEA requires that transition plans include measurable post-secondary

education, employment, and independent living goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments (IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1401 [34][B], 2004). IDEA also requires state education agencies (SEA's) to collaborate with community service agencies to coordinate transition activities aligned to the child's individual strengths, needs, preferences, and interests and to their post-school employment, education, and independent living goals. (Johnson, 2002; Hardman & Dawson, 2010; Petcu et al., 2014; Poppen & Alverson, 2018; Yell et al 2013;).

The progression of federal special education legislation through amendments and reauthorizations provides states and districts with a framework for establishing transition planning processes. The transition process is a multi-faceted and complex process that includes a number of professionals from different agencies (DiPaola et al., 2004; Kohler & Field, 2003; Morningstar & Liss, 2008; Wehman, 2020). The process begins with the development of appropriate, measurable, postsecondary goals based on the student's strengths, needs, interests, and preferences, and data from age-appropriate transition assessments (Morningstar & Liss, 2008; Wehman, 2020). To ensure the provision of services that enable students to make progress towards their IEP and transition goals and to monitor the provision of these services, the IDEA requires the coordination of agency services through multidisciplinary IEP teams consisting of various stakeholders involved in developing students' transition plans as part of the IEP process (Johnson, 2012; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Morningstar & Liss, 2008; Wehman, 2020). IDEA (2004) requires student involvement, and parent notification and participation in the transition planning processes. Other stakeholders include general

and special education teachers, a LEA representative, usually the school principal or other administrative designee, with authority to allocate resources, related services providers where appropriate (e.g. occupational therapists, physical therapists), and other or outside agency service providers such as vocational rehabilitative (VR) counselors, or community agency representatives (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Kohler & Field, 2003; Wehman, 2020).

Special education mandates and reform initiatives add to the demands for improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities, which likely will affect administrators' attitudes and actions of towards special education programs and services including transition services at the secondary level. Kohler and Field (2003) identified such initiatives that have changed administrators' perspectives about special education and transition programs over time including: federal legislation; federal, state, and local investment in special education and transition services; and effective special education and transition practices research.

### **Ongoing Challenges to Providing Effective Transition Services**

Whereas the IDEA requires special education and transition services for all students with disabilities when they reach a certain age, there are many challenges in ensuring the highest quality secondary transition services. Poppen and Alverson (2018) asserted that evolving legislation and policy pertaining to educational services for students with disabilities contribute to improved practices in providing programs and services to individuals with disabilities and have facilitated change; however, there are

still a myriad of barriers that impede providing high quality special education programming for students with disabilities.

In 2004, the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) synthesized research and identified challenges in providing secondary education and transition services nationally. The challenges included (a) ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, (b) increasing graduation rates for students with disabilities, (c) ensuring students have access and participation in postsecondary education and employment, (d) increasing parent involvement in the planning and decision-making processes, and (e) improving collaboration among all stakeholders and systems within and outside of school. Recommendations to address these challenges included providing appropriate accommodations and supports to students with disabilities, allocating adequate resources including personnel and programming, employing empirically sound instructional programs and practices, and drop-out prevention and intervention strategies (NCSET, 2004).

In a 2004 study, Cruzeiro and Morgan surveyed 255 principals who identified barriers to providing effective special education programs. These barriers included administrative constraints, teacher preparation, funding and economic challenges, and legislation along with resistance to change among staff and in some rural areas, geographical challenges. Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) conducted a state-wide survey of 533 middle and high school special education teachers and district-level contacts for special education on their perceptions of barriers to effective transition programming. The most effective practices identified by participants were (a)

stakeholder involvement, (b) systems and policy, and (c) communication and collaboration. Participants identified the following as major barriers to providing transition programs and services: (a) lack of resources, (b) lack of stakeholder involvement, (c) system policy issues, and (d) information and training (Lubbers et al., 2008). When asked about suggestions for improvement to the transition process, participants identified systems and policies and information and training (Lubbers et al., 2008).

Researchers have identified the following factors as crucial in leading and providing effective special education transition programming: (1) principals' and teachers' knowledge of special education and transition laws and policies; (2) student and family involvement in the transition planning processes; (3) developing, implementing, and monitoring evidence-based curriculum and programs that support the academic, social, and employment needs of students with disabilities; (4) the use of data from appropriate sources in decision-making processes; (5) developing and maintaining collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders; and (6) promoting a school climate and culture of inclusiveness (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Cobb, 2013; Cobb, 2015; Cobb & Alwell, 2009; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lubber et al., 2008; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Johnson, 2004; Kohler et al., 2016; Landmark et al., 2010; Lashley, 2007; Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Petcu et al., 2014; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Test et al., 2015; Wehman, 2020)

In the present study the factor of secondary administrators' (principals' and assistant principals') knowledge of transition services will be examined. The transition literature is rich in research regarding maximizing students' transition outcomes; yet secondary administrators' perspectives are limited in this literature base. This is worrisome as secondary administrators' knowledge of special education laws, policies, and initiatives, collaboration with stakeholders, and common goals for all learners are agents that support or hinder secondary administrators' efforts in effectively leading and providing special education programs (DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003).

### **The Critical Role of School Principals**

The critical roles of principals are well known; however, it is less clear how principals perceive their impact on transition efforts. Where research recognizes principals as vital stakeholders in transition planning and programming (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Cobb, 2015; Garrison-Wade, et al., 2007; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Kohler & Field, 2003; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Roberts, et al., 2018; Shulze & Boscardin, 2018), there is less research specific to secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement in providing and supervising effective secondary transition programs for students with disabilities. As Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Dezell (2006) found, it is important to examine secondary administrators' perceptions as their beliefs influence their practice and the instructional practices of teachers thus impacts school culture, student achievement, and student outcomes.

According to Cruzeiro and Morgan (2004), principals are critically important to both schools and special education programs because they are responsible for the development, implementation, and delivery of all educational programs in schools including special education and transition programs and are key to programs being a success or a failure. Further, Weyman (2020) contended transition planning and services involves a complex, collaborative, multi-stakeholder process with appropriate individuals from school and community and family comprising the transition planning team. Student and parent participation are both important to the development of such programs. It is, however, the ultimate responsibility of the principal to ensure the provision of appropriate curriculum, programs, and services.

Because they can facilitate or negate effective special education programs which affect outcomes for students with disabilities in schools, principals should possess the competencies and skills needed to provide and manage empirically sound special education transition programs, understand special education law and implement programs and services in accordance with the law, and identify any barriers to providing these programs and identify ways to overcome these barriers. When principals lack knowledge and understanding of mandates, empirically supported practices, or lack the skills and abilities to implement and supervise policies, practices, programs, and services for students with disabilities, this can present barriers to schools and districts meeting these important mandates and likely will negatively affect outcomes for students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004; Fixen et al., 2013; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Landmark

et al., 2010; Lubbers et al., 2008; Test et al., 2015; Lynch, 2016; Petcu et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thompson, 2017; Wang, 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many factors can contribute to insufficient special education transition programming and lackluster postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004; Kohler & Field, 2003; Lasky & Karge, 2006). Researchers have found improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities often depend on school principals' knowledge and understanding of special education law, policies, and best practices as well as their ability to effectively implement, manage, and lead special education programs and personnel (Bai & Martin, 2015; Christensen et al., 2013; DiPaola et al., 2004; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Schaaf et al., 2015; Wigle & Wilcox, 2002).

Furthermore, the task of developing and implementing effective special education and transition programs for students with disabilities is often the ultimate responsibility of school principals (Crocket, 2007; Lynch, 2012). Researchers have recognized school principals as vital stakeholders in transition planning and programming (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Cobb, 2015; Garrison-Wade, et al., 2007; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Kohler & Field, 2003; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Roberts et al., 2018; Shulze & Boscardin, 2018); however, there is little research that specifically addresses secondary administrators' actual involvement and engagement in providing effective secondary transition programs for students with disabilities. Additionally, research specific to secondary administrators' perceptions of barriers to providing secondary transition programming is also sparse.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Principals are ultimately responsible for ensuring educational programs in their schools meet legislative mandates and providing appropriate services and supports to students with disabilities at the secondary level. According to Scheef and Mahfouz (2020), the effective participation of a school principal is especially important to improving post-school outcomes for these students. Because of the responsibility placed on principals to meet legislative mandates and the high-stakes accountability measures for post-school student outcomes, it is critical that researchers obtain a better understanding of principals' perceptions of their roles in providing special education and transition programs to students with disabilities. It is equally important to examine principals' perceptions of barriers to providing effective programs for students with disabilities in order to address these appropriately. Although research exists relative to school principals' perceptions of their preparation, knowledge and skills in leading special and general education programs, there is a dearth of research specific to secondary administrators' actual involvement in providing and leading effective special education transition programs for students with disabilities. The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the perspectives of secondary administrators on their involvement and engagement in providing effective transition programs for students with disabilities, and to identify perceived barriers in providing and supporting transition programs. Two overarching research questions will guide this study:

1. What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?
2. What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions will be used:

***Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*** - Requires standards-based accountability for all states in preparing all students for college or careers. Requires states to develop standards to address and improve student achievement, teacher development, and instructional practices. (ESSA, 2015; Poppen & Alverson, 2018).

***Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*** – A FAPE consists of special education and related services provided to students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 that are provided at public expense (no cost to student or parent), meet the standards of the state education agency (SEA), include preschool, elementary, and secondary education, and are provided in conformity with a student's IEP. A FAPE Includes students with disabilities that have been suspended or expelled from school (Yell & Bateman, 2018; Dieterich et al., 2019).

***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*** – Primary federal law governing educational rights of students with disabilities. Ensures that every student with a disability who is eligible for special education services under IDEA, receives a FAPE, which includes transition services beginning at age 16 in the federal law and

younger ages (e.g. 14) in many states (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Poppen & Alverson, 2018).

**High School** - A public school that houses grades no lower than 7<sup>th</sup> and no higher than 12<sup>th</sup>. (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-1-150, 2016).

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** - Required by IDEA, the IEP is a written, legally required document describing the special education and related services, including transition services for students age 16 or younger, designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and to allow them to make progress. An IEP is based on results of evaluations deemed appropriate by a multidisciplinary team (Bateman & Bateman, 2014).

**Least Restricted Environment (LRE)** - Requirement under federal law that requires to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities, including those in private schools or other facilities, receive an education with students who do not have disabilities. The LRE mandate also requires that the removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occur only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in the regular education setting cannot be achieved even with use of supplemental aides and services (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)).

**Principal** – the chief administrative head or director of an elementary, middle, or secondary school or of a vocational, technical, special education, or alternative school (SC R.43-165.1).

**Post-school outcomes** – outcome measures for students with disabilities after exiting high school which include postsecondary enrollment rates; employment rates;

engagement in employment, education, and/or job training activities; independent or dependent living/household circumstances; and social and community involvement (NLTS-2, 2011).

**Public school** - means a school operated by publicly elected or appointed school officials in which the program and activities are under the control of these officials and which is supported by public funds. (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-1-120, 1974)

**Secondary Administrators** – for the purpose of this study, secondary administrators include middle and high school principals and assistant principals.

**Secondary School** - A school supported by public funds and operated by publicly elected or appointed officials who control the programs and activities within the school (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-1-120, 1974). For the purpose of this study, *secondary school*, will be used interchangeably with *middle and high* schools.

**Special Education** – specially designed instruction provided to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

**Transition Services** – Services that begin no later than the first IEP in effect when a child turns 13, or younger if deemed appropriate by an IEP team, and updated annually and which must include: (1) *Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals* based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills; and (2) *Transition services* (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals that align with the child’s career goals and course of study in the child’s Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) (S.C. Code Ann. §59-59-140).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As part of their educational and instructional programs, the IDEA mandates secondary transition programs and services for all students with disabilities. Secondary administrators are ultimately responsible for ensuring appropriate transition programs and services are afforded to all students with disabilities in their schools (Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Sun & Xin, 2020). Secondary administrators, therefore, must be able to identify and navigate barriers that could impede with the provision of effective secondary transition programs and services in their schools. As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for the education of all students including those with disabilities. Moreover, because leadership affects student outcomes, it is important that principals possess foundational, legal, and professional knowledge of special education and transition and effective practices that support special education and transition programming. Principals also need to possess skills and competencies to effectively implement, manage, and lead special education programs and transition programs (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al. 2017; Cobb, 2015; Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008; Luckner & Movahedazarhouli, 2019; Protz, 2005; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Wakeman, et al., 2006).

The role of the principal has evolved over time to a complex, multifaceted role, and research supports principals are second only to teachers in predicting school and student success (Bateman et al. 2017; Cobb, 2015; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; DiPaola, et al., 2004; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Protz, 2005; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). There

is a plethora of research on the important roles secondary administrators have as school leaders; however, there is a dearth of research specific to secondary administrators' actual involvement in leading and supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities. This study will examine secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in secondary transition processes as well as perceived barriers in providing and supporting secondary transition program and services to students with disabilities. The review of research examines the historical emergence of mandates for secondary transition services for students with disabilities in federal legislation, the roles and responsibilities of secondary administrators in providing, leading, and supporting general and special education programs, and literature relative to barriers that can impede with the provision and supervision of special education and secondary transition programs.

### **Disparities in Post-School Outcomes for Students with Disabilities**

Despite federal legislation which mandates appropriate education programs include transition planning and programs for students with disabilities, disparities in post-school outcomes for these students when compared to non-disabled students continue to exist. Researchers have found students with disabilities are less likely to graduate on time, earn a high school diploma, enter or complete post-secondary education or a 4-year college, gain and sustain competitive employment, and live independently than students without disabilities (Kohler & Field, 2003; Hardman & Dawson, 2010; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Fowler et al., 2014; and Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020).

In the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), a sample of 11,270 youth with disabilities, ages 13 through 16, who received special education services under IDEA were surveyed. The students were in grade 7 and higher in public schools across the U.S. were surveyed. Data from the youth, parents, and schools was collected from 2000 until 2010, eight years after they exited high school, on post-secondary outcomes in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (Newman, et al., 2011). Results of the NLTS 2 study showed youth with disabilities were less likely than students without disabilities to enroll in post-secondary education programs (60% compared to 67%), less likely to attend four-year universities (19% compared to 40%), and less likely to complete post-secondary education programs (35% compared to 55%). In areas of employment and independent living, the study showed youth with disabilities earned less than the general population, were less likely to live independently (45% compared to 59%), and less likely to participate or engage in community activities

Similar post-school outcome disparities appear in Miller-Warren's (2016) quantitative study of parents' perceptions of the effects of secondary transition planning processes. Miller-Warren (2016) surveyed parents of youth with disabilities who graduated high school and found half of the graduates (50%) were unemployed, the majority were not enrolled in college (62.5%), and most (58.3%) still lived with parents. The study also showed only 37.5% of graduates had a post-secondary agency

representative for support with secondary education, employment and independent living efforts.

In their 2017 Disability Status Report for the United States, Erickson, Lee and von Schrader (2021) reported post-school outcome disparities between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in secondary and post-secondary education, employment, income, and independent living. Statistical data used in their report showed 37.3% of individuals with disabilities aged 16 to 24 were employed full-time compared to 79.4% without disabilities. Annual income for those with disabilities was lower (\$40,400) compared to non-disabled (\$47,500), and poverty rates for those with disabilities was higher (26.1%) compared to non-disabled (10.4%). In addition to employment and income, the data showed post-secondary education gaps with 14.8% of individuals with disabilities earning a Bachelor's degree compared to 34.5% of non-disabled.

In 2020, researchers at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported approximately 414,000 students with disabilities ages 14 to 21 exited school in 2017-2018 and, of these, 72.7% graduated with a high school diploma which is less than the national rate of 85% for all students (Hussar et al., 2020); 16% students with disabilities dropped out of school compared to 5.3% for all students (Hussar et al., 2020); 10% received an alternative certificate; and 1% reached maximum age (Hussar et al., 2020). These national findings support the continued need for effective secondary transition programs and services for students with disabilities.

Along with national data on the prevalence of post-secondary disparities in education, employment, and independent living for students with disabilities, is the prevalence of disparities in secondary outcomes specific to South Carolina (SC). The SC Department of Education's 2018-2019 School Report Card and LEA's Special Education District Profiles (2018-2019) show on-time (4 year) graduation rates for students with disabilities in SC at 54.4% compared to 81.1% for all students. Furthermore, according to the SC Special Education District Profile, 43.5% of students with disabilities in SC scored college or career ready compared to 75.3% of all students. Given these reported outcomes for graduation and career readiness for students with disabilities in SC, the state was identified in both 2017 and 2018 by the US Department of Education in the category of *Needs Assistance* in implementing the requirements of Part B of IDEA (SC State Department of Education, 2018). Thus, in efforts to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, national and state level emphasis has been placed on improving and strengthening special education and transition services in school districts.

### **Federal Legislation for Special Education and Transition Services**

In the United States, federal legislation has historically been the driving force behind special education mandates as well as the catalyst for change in special education in services for students with disabilities (Hardman & Dawson, 2010). Prior to the mid-1970's, schools could legally prevent students with disabilities from attending school, and those with more moderate or severe disabilities were in institutions not public schools (Harris, 2006). Increased federal legislation and national school reform efforts would eventually result in changes in how students with disabilities were served

in schools and lead to increased focus on secondary transition services for these students.

In the mid 1970's, federal legislation began focusing on the education of students with disabilities in public schools. Prior to this era, schools could legally deny these children entry into schools (Dieterich, et al., 2019). According to Yell (2019), in the early 1970's, more than 50% of school-aged children with disabilities were either not in school or were receiving an education that did not meet their needs. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), also called Public Law 94-142, became the first major federal special education legislation requiring schools to provide a FAPE for all eligible children and youth with disabilities (Hardman & Dawson, 2010; Dieterich et al., 2019; Yell, 2019).

In the 1980's, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) began focusing on improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities including increasing their chances of successful employment following graduation; thus, a focus on secondary transition emerged (Will, 1984). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, "A Nation at Risk," sparked national debate on education reform, included recommendations for improvement, and advanced the ideal that all children could learn and public schools were responsible for providing students with skills for post-secondary education, employment, and community engagement (Hardman & Dawson, 2010).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act increased the federal role in education and aimed to improve America's public schools by improving the academic achievement of

*all* students including those with disabilities. NCLB (2001) required adoption of rigorous state standards and the development and implementation of systems to measure and report student, teacher, and administrator performance annually (Yell et al., 2006; Hardman & Dawson, 2010; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). NCLB (2001) greatly influenced the reauthorization and amending of the IDEA in 2004 (Yell et al., 2006). The IDEA further required mandated that transition planning be included in a student's IEP beginning at age 16, or earlier if required by an SEA, and that this programming included post-secondary goals for education, employment, and independent living where appropriate. The IDEA (2004) defines transition services as

“a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment) ...and... includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1401 [34][a]).

The IDEA (2004) shifted focus from merely including transition services to actually measuring and improving post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

In 2015, NCLB was replaced by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) which retained requirements for accountability but allowed states flexibility in developing

performance goals and accountability measures. The ESSA also includes more emphasis on standards and assessments that prepare students for college and career (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016; Tomasello & Brand, 2018). Federal legislation in education such as ESSA (2015) coupled with IDEA (2004) mandated and supported secondary transition programs and services in schools.

Besides federal education legislation, other laws supported the transition of young adults to post-secondary education, employment and living in the community. These laws included the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994; and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (Hardman & Dawson, 2010). The WIA (1998) was amended in 2015 to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which further expanded services to individuals including students with disabilities and emphasizes interagency collaboration between schools and adult service providers such as vocational rehabilitation (VR) professionals to improve post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

### **Emergence of Secondary Transition Models and Practice**

To help special educators meet these legislative mandates and requirements, research began developing transition planning models for students with disabilities were developed. Will (1984) provided a framework for transition programming with the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services' (OSERS) "Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life" model which focused on the post-school employment of students with disabilities. To address the

need for more effective transition programs in school, and to improve post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities, Will (1984) proposed integrating, or bridging, transition supports in high school with the services offered to adults with disabilities after leaving high school. Hardman and Dawson (2010) identified three tenets in Will's *Bridges* model: (a) the complexity in and competition for post-school services for students with disabilities, (b) focus on students and their needs rather than type and severity of disability, and (c) a goal of sustained, paid employment either immediately after school or after post-secondary or vocational training.

Whereas Will's *Bridges* model focused on transition planning to improve post-school *employment* outcomes, Andrew Halpern (1985) proposed a more comprehensive transition planning model that included supports for education, employment, *and* community living. Halpern (1985) asserted that because programs in high schools provided the foundation for students with disabilities to transition from school to adult living and if students were to transition successfully, these programs must incorporate transition planning programs that comprehensively address all areas of community life including employment, residential living, and social and interpersonal relationships. Both models offered by Will (1984) and Halpern (1985) emphasized the importance of curriculum and instruction, program organization, assessment, the IEP process, student engagement, and collaboration between school and adult service agencies, which were all important components identified in research and current transition planning models (Hardman & Harman, 2010).

In 1996, Kohler introduced “A Taxonomy for Transition Planning” model based on the premise that all secondary education is transition preparation. Kohler’s (1996) Taxonomy included five categories: (a) Student-focused planning, which consisted of IEP development, student participation, and planning strategies; (b) *Student Development*, which included life skills instruction, career and vocational instruction, and work experiences; (c) Interagency Collaboration; (d) Family Involvement, which includes family training and empowerment; and (e) Program Structure, which involves program philosophy, policy, planning, evaluation, resource allocation, and human resource development. Kohler and Field (2003) continued to emphasize the importance of a transition-focused education for students with disabilities and described the concepts behind Kohler’s (1996) taxonomy as a shift from disability and deficit-focused instruction to an educational and service delivery approach based on students’ abilities, post-school options, and self-determination.

In 2016, Kohler’s taxonomy model was expanded to the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0, including effective practices for improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Kohler, et al., 2016). Kohler’s (2016) revised taxonomy 2.0 model emphasized collaboration across all five categories between school and outside service agencies. Other changes in the revision include adding additional student supports and activities under student development that emphasized using students’ self-determination, assessment, strengths, and interests, and real-life, employment, and occupational skill development through school and work-based learning activities. School climate was added in program structure to promote a culture of inclusiveness

along with cultural relevancy under family engagement. (Kohler et al., 2016). Figure 1 shows Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0.



Figure 1.1 Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016)

Models of transition programming led to increased attention on instructional practices. Specifically, attention would focus on instructional practices supported by research and shown to be effective in improving student performance and outcomes. Such instructional practices are termed evidenced-based practices, or EBPs (Cook & Cook, 2011; Cook et al., 2015; Fixsen et al., 2013).

### **Evidence-Based Practices in Secondary Transition**

Because of the federal mandates for schools to use evidence-based programs and practices (EBPs) for all students, including those with disabilities, it is important that

school personnel, especially administrators charged with the supervision of all instructional programs, have knowledge of research on EBPs and on in-school predictors of post-secondary outcomes (Test, Bartholomew, & Bethune, 2015). According to Mazzotti and Plotner (2016), because of the inadequate transition outcomes for youth with disabilities, special educators should provide enhanced transition programs and services which included evidence-based practices, or EBP's. Cook and Cook (2011) differentiated EBPs from practices labeled with related terms such as research-based, best, and recommended practices, and noted that EBPs are effective instructional techniques and practices supported by meaningful research and proven to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

In addition to EBPs, Hardman and Dawson (2010) found effective transition planning programs include (a) education programs that prepare students for community living and work, (b) access to post-secondary education and/or adult services appropriate for and aligned with individuals' needs and preferences, and (c) a coordinated system of planning and collaboration among educational and community service agencies to help students with disabilities achieve desired post-secondary goals. Researchers have supported the notion that successful transition programs should incorporate EBPs that contain elements for individual, school, family, and community and focus on the domains of post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (Cook & Cook, 2011; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas; 2003; Halpern, 1985; Hardman & Dawson, 2010; Kohler, 1996; Kohler, 2016; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2010;

Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2012; Mazzottie & Plotner, 2016; Rusch & Phelps; 1987; Wehman, 2020; Will, 1984;).

Several national resources serve as repositories for evidence-based practices. One example, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC, n.d.) reviews existing research on instructional programs, policies, and practices and determines EBPs for education purposes. The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), formerly the Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), identifies EBPs and predictors specifically for secondary students with disabilities transitioning to post-school living including post-secondary employment, education, and the community (Test et al., 2015). The best practices and predictors in secondary transition for students with disabilities have been identified through several decades of research.

NTACT conducted comprehensive literature reviews to provide states and LEAs with information on EBPs for teaching secondary transition skills and improving transition programs in schools and predictors of post-school success using Kohler's widely accepted framework (Taxonomy for Transition Programming; Kohler, 1996) for transition education (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian; 2012; Test, Bartholomew, & Bethune, 2015). In August, 2009, Test, Fowler et al., identified 32 secondary transition evidence-based practices linked to the areas in Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy with the majority being in the area of Student Development and others in the areas of Family Involvement and Program Structure. Similarly, in their updated research review, Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) found 29 studies supporting best practices in transition education including paid/unpaid work experience, employment preparation, family involvement, general

education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills training, and self-determination. NTACT (2019) continually updates a matrix relative to evidence based, research based, and promising practices in secondary transition.

### **Evidence-based Predictors**

According to Test et al., (2009), EBPs are designed to teach students specific transition-related skills. To measure the impact of these skills on post school outcomes, correlational research has been conducted in secondary transition to identify evidence-based predictors correlated to improved post-school outcomes in education, employment, and independent living is examined. Through a systematic review of secondary transition correlational literature, Test et al. (Dec., 2009) identified evidence-based predictors of post-school outcomes in education, employment, and independent living which included: career awareness, community experiences, exit exam/high school diploma status, inclusion in the general education setting, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, paid/unpaid work experience, parent involvement, program of study, self-determination, self-care/independent living, social skills, student support, transition program, vocational education, and work study. In 2015, Test et al. added Parent Expectations as another predictor of post-school success. The researchers reiterated how EBPs and predictors can be used by administrators to ensure the most effective transition programs and services for students with disabilities are used and to assess schools' current programs and levels of implementation for EBPs and predictors.

Along with their overview of identified evidence-based practices and predictors of post-school success for students with disabilities, Mazzotti et al. (2012) emphasized

the importance of LEAs being coordinated across federal, state and local policies to provide effective and efficient secondary transition programs. These authors also stressed the need for federal and state legislation to improve SEAs' and LEAs' ability to provide quality transition programs, develop sustainable secondary transition programs based on EBPs at the state and local level, continue federal funding of university personnel training programs and have state-created licenses and certificates for secondary transition personnel at the state and local levels. Whereas there is agreement among researchers on EBPs and predictors, research continues to expand to identify EBPs and predictors of post-school outcomes for students with disabilities which, when accessed and utilized appropriately, can support school administrators in their efforts to provide students with disabilities with the most effective, quality transition programs and supports proven to positively impact student outcomes (Cook et al., 2015; Mazzotti et al., 2016; Test et al., 2015).

### **Barriers and Facilitators to Providing Transition Programs and Services**

The IDEA requires transition services for all students with disabilities beginning at age 16; however, South Carolina requires transition planning services at age 13 (Suk, et al., 2020). Despite federal and state mandates for transition services, barriers to providing special education and transition programs and services for students with disabilities persist. In a 2002 review of secondary transition research to identify key issues in implementing transition requirements under the IDEA and state and local policy issues, Johnson et al. (2002) found specific challenges relative to implementation including (a) ensuring students with disabilities access the full range of general

education curricular options and learning experiences; (b) making high school graduation decisions based on meaningful indicators of students' learning and skills and clarify different diploma options for students with disabilities; (c) ensuring students access to and full participation in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living opportunities; (d) supporting student and family participation; and (e) improving collaboration and system linkages at all levels (Johnson et al., 2002).

***Insufficient interagency and stakeholder collaboration.*** Zhang et al. (2005) surveyed one hundred and five special education teachers and department leaders to examine middle and high school secondary transition practices in South Carolina. Results showed Vocational Rehabilitation counselors were present at little more than half of transition planning meetings, and representatives from the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, Mental Health, and other agencies were absent altogether. Interestingly, although most high schools in SC (90%) reported success in providing school-based functional skill and social skill development opportunities, and 81.9% of schools provided school-based work experiences, in cases where VR counselors were involved, students did not appear to be receiving supported or community-based employment opportunities.

Likewise, in a 2014 Delphi study examining school-to-work barriers for SWD, Riesen et al. (2014) surveyed forty-six (46) participants including special educators, vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors, and community rehabilitation providers identified 84 barriers across twelve domains. Using means (M) of greater than 3.00 and standard deviations (SD) less than .80, Interagency Collaboration was an identified

domain as participants identified eleven barriers under this domain. The highest ranking interagency collaboration barriers identified were long term supports not in place ( $M=3.70$ ,  $SD = .465$ ), lack of knowledge of available supports ( $M=3.54$ ,  $SD = .647$ ), mixed messages from providers about post-school options ( $M=3.31$ ,  $SD = .679$ ), and lack of clear definition and process for collaboration between organizations ( $M=3.30$ ,  $SD = .669$ ) (Riesen et al., 2014).

Tucker and Schwartz (2013) administered a mixed-method survey to one hundred thirty-five parents of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to examine parent perspectives of barriers and facilitators to IEP participation. The researchers also explored parent perspectives on possible barriers to collaboration. When asked if parents ever believed they were not included in their child's educational collaboration and planning, 66% reported "yes" to this question. When asked what might have happened to make them feel they were not part of collaboration and planning processes, 44% indicated "my ideas and suggestions were not included," and 42% indicated "no regular communication." Equally rated at 34% was the response, "IEP created without my input" and "outside provider information not considered" (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). 34% of respondents indicated that conflicts resulted when outside input was not considered, and when asked specifically if they had experienced conflicts with school IEP teams, 83% of parents reported "yes" (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Given these results, the researchers stressed the importance of collaboration to the success of programming and services for students with disabilities. The researchers also emphasized that collaboration was more successful when school leaders made it a

priority and successful collaboration opportunities involved supportive and intentional practices (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

***Inadequate student and parent involvement.*** In addition to inadequate collaboration, researchers have reported inadequate student and parent involvement as a barrier to IEP development and program planning processes. In their review of court rulings relative to policy and law in transition practices, Petcu et al. (2014) reiterated IDEA's requirement for parent participation in IEP meetings and the requirement for students to be invited and participate when transition is to be discussed. Yet, the researchers' review of court rulings showed lack of parent and student inclusion and involvement in IEP development and transition planning processes continue to impede with transition planning and service efforts (Petcu et al., 2014).

In their study examining middle and high school secondary transition practices, Zhang, et al. (2005) found student participation in transition planning inadequate, because only 79% of students attended their transition planning meetings. Shogren and Plotner (2012) conducted a secondary data analysis using results of the NLTS-2 study to examine the transition planning for 11,270 students with intellectual disability, autism, or other disabilities. Results of their analysis showed that while transition planning was conducted most of the time, parents reported significantly fewer students with autism (56.3%) attended their IEP team meetings than youth with intellectual disabilities (67.9%) or other disabilities (77.3%). Further, results showed significantly more parents of students with autism (93.2%) attended IEP meetings compared to parents of students with intellectual disability (85.4%) or other disabilities (88.8%). Although students may

have attended their meetings, teacher responses indicated students with intellectual disability and autism ranked significantly higher in presence but participated very little or not at all, 36.4% and 44.7% respectively, compared to 22.7% of youth with other disabilities (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Riesen et al. (2014) also identified lack of student involvement as a primary barrier in transition processes and insufficient parent and family involvement in transition team meetings and planning processes.

To determine teachers' working knowledge of transition best practices, Lubbers et al. (2008) surveyed five hundred thirty-three (533) middle and high school special education teachers and district transition contacts in Florida. Qualitative data analysis allowed the researchers to group response data into categories and identify emerging themes. Results of survey responses showed lack of stakeholder involvement which included lack of parent and student involvement as the most prevalent barrier at the middle school level (29%) and the second-most prevalent barrier identified at the high school level (37%). Across all groups the top four identified barriers were (a) lack of resources (36%), (b) lack of stakeholder involvement (35%), (c) systems and policy issues (25%), and (d) information and training (24%) (Lubbers, et al., 2008).

Geenen et al. (2005) also explored parent involvement, looking specifically at culturally diverse students with disabilities, and identified decreased parent involvement as a barrier in to transition planning. In a qualitative study for which 31 culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents and caregivers from Native American, Hispanic and African American communities were asked to participate in focus groups and interviews. The results from this study indicated (a) power imbalance, (b)

psychological or attitudinal demands, (c) logistics, (d) information, (e) communication, (f) socio-economic and contextual and (g) cultural barriers were factors that contributed to low CLD parent participation in special education transition planning (Geenen, et al., 2005). Through the identification of factors which impede parental involvement, perhaps these factors can begin to be addressed, increasing parental participation which also leads to an increase in students taking an active role in the transition planning process (Wagner, et al., 2012).

***Insufficient resources.*** In addition to inadequate collaboration and insufficient student and parent participation, insufficient resources are perceived by teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders as a barrier to providing effective programs and services for students. Researchers have found that insufficient resources including insufficient information and training of personnel including teachers, administrators, and IEP teams, and insufficient funding for securing highly trained personnel, professional development and training, and quality programs for students are barriers to effective transition programming (Lubbers et al., 2008; Riesen, et al., 2014; Miller, 2018; Sun & Xin, 2020).

***Insufficient information and training.*** Unsurprisingly, researchers have supported the notion there is a positive relationship between the training that teachers receive and their ability to implement transition interventions and services (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Even though information and training specifically related to transition is necessary for effective transition planning and service delivery (Li, et al., 2009), literature on the topic indicates transition team participants are not being provided with

sufficient information and training opportunities (Li et al., 2009). Although educators rely on their teacher preparation course work to gain the knowledge of transition, researchers have suggested that this preparation may not be sufficient. Findings from a national survey of special education personnel preparation programs revealed that less than half of the special education programs offered a stand-alone course devoted to transition (Anderson, et al., 2003).

In the study conducted by Lubbers, et al. (2008), 24% of surveyed special education teachers (middle and high) and transition contacts in Florida identified lack of information and training as a major barrier to successful transition processes. Further, across groups, the most commonly desired training reported (range 56% to 63%) was career development/planning for students with disabilities (Lubbers et al., 2008). The content of the training reportedly received across groups was primarily related to transition IEP development but not career or employment related. This finding was , similar to the conclusion drawn by Morningstar and Benitez (2013) that generally, teacher education programs have prepared secondary special educators with the necessary skills for planning, but not the delivery of transition services.

In addition to teachers and other personnel lacking information and training, principals also report needing additional information and training with regard to special education programs. Protz (2005) surveyed 82 principals in one county in a southeastern state about the knowledge base of public school principals on special education law and their roles as school administrators. The results of this study revealed that 50% of principals surveyed reported having zero years of formalized

schooling in special education, 54.9% indicated a need for workshops in special education programs, and over 60% indicated agreement that ongoing professional development in special education would benefit themselves, teachers, and staff.

In an examination of the IEP requirements of IDEA, Yell, et al. (2013) identified Insufficient information and training as a challenge principals face in their efforts to meet the requirements of IDEA when involved in the development of educationally, meaningfully, and legally sound IEPs for student with disabilities. The authors reported challenges to developing IEPs which included principals' personal lack of knowledge of special education law and practices, teachers' lack of knowledge of EBPs and how to implement and supervise these programs. The authors stressed the importance of IEP teams having knowledge and understanding of transition requirements under IDEA and the importance of team members knowing and understanding current research, procedures, strategies, and interventions supported in the research to effectively implement IEPs, programs, services (Yell, et al., 2016).

In a review of judicial decisions made between 2005 and 2013, Petcu et al. (2014) identified issues that district and school administrators face in implementing transition programs for students with disabilities. These issues included administrators', teachers', and staff's lack of knowledge and understanding of special education law, specifically IDEA and the requirements for transition programs and services for students with disabilities. The researchers stressed the importance of administrators, teachers, and staff having knowledge and understanding of IDEA relative to transition planning, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, Petcu et al. (2014) asserted that to avoid

legal issues, school leaders should ensure IEP team members are knowledgeable about their responsibilities under IDEA.

***Insufficient funding.*** Insufficient funding has also been identified as a barrier to the provision of effective special education and transition programming and services. Miller (2018) conducted a multiple-case study in which five retired special education administrators from a regional educational agency were interviewed to get their perspectives on current and future challenges for leaders of special education programs. Participants in the study cited insufficient budgets along with personnel constraints as challenges administrators currently have and will continue to face when providing effective programs for students with disabilities.

Lubbers et al. (2008) also found that funding was reported as a perceived barrier by teachers and district transition contacts. Not only was funding needed in order for districts to secure well-trained, highly qualified staff and appropriate programs for students (Lubbers, et al., 2008), but according to implications of NSTTAC's literature review identifying EBPs and predictors of post-school success, sufficient funding is also needed to fund university personnel preparation programs which are needed to train secondary transition personnel at the classroom and administrative level to ensure that highly qualified personnel continue to be available to (directly or indirectly) serve students (Mazzotti, et al., 2012).

To examine school principals' opinions of their knowledge, skills, and leadership roles in providing services and supports to students with disabilities and special needs, Sun and Xin (2020) conducted a quantitative study, surveying 134 school principals in a

northeastern state of the US, and used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze their findings. In identifying obstacles that interfered with decision-making about special education in their schools, 26 principals identified lack of funding, 17 principals identified lack of time (time for planning program implementation and program evaluation, time for professional development, time for teacher preparation and planning), and 11 indicated district mandates and district office control as obstacles. Others identified lack of program buy-in by teachers and support staff, requirements for certification of special education teachers, independence for principals to lead special education programs in their schools, and training and time restrictions to align with union agreements (Sun & Xin, 2020).

Drawing from the literature and best practices, Scheef and Mahfouz (2020) reiterated that school administrators are responsible for making sure educational programs for students meet legislative requirements and support the secondary and post-secondary needs of students. The researchers asserted that as the instructional leader, a school principal must ensure all students are provided with high quality, evidence-based programs that promotes students' academic and personal growth during and after exiting school (Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). It is imperative the barriers principals perceive to impede with successful implementation of transition programs and services are identified so they can be addressed.

### **Facilitators**

As important as it is to identify barriers to providing effective transition programming, it is equally important to identify facilitators that promote successful

transition programs and services. To identify predictors of transition policy compliance and best practice, in 2001, McMahan and Baer conducted a survey study using the “National Survey of the Implementation of the IDEA Transition Requirements” and the Ohio survey, the “Transition Policy Compliance and Best Practice survey.” One hundred eighty-six IEP team members (school, agency, and family members) involved in transition planning for students with disabilities in schools across Ohio participated in the study. Frequencies established that school based interagency transition teams had the strongest correlation to transition policy compliance and best practice. Furthermore, results indicated the following as best predictors for policy compliance and best practice: (a) providing transition training; (b) having a school-based interagency team; and (3) having in-house transition training as factors most associated with policy compliance and best practice. Results of this study supported the need to form interagency teams as part of transition training activities (McMahan & Baer, 2001).

In their survey study examining perceptions of transition barriers, practices, and solutions, Lubbers et al. (2008) found the top three effective practices for transition programming were (a) stakeholder involvement (27%); (b) systems and policy (26%); and (c) communication and collaboration (21%). The most frequently identified suggestions for improvement across all groups were systems and policy (35%); training for all stakeholders (23%), and additional resources (22% high school teachers and 18% transition contacts). Using the study results, to address transition programming issues identified by the participants, Lubbers et al. (2008) suggested (a) developing and implementing consistent policies and procedures regarding funding and personnel

which could help alleviate resource issues; (b) increase interagency collaboration through interdisciplinary collaboration, involving all stakeholders in the planning and sharing resources and information and in creating a shared vision with goals and progress monitoring towards the goals; and (d) developing and implementing clear policies and procedures for transition services and programs in the schools.

Kohler's et al. (2016) Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 included strategies and practices recognized as strengthening secondary transition programming and promoting successful transition of youth with disabilities to post-school living. Kohler et al. (2016) identified five primary practices that can lead to effective transition practices: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure.

In summary, researchers on effective transition planning and programming have identified supports, barriers, and facilitators to providing effective transition programs including (a) knowledge and experience in special education, transition, and empirically sound programs and practices; (b) student and family involvement; (c) interagency collaboration; (d) development and implementation of programs and policies for students with disabilities; and (e) sufficient resource allocation to programs and personnel supporting special education transition programs (Geenan et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2002; Li et al., 2009; Lubbers et al., 2008; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; McMahan & Baer, 2001; Miller, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2013; Petcu et al., 2014; Protz, 2005; Riesen et al., 2014; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Sun & Xin, 2020; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Yell et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2005). Unfortunately,

there are obvious gaps in the literature which includes the lack of research that examines secondary administrators' and their perceptions of barriers in providing effective secondary transition programs and services.

### **Stakeholders' Roles in Special Education and Transition Programs and Services**

To ensure students' successful transition from high school to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living, school personnel must involve and work collaboratively with various stakeholders to plan for and deliver a continuum of transition services and supports to the student and where appropriate, to their family. (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb, 2015; Plotner, et al., 2020). IDEA requires that an IEP team to be involved in the transition planning process and defines participants necessary for the IEP team. Required members include: (a) the student's parent or legal guardian; (b) a special education teacher; (c) a general education teacher; (d) a representative of the educational agency who is authorized to commit school district funding towards services and programs deemed necessary by the team; and (e) a person who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluation results and data. Moreover, the student must be invited to participate in the team. Additionally, a representative of the agency responsible for providing or paying for transition services must be invited as long as a student's parent provides his or her permission, or in the case of the student reaching age of majority, with student permission (Oertle et al., 2017; Oertle & Trach, 2007; Petcu et al. 2014; Plotner et al, 2020).

A successful transition program requires a comprehensive assessment data of a student's strengths, interests, needs, and preferences. From this data, the team may develop the transition program including post-secondary education, employment and independent living goals and a program of transition activities and services to assist in the student progressing towards these goals. The programming is included in the student's IEP, which is implemented as written (Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012). When these key elements are embedded in a student's IEP, the document serves as a road map of the comprehensive education and transition plan tailored to a student's individual needs, strengths, interests, and preferences. This process and document serve to facilitate a student's transition from school to post-school life (Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012). Transition services may be provided by the school or by agencies outside of school and should be specified in the IEP (Oertle & Seader, 2015; Oertle et al., 2017; Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012).

Both IDEA and the Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act, or WIOA, (2015) require collaboration between schools and adult service agencies. The roles of the various stakeholders involved in the transition planning process are to ensure the student's individual needs, interests, strengths, preferences, and post-school goals are considered, to ensure the provision of school-based educational and support services while the child is in school, and to provide knowledge of and access to resources available to the student after leaving high school (Landmark, Roberts, & Zhang, 2013; Noyes & Sax, 2004; Oertle et al., 2017; Oertle & Trach, 2007; Petcu et al., 2014; Plotner et al., 2020; Wehman, 2020).

All stakeholders play vital roles in the transition planning process. The student especially is a fundamental part of his/her IEP and transition planning team, and school district personnel (teachers, therapists, counselors, administrators, etc.) should work with students to empower them with skills to actively participate in decision-making processes (Johnson, 2012; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Petcu et al., 2014). Parents play a key role in contributing to transition planning teams as they provide unique insight into their child, influence the child's attitudes, values, and decisions, and provides support for the child during and after exiting school (Miller-Warren, 2016; Wehman, 2020). General and special education teachers facilitate students' participation in their IEP meeting through daily instruction of academic, social, communication, and self-determination skills and by providing students with opportunities to practice these skills (Petcu et al., 2014). Local vocational rehabilitation (VR) service representatives provide information and access to community resources and opportunities includes job services and paid and unpaid work experiences (Plotner et al., 2020).

School administrators, specifically principals and assistant principals, also play a pivotal role in the transition planning process in the role of LEA at IEP meetings. In this role, principals can affect teachers' attitudes and performance and students' attitudes, behaviors, performance, and post school outcomes. The LEA representative is responsible for effective special education and transition programs in schools (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; DiPaola et al., 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cob, 2015; Bateman et al., 2017; Lynch, 2016; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020).

The LEA representative is an essential member of the IEP team and is responsible for ensuring the school and district are complying with procedural, substantive, and implementation requirements of the IDEA and ensuring students receive a FAPE. How principals perceive their roles and responsibilities in ensuring provision of a FAPE to students with disabilities, adhering to special education laws and policies, and ensuring the provision of empirically sound general and special education and transition programming can influence the decisions in the implementation and delivery of educational services to students with disabilities in their schools (Dieterich et al., 2019; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lynch, 2012; Petcu et al., 2014; Praisner, 2003; Protz, 2005; Riehl, 2008; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Roberts, et al., 2018; Shulze & Boscardin, 2018; Wakeman et al., 2006; Yell, et al., 2006).

### **Principals' General Roles and Responsibilities**

The roles of principals in schools has evolved over time from disciplinarian and teacher supervisor to involving more complex responsibilities (Lynch, 2012). The principal is the leader of personnel, students, public relations, finance, instruction, academic achievement, and strategic planning (Lynch, 2012). This section examines what principals are expected to do in schools through the professional standards on which principals are evaluated, and then a summary of general roles and responsibilities is included based on synthesis of the literature.

**Professional Standards.** Whereas school administrators, specifically principals, play many roles in schools, national and state laws, policies, and standards help to inform their practice so they will be effective in their roles and beneficial to all

stakeholders. Standards also outline principals' general roles and responsibilities for leading schools and instructional programs. In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration released updated standards for principals and school administrators. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) formerly known as the Interstate School Leaders' Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, emphasized the importance of a principal's role in teacher and student learning and the affect principals have on learning. The PSEL (2015) standards are based on the premise that improving student learning requires a holistic view of leadership in that principals and school leaders must focus on promoting and improving the learning, achievement, development, and well-being of each student. PSEL (2015) standards identify the following ten interdependent domains, qualities and values that research and practice identify as integral to effective principal leadership: (1) Mission, Vision, and Core Values; (2) Ethics and Professional Norms; (3) Equity and Cultural Responsiveness; (4) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; (5) Community of Care and Support for Students; (6) Professional Capacity of School Personnel; (7) Professional Community for Teachers and Staff; (8) Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community; (9) Operations and Management; and (10) School Improvement. Whereas PSEL (2015) standards outline general leadership practices to improve student achievement and student outcomes, they do not specifically address special education.

In an effort to address gaps in equitable school leadership and to promote school improvement and student learning, the South Carolina State Department of Education (SBE) adopted the Expanded Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal

Performance (PADEPP) Standards and Criteria (2017) for principals and for principal evaluation. PADEPP (2017) standards align to both PSEL and ESSA, and identify nine standards that emphasize a focus on students, student learning, and student wellbeing in the present and in the future. These standards are:

- *Vision* - fosters the academic success and well-being of each student by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of learning reflective of excellence and equity.
- *Instructional Leadership* – leads in the development and alignment of organizational, instructional, and assessment strategies that enhance teaching and learning.
- *Effective Management* – manages the school organization, its operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; *Climate* – advocates, nurtures, and sustains a positive, equitable school climate.
- *School/Community Relations* – collaborates effectively with all stakeholders (school and district staff, students and families, and community).
- *Ethical Behavior* – demonstrates integrity, fairness, and ethical behaviors.
- *Interpersonal Skills* – interacts effectively with stakeholders and addresses their needs and concerns.
- *Staff Development* – collaborates with school and district staff to plan and implement professional development activities that promote the achievement of school and district goals.

- *Principals' Professional Development* – uses available resources and opportunities for professional growth.

SC's SBE (2017) embodied a principal's core, fundamental practice and purpose which is to promote the learning and success of schools, teachers, and all learners. Similar to the PSEL (2015) standards, SC's PADEPP standards do not specifically address special education, but they do emphasize principals' responsibilities in leading schools, personnel, and programs designed to promote the success of all learners.

Principals have important, dynamic, and complex roles in schools including being the instructional leader ultimately responsible for all special and general education programs in the school (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). Furthermore, school principals have significant effect on student performance and student achievement (Bateman, et al., 2017; DiPaola et al., 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Lynch 2012). The role of school principals has evolved from building managers and student disciplinarians to that of instructional leaders who communicate the school's educational mission, manage curriculum and instruction, support and supervise teachers, monitor student progress, and promote learning climates inclusive to all learners (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lynch, 2012). A principal's role is multifaceted and vital to both quality instruction and student learning (Roberts et al., 2018). In fact, research supports principals are second only to classroom teachers in terms of influencing student performance (Leithwood et al., 2004; Roberts et al., 2018), and principals' actions influence both schools and student outcomes (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2017; Roberts et al.,

2018). Given the variety of roles principals have in schools, the affect they have on teacher and student performance and outcomes, and the accountability in legislation such as the IDEA inform principals of the need to be effective leaders in special education programs. Thus, it is important to further examine their roles and perspectives of their roles in special education and transition programming and services.

### **Principals' Roles in Special Education and Transition Programs and Services**

Laws, policies, and standards set high expectations for principals to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, meet state expectations and show improved post-school outcomes. Principals must possess knowledge of special education laws, and ensure that their teachers provide EBPs and services to students. Moreover, principals are held accountable for processes, student achievement, and post-school outcomes for these students (Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; Petcu et al., 2014). It is important to look at principals' roles and their perceptions of their roles in special education as their knowledge and attitudes towards special education decision-making, budgeting, staffing, programming, and procedures affect special education programming and services provided in their schools (Sun & Xin, 2020).

Literature reviews and research studies show common themes in the roles of principals leading special education center mostly around principals' competencies in special education and special education law and instructional leadership. In 2003, DiPaola and Walther-Thomas provided a literature review on principals' roles and influence on special education, emerging standards for principals, the knowledge and skills needed for effective school leaders, and leadership issues relative to effective

special education programming. They found effective schools have five instructional leadership priorities of principals: (a) defining and communicating the school's educational mission; (b) managing curriculum and instruction; (c) supporting and supervising teaching; (d) monitoring student progress; and (e) promoting an effective learning climate. Furthermore, effective principals: must have knowledge and understanding of special education and special education laws, EBPs, and effective teaching and management skills. It is important that principals be able to assess their personal strengths, interests, and professional development needs and foster the professional development of others on effective instructional models. Moreover, principals must be committed to sustained implementation of innovative programming and be able to build and sustain collaborative relationships with school, student, family, and community stakeholders. Their review of the national ISLLC Standards for the knowledge and skills needed for effective school leaders resulted in their providing a Leadership Framework Based on the Needs of All Students which includes 6 standards for school administrators to promote the learning of all students by (1) facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community; (2) advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; (3) management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (4) collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; (5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an

ethical manner; and (6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

In another literature review on school principals' roles in providing and leading effective special education programs, DiPaola et al. (2004) found the following five dimensions of effective leadership by principals: (a) promoting an inclusive school culture by engaging others in developing and working towards a shared vision; (b) providing instructional leadership by focusing on academic outcomes for all students, promoting professional inquiry and innovations, being dedicated to research-based practices and data-based decisions, and having an understanding of special education laws and policies and effective practices; (c) modeling collaborative leadership by creating responsive learning communities that support academic success for all learners; (d) managing and administering organizational processes by finding ways and means of meeting the needs of the school, personnel, and students through collaborative problem-solving; and (e) building and maintaining effective working relationships with all stakeholders (students, families, school personnel, and community) to benefit all students.

To examine the knowledge base and perceptions of preparation of public school administrators in a southeastern state, Protz (2005) surveyed 82 practicing elementary, middle, and high school administrators (principals, assistant principals, principal fellows, and principal interns) across 19 schools in a county located in that state. The survey consisted of sections relative to demographics, respondents' views on the relevance of special education law in their administrative positions, education and training and need

for on-going training, and administrators' knowledge of special education law.

Frequency distributions describe the sample and administrator perceptions of the relevance of special education law to their administrative positions, their perceived need for training in special education law, and responses to special education situational questions that simulate decision making (Protz, 2005). In terms of administrative experience, 62.7% reported having 1 to 5 years of administrative experience and 10% reported having more than 25. 27.5% strongly agreed their educational backgrounds were adequate to meet the needs of exceptional children, 3.9% strongly disagreed. In response to the need for professional development, 51% strongly agreed additional training in special education law is needed. 60% strongly agreed on the need for on-going professional development for administrators, school counselors, and regular education teachers, and 78.4% strongly agreed on the need for on-going professional development for special education teachers. Questions in the third section involved scenarios based on discipline, related services, due process, preschool services, pre-placement evaluations, reevaluations, private school placements, parents with learning disabilities, compliance, transportation, and English as a Second Language (ESL) students referred for special education. The highest score possible for this section was 28 and the lowest was 0. The highest score achieved was 27 and the lowest was a 6 and 23.5% earned the mode score of 16. Cross-tabulation results for this section showed correct response rates of 53.8% for elementary school, 42.3% for middle schools, and 11.5% for high schools. A low rate of knowledge and understanding in the areas of evaluation, reevaluation, graduation, related services, compliance, and due process. The effect of

failing to meet IEP goals and graduation was most problematic with a correct response rate of only 16.6%. Mediation and due process had less than 35% correct responses. 94% of principals and 87.5% of assistant principals reported fewer than five years of education experience. Findings from this study show the majority of administrators demonstrate an inconsistency in their knowledge and understanding of special education law and practice, and lack preparedness because they have little or no formalized instruction in special education law and practice. The majority of administrators surveyed had less than 6 years of education experience. Protz (2005) referred to school administrator's roles in decision making as flawed concerning placement, discipline, and IEP meetings which can be costly to districts. The principal's important role in knowing, understanding, and following special education law was emphasized in this study.

To examine their roles and responsibilities in special education, Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) surveyed 255 rural school principals in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The survey consisted of 42 positive statements, and principals responded to each statement using a Likert scale with "1" indicating strong agreement, "3" being neutral, and "5" indicating strong disagreement. The original mailing for the surveys was 439, with 255 returning questionnaires for a response rate of 58%. 98 participants were elementary school principals, 78 were secondary administrators, 19 were elementary/secondary school administrators, and 50 were central office and other administrative officials. Respondents reported 79% of their time was spent on regular education tasks and 21% on special education. Items that focused on the delivery of

special education services received lowest ratings, and items that focused more on support of teachers in the classroom and with professional development in special education were the highest rated items. A primary finding in this study was that principals are integrating special education in the total school community by communicating their mission to all stakeholders, managing curriculum and instruction, supervising general and special education teachers, monitoring all student progress, and promoting a positive instructional climate (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006).

Wakeman et al. (2006) conducted a survey study to determine the knowledge base of national secondary administrators related to special education. The researchers used a systematic sampling frame, selecting and surveying 1000 principals from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)'s 2004 mailing list of principals to examine principal's fundamental knowledge and knowledge of current issues in special education. The researchers define fundamental knowledge as basic understanding of the functioning and history of special education using the CEC's (2002) five common areas of principal knowledge: (a) professional practice; (b) all teachers teaching all students; (c) characteristics of disabilities; (d) legislation; (e) learning differences. They defined current issues as those driving research, policy, and practice. 362 surveys were returned for a rate of 36%. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to summarize findings. 98.6% of principals agreed all students and 94.9% of all teachers are the responsibility of the principal. In regard to practices by principals, 92.2% reported they consistently promoted an inclusive culture; 87.1% provided resources for instructional inclusive practices, 84% reflected on actions and decision;

81.9% met with program teachers regularly (once a month or more); 76.7% participated in IEP meetings. Although principals reported being well-informed in fundamental issues, some acknowledged limited understanding in current issues such as self-determination practices, functional behavior assessments, and universally designed lessons which supports the need for principals to having professional development in effective special education practices, and in how to use research in decision-making and for improvements in instructional practices (Wakeman et al., 2006).

Bays and Crockett (2007) conducted a qualitative study to examine how instructional leadership occurs in elementary schools. Thirty-eight participants including 24 teachers, 9 principals, and 3 special education directors across 9 schools and 3 districts in a southeastern state participated in interviews with the researchers. In addition to interviews, the researchers spent 3 days conducting direct observations in schools totaling 126 hours. Observations were conducted by shadowing the principals during IEP meetings, eligibility meetings, parent conferences, discussions among teachers and guidance counselors, meetings with agency personnel, phone calls to the SPED directors, faculty meetings, teacher observation sessions, interactions with individual students, as well as during principals' visits to classrooms and interactions during lunch, halls, and offices. The researchers coded all interviews and notes from all observations and developed a theory based on the following patterns: The instructional supervisor's role was assigned by the school board policy to the principal, the principal must negotiate among competing priorities and contextual factors to fulfill the role, and the outcome of this negotiation was the dispersal of responsibility for special education

among administrative and teaching personnel. In short, the principal collaborates with the special education director, teachers, and other experts, and engages in open communication, formal evaluations, and informal observations to support the delivery of special education (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

To examine, understand, and analyze principals' perceptions of their role as the instructional leader with special education teachers, Frost and Kersten (2011) conducted a quantitative study including 132 elementary school principals in one Illinois county. Of the 132 principals contacted, 56 responded. Principals answered a 4 part, 41-item online survey which prompted them to provide demographic information and respond to subsequent sections where they rated their knowledge of special education and indicated the frequency in which they engaged in specific instructional leadership behaviors with special education teachers. Likert scales were assigned to each of these sections. Open ended questions at the end of the survey probed for principals' perceptions of their role with special education teachers which were coded and analyzed for trends and patterns. Frequencies and percentages were then used to describe responses using statistical software. Principals were asked to indicate their level of knowledge using a scale of 1 = limited, 2=modest, 3= average, 4=good, and 5=excellent on three categories: legal, foundation (activities related to ensuring an effective model of service provision), and context (research on evidence-based curriculum that aligns with state standards and appropriate for students' needs). Principals rated all areas of knowledge between a mean span of 3.43 to 4.32, falling within the "average" to "good" range. Principals rated themselves highest in the areas

of Response to Intervention (RtI) plan (4.32), knowledge of district's related services delivery model (4.30) and the district's continuum of service (4.28) and parents' role in the IEP process (4.28). The three lowest areas scored were (a) development of a program improvement plan for special education (3.43), (b) knowledge of state learning standards for students with disabilities (3.55), and (c) knowledge of special education rules and regulations contained in the Illinois Administrative Code (3.57). Regarding measuring their instructional leadership activities with special education teachers, principals rated involvement highest in conducting formal evaluation (4.55), hiring teachers (4.32), and making classroom visits (4.32). Lowest ratings were in (a) annual attendance at professional development opportunities pertaining to special education legal issues (2.89), (b) monitoring alignment of IEPs to state learning standards (3.17), and (c) planning program improvement for special education programs and services (3.17). Findings from this study showed principals rated their involvement highest in foundation area of special education and lowest in the legal area. When comparing means for knowledge and involvement, principals rated themselves higher in involvement as opposed to knowledge in context. The researchers noted this was interesting because responses indicated that principals acknowledged engaging in tasks without having the necessary knowledge in regard to special education (Frost & Kersten, 2011). Principals provided 96 responses on open ended questions and results showed 22.9% identified administrative support as their primary responsibility with special education teachers which is defined as guidance, supervision, communication, and

evaluation. Additionally, 16.7% reported student instruction and achievement as primary responsibilities, and 13.5% said resource dispersion (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

In their book, “A Principal’s Guide to Special Education,” Bateman & Bateman (2014) gathered input from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC), and other researchers with knowledge and experience in the field, Bateman and Bateman asserted there were nine important themes regarding principals’ primary responsibilities in providing appropriate, effective, and legally sound special education programs for students with disabilities:

- the principal is responsible for the education of all students;
- the principal needs to be familiar with the concept and practice of special education;
- the principal needs to ensure that staff members know what is necessary for providing special education services;
- the principal needs to verify that staff members are appropriately implementing services for students with disabilities;
- the principal should lead efforts for data collection;
- the principal should ensure that all staff members are aware of the process for identifying students with disabilities;
- the principal must be prepared to lead meetings related to services for student with disabilities;

- the principal needs to know all students in the building and be ready to talk about them; and
- the principal needs to know how to prevent discipline problems.

Bateman's and Bateman's 2017 review of research relative to special education competencies for principals reviewed the standards for principals' training from multiple organizations including the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the Interstate School of Leaders' Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The authors assembled a list of 30 competencies identified by principals across the nation as necessary to lead effective special education programs which include principals' knowledge and understanding of IDEA and procedural requirements, knowledge and understanding of IEPs and team meeting and planning processes, district and school accountability, parent and student involvement in the educational planning processes, discipline and behavior interventions, transition requirements, and avoiding discrimination.

From their review of literature, Cobb (2015) found principals played seven key roles as special educator leaders: visionary, partner, coach, conflict resolver, advocate, interpreter, and organizer. Cobb (2015) reiterated that when acting as visionary, the principal supports equity and inclusion and communicates the vision to staff through

words and actions. Further, principals work as partner, coach, conflict resolver, and advocate to establish school-wide practice of inclusive, program delivery, shared decision making, and equitable support. By interpreting policies and expectations, and then setting up special education processes accordingly, they ensure equity in programs and methodologies.

Researchers including Parker & Day (1997), Smith & Colon (1998), and Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) asserted that principals are key in making special education programs either a success or a failure. Drawing from relevant literature and best practices, in an article describing roles of transition coordinators and the role of administrators in supporting special education students, teachers, and programs, Scheef and Mahfouz (2020) presented key roles for principals in providing effective special education and transition programming. The roles identified by the researchers include: principals being instructional leaders who use high quality instructional programs for all students including educational and transition programs for students with disabilities; principals supporting special education personnel, programs, and students with disabilities; principals creating a school culture of inclusiveness; principals providing teachers with on-going professional development and support; and principals fostering collaboration in and outside of school.

### **Conclusion and Rationale for Study**

The IDEA mandates special education and related services for all eligible students with disabilities and secondary transition programs and services for eligible students with disabilities of a certain age. Secondary administrators, principals and assistant

principals, are responsible for ensuring appropriate transition programs and services are afforded to all students with disabilities. Principals play multifaceted and important roles in the teaching and learning processes and have prolific impact on student outcomes including post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities; thus, principals must be knowledgeable of special education, law, and best practices that support students and programs for students with disabilities. Principals are directly responsible for personnel, policy implementation, and program development and evaluation, and in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, they must create learning environments that foster student progress in academics and in post-secondary goals (Cobb, 2015). To accomplish this, principals must be actively involved in instructional programming and processes and must be able to identify and navigate barriers that impede with the provision of effective transition programs and services for students with disabilities. In short, secondary administrators should possess knowledge and skills to effectively implement, manage, and lead secondary transition programs and be actively engaged in these processes to improve practices, programs, and student outcomes (Bateman et al. 2017; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola, et al., 2004; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Wakeman, et al., 2006).

Whereas research supports the various and important roles of principals in providing education programs for all students, there is little research specific to secondary administrators' actual involvement and engagement in the provision of secondary transition programs. Research examining principals' perceptions of barriers specific to providing and supervising secondary transition programming is also lacking.

This study will add to the literature by examining secondary administrators' perspectives of their involvement in providing transition programs and services to students with disabilities and investigating barriers they perceive as impeding with the provision of these programs. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?
2. What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

To improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, federal and state legislation and policies require age appropriate transition services for students with disabilities. The state of South Carolina requires transition services to begin at age 13 (Suk et al., 2020). Despite legislative efforts to improve outcomes, disparities continue in secondary and post-school outcomes for these students in relation to non-disabled peers. Secondary administrators play important roles in providing and managing effective educational and transition programs for students with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to examine perspectives of secondary administrators on their involvement and engagement in providing effective transition programs for students with disabilities, and to identify perceived barriers by principals in providing and supporting secondary transition programs. The overarching research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?
2. What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this study including the research study design, the participants and survey instrument. A description of the procedures, data collection, and data analysis will follow.

### **Participants and Procedures**

Principals and assistant principals working in public secondary (middle and high) schools in South Carolina were the target population for this study. This population was selected because of the lack of research specific to secondary administrators' leading secondary special education and transition programs in South Carolina and elsewhere. According to Fowler (2014), a *sample* is a small subset representative of the population, and individuals who have a chance of being included among those selected make up the *sampling frame*. Using the South Carolina State Department of Education's middle and high school directories, principals in all middle and high schools in the state were identified. Assistant principals could not be identified because SC does not maintain a directory for assistant principals. The list was then filtered to exclude administrators in: (a) magnet and charter schools as there are not such schools in every district and their variance from traditional school structure, curricular, and/or instructional methods; (b) career and technology centers due to multi-district sharing of these across the state and directors or principals of these schools not being responsible for home district special education students' services; and (c) private schools accepting public funds in order to capture *public* high schools resulted in a total of 460 public middle and high schools. The sample, therefore, was identified as principals and assistant principals working in the remaining 460 middle and high schools across SC. Surveys were sent directly to 460

principals via email addresses obtained from the SC State Department of Education’s principal directory. Principals were then asked to forward the email and survey to all assistant principals in their building. There were 150 responses to the survey including partial responses. Because the researcher used direct and indirect contact methods, a precise response rate was difficult to determine. However, given 82 principals responded (minimum) and given 150 survey responses (maximum), a possible response rate range is 18% to 33%.

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of South Carolina’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The *Secondary Administrators’ Perspectives on Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts* survey questions were entered into SurveyMonkey™(2020) and disseminated to participants via email which included instructions for completion (see Appendix B). Principals and assistant principals of SC middle and high schools were asked to participate. To increase response rate and reduce nonresponse error, a reminder email was sent to participants two weeks prior to the deadline and again one week prior to the deadline of July 31<sup>st</sup> (Johnson & Morgan, 2016). There were 150 responses including partial responses which are included in the data analysis. Descriptive statistics regarding participants’ gender, level of education, and current position are shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	76	51.70
Female	71	48.30

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
Level of education		
Doctorate	30	20.41
Masters +30	80	54.42
Masters	31	21.09
Bachelors	0	0.00
Other	6	4.08
Current position		
High school principal	37	25.34
High school assistant principal	29	19.86
Middle school principal	45	30.82
Middle school assistant principal	29	19.86
None of these	6	4.11

*n* = 146 - 147

Table 3.2 below shows participants' professional experience and training in education and administration, years of experience specific to middle and secondary administration, and the amount of training received specific to special education.

Table 3.2 Professional Experience and Training

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
Total professional years		
5 or less	2	1.36
6-10	6	4.08
11-15	20	13.61
16-20	36	24.49
21 or more	83	56.46
Years as a principal or assist. principal		
5 or less	59	40.41
6-10	37	25.34
11-15	27	18.49
16-20	12	8.22
21 or more	11	7.53
Years as secondary principal or asst. principal		
5 or less	60	41.96
6-10	34	23.78
11-15	26	18.18
16-20	15	10.49
21 or more	8	5.59
Years in current position		

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
5 or less	111	76.03
6-10	28	19.18
11-15	2	1.37
16-20	3	2.05
21 or more	2	1.37
Amount of training in special education		
Doctoral degree in SPED	0	0.00
Master's degree in SPED	10	6.80
Bachelor's degree in SPED	3	2.04
College certificate in SPED (add-on)	5	3.40
25 or more hours SPED prof. dev.	0	0.00
25 or less hours SPED prof. dev.	93	63.27
No formal training in SPED	25	17.01
Other	11	7.48

*n* = 143 – 147

Table 3.3 below provides summary statistics relative to participant's school environments.

Table 3.3 School Environments

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
Number of students served in current school		
0-250	17	11.56
251-500	37	25.17
501-1000	63	42.86
1001-1250	11	7.48
1251-1500	10	6.80
>1500	9	6.12
Number of certified SPED teachers in current school		
0	2	1.36
1-5	71	48.30
6-10	59	40.14
11-15	9	6.12
16-20	3	2.04
21-25	1	0.68
26 or more	2	1.36
Don't know	0	0.00
Type of community served by school		
Urban	10	6.76

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent (%)
Rural	82	55.41
Suburban	19	12.84
Urban/rural	6	4.05
Urban/suburban	9	6.08
Rural/suburban	17	11.49
Urban/rural/suburban	5	3.38

*n* = 147 - 148

## Instrumentation

**Instrument development.** Fowler (2014) asserted the purpose of a *survey* is to produce quantitative statistics or numerical descriptions about some aspects of a study population. Thus, a quantitative study design utilizing a survey instrument was utilized in this study. The initial instrument was created by the researcher based on existing literature pertaining to leadership and leadership of special education and transition programs which can be seen in Appendix A. Connection of survey items to the literature strengthens internal validity for the study (Johnson & Morgan, 2016).

The initial draft of the survey consisted of five sections and 90 question items. Two levels of content reviews were conducted on the survey instrument following initial development for instrument reliability and validity (Fowler, 2014; Johnson & Morgan, 2016). The first review consisted of obtaining feedback on the organization, comprehensiveness of content, item relevance to purpose and constructs, and suggestions for additions or omissions for clarity and length from an experienced special education transition professional (a PhD level special education transition professor and five first year doctoral students in a special education transition PhD program at a state accredited university). Feedback from the first layer of review resulted in edits to the

wording of two questions in the *Demographics* section for clarity and the omission of the one section, *Perceived Confidence*, due it being considered irrelevant to the guiding research questions and purpose of the study.

The second layer of content review consisted of having three experienced secondary administrators (one retired middle/secondary principal and two practicing secondary assistant principals) use a feedback form (see Appendix D) to provide feedback on the survey tool and on item content for clarity and comprehensiveness. Feedback from these reviewers resulted in adding an “Unsure” option to questions prompted for “Yes” or “No” responses, and resulted in correcting the rating scales under *Perceived Barriers* section. No other revisions were made to content, organization, or wording of items.

**Final survey instrument.** The initial survey instrument was revised using feedback and suggestions received from the two layers of content reviewers. The final survey instrument, *Secondary administrators’ Perspectives on Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts*, consists of four sections with 55 question items (See Appendix C for copy of full survey). Section I, *Introduction and Purpose*, introduces the researcher, explains the purpose, and provides researcher contact information. Section II, *Demographics*, consisted of 12 items to collect demographic information specific to individual participants. Section III, *Perceived Involvement and Engagement*, contained 25 items relative to principals’ perceived levels of involvement and engagement in providing and supporting transition programs. Using a Likert scale with choices of *Never directly involved*, *Rarely involved*, *Moderately involved*, and *Highly*

*involved*, participants were asked to rate their level of involvement in transition related activities for item 26. Section IV, *Perceived Barriers*, included 18 items and participants were asked to rate each item as either a *Significant barrier*, *Moderate barrier*, *Minimal barrier*, or *Not at all a barrier* in leading and supporting special education transition programs for students with disabilities. An open-ended question (item 29) was included for principals to identify any other barriers not already listed to supporting secondary transition efforts.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey responses collected via SurveyMonkey were uploaded to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program for statistical data analysis used to answer each research question. Specifically, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to obtain a clear understanding of the population. Measures of central tendency (means and percentiles) and dispersion (standard deviation and ranges) were also computed. Data from all participants was analyzed as a whole, and using participants' current position, data was further analyzed for comparison of responses between middle and high school administrators.

**Research Question 1:** *What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?*

To identify secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs, the researcher examined administrators' perceptions of how often and to what extent they are involved in

transition planning activities including intra and inter-agency collaboration, attending and actively participating in transition meetings, and supervising transition programming. The researcher also examined the administrators' perceptions of their familiarity with IDEA and federal IEP requirements relative to transition, with secondary transition service delivery and practices, and their familiarity and use of post-secondary outcome data for students with disabilities. Item level analysis including frequency and percentages, means, and standard deviations of means were calculated on items 16 and 19-27.

**Research Question 2:** *What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?*

Principals' perceptions of barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities were identified by item level analysis on item 28. Descriptive statistics including frequency and percentages were calculated of barriers identified as significant and the mean and standard deviation for the level of barrier perceived by administrators were also calculated. Survey item 29 included an open ended question for participants to identify any other barriers not already listed in item 28. Responses to this open-ended question was analyzed to identify common barriers identified by respondents and frequencies then calculated. Responses were coded to identify themes or barrier, and then frequencies were counted for each.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine perspectives of secondary administrators on their involvement and engagement in providing effective transition programs for students with disabilities, and to identify perceived barriers by principals in providing and supporting secondary transition programs. The overarching research questions which guided this study included:

1. What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?
2. What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?

**Research Question 1:** *What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?*

To answer this question, the extent of principals' and assistant principals' involvement and engagement in a variety of secondary transition activities was examined including their participating in transition teams and transition meetings (items 16, 19, and 20), attending IEP meetings (item 21), and frequency of engagement in other transition activities (item 27). Further, perceptions of their familiarity with secondary

transition service delivery and practices (item 22), familiarity with and use of post-secondary data in decision-making (items 23 and 24), familiarity with IDEA and federal IEP requirements for transition (item 25) were examined. Perceptions on the importance of their being familiar with IDEA and federal IEP requirements for transition and being familiar with secondary transition service delivery practices (items 25 and 26) were also examined.

**Frequency of participation in transition and IEP team meetings.** As shown in Table 4.1, when asked if their school had a secondary transition team, were they a team member, the majority of respondents (43 out of 63, or 68.25%) indicated they were not a transition team member. Further, when asked how often they attend secondary transition team meetings, the majority (64.17%) indicated not at all. When asked about attending IEP meetings, the majority of participants did indicate they attended IEP meetings either monthly (41.67%) or weekly (38.33%). Examination of data to compare high school administrators' responses to middle school administrators' responses showed 30.3% of high school administrators reported not being a transition team member compared to 43.1% of middle school administrators. Responses showed 63.1% of high school administrators reported not attending secondary transition team meetings compared to 66.7% of middle school administrators. When comparing responses for attending IEP meetings, 67.70% of high school administrators reported attending IEP meetings weekly (27.7%) or monthly (40%) compared to 96% of middle school administrators reported attending IEP meetings weekly (52.9%) or monthly (43.1%). Thus, high school administrators reported more involvement in team meetings.

Table 4.1 Frequency of Participation in Secondary Transition or IEP Teams

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Secondary transition team member		
Yes	20	16.53
No	43	35.54
My school does not have transition team	58	47.93
Attending secondary transition team meetings		
Weekly	0	0.00
Monthly	12	10.00
Quarterly	12	10.00
Bi-annually	7	5.83
Annually	12	10.00
Not at all	77	64.17
Attending IEP meetings		
Weekly	46	38.33
Monthly	50	41.67
Quarterly	11	9.17
Bi-annually	4	3.33
Annually	4	3.33
Not at all	5	4.17

*n* = 120 - 121

**Familiarity with secondary transition service delivery and IDEA.** As shown in Table 4.2, 65% of participants indicated they were somewhat familiar (47.50%) or not at all familiar (17.50%) with secondary transition service delivery and practices; however, when asked if they felt it important for secondary administrators to be familiar with secondary transition service delivery and practices, the majority (54.55%) indicated they felt it was extremely important. When asked how important it was for secondary administrators to be familiar with IDEA and federal IEP requirement relative to secondary transition, 74.38% indicated they felt it was extremely important.

When comparing high school administrator responses to middle school administrator responses, 10.8% of high school administrators and 27.5% of middle school administrators reported not being familiar at all with secondary transition service delivery and practices, and 56.1% of high school administrators and 49% of middle school administrators believed it extremely important to be familiar with transition service delivery and practices. The majority of high school administrators (59.8%) and middle school administrators (63.8%) felt it extremely important for middle and high school principals and assistant principals to be familiar with IDEA and IEP requirements related to secondary transition.

**Familiarity with and use of post-secondary outcome data.** Also shown in Table 4.2, when asked to rate their familiarity with their school's or district's post-secondary outcome data for students with disabilities, 81.66% of respondents indicated they were either somewhat familiar (45.83%) or not at all familiar (35.83%) with the data. In addition, the majority of respondents (56.30%) indicated they never (31.09%) or rarely (25.21%) used their school's or district's post-secondary outcome data in decision-making regarding special education and secondary transition programming. When comparing responses, 27.7% of high school administrators and 45.1% of middle school administrators reported not being familiar at all with their school's or district's post-secondary outcome data. Further, 25% of high school administrators compared to 41.2% of middle school administrators reported never using post-secondary outcome data in their decision-making regarding transition programming.

Table 4.2 Familiarity with Transition and Post-Secondary Outcome Data

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Familiarity with transition service delivery/practices		
Not at all familiar	21	17.50%
Somewhat familiar	57	47.50%
Moderately familiar	34	28.33%
Extremely familiar	8	6.67%
Familiarity with school's post-secondary outcome data		
Not at all familiar	43	35.83%
Somewhat familiar	55	45.83%
Very familiar	19	15.83%
Extremely familiar	3	2.50%
Uses post-secondary data in decision-making		
Never	37	31.09%
Rarely	30	25.21
Sometimes	28	23.53
Usually	14	11.76
Always	10	8.40
Importance of being familiar with IDEA and IEP requirements for secondary transition		
Not at all important	0	0.00%
Somewhat important	12	9.92%
Moderately important	19	15.70%
Extremely important	90	74.38%
Importance of being familiar with transition service delivery and practices		
Not at all important	1	0.83%
Somewhat important	14	11.57%
Moderately important	40	33.06%
Extremely important	66	54.55%

*n* = 119 - 121

**Involvement in secondary transition related activities.** Participants were asked to rate to what extent they were involved in secondary transition related activities within their respective school using a four-point Likert scale (1 = never directly involved, 2 = rarely involved, 3 = moderately involved, and 4 = highly involved). Table 4.3 summarizes their responses. Responses show the top rated areas where participants

indicated they were *never* directly involved include communicating with and encouraging outside agencies to be actively and effectively involved with students with IEPs (52.10%), conducting and/or supervising secondary transition program evaluations (47.90%); developing or monitoring policies and procedures for transition programs and services (45.76%). In addition, 66.10% of respondents indicated they either never (32.20%) or rarely (33.90%) actively participated in secondary transition team meetings. When looking at high school and middle school administrator responses, the data showed 35.9% of high school administrators and 74.5% of middle school administrators reported never being involved with communicating with outside agencies; 34.4% of high school administrators and 66.7% of middle school administrators indicated never being involved with conducting secondary transition program evaluations; 31.7% of high school administrators and 64.7% of middle school administrators reported never being involved in developing or monitoring policies for transition programs; and 29.7% of high school administrators and 37.3% of middle school administrators reported never directly involved in actively participating in secondary transition team meetings.

Participants indicated they were moderately to highly involved in: including parents or families in the transition process (49.58%); gathering and/or analyzing student data relative to transition programs and services (40.68%); and informing and preparing families to participate in transition processes (38.98%). Examination of data to compare involvement in activities by high school and middle school administrators showed 56.3% of high school administrators and 39.2% of middle school administrators reported being moderately or highly involved with including parents or families in

transition processes; 50.8% of high school administrators and 22.4% of middle school administrators reported being moderately or highly involved with gathering and/or analyzing student data relative to transition programming; and 47.6% of high school administrators and 27.4% of middle school administrators reported being highly to moderately involved in informing and preparing parents and families to participate in transition processes. In summary, high school administrators report more involvement in transition specific activities.

Table 4.3 also shows all items in question 27 had a mean range of 1.83 to 2.36. The highest mean items were including parents and families in transition processes (2.36); informing and preparing parents and families to participate in transition processes (2.19); and gathering and analyzing student transition data (2.17). The lowest mean items were communicating with and encouraging outside agencies to be actively and effectively involved with students with IEP's (1.83), conducting and/or supervising transition program evaluations (1.90), and developing or monitoring clear, effective policies and procedures for transition programs (1.92).

Table 4.3 Participants' Level of Involvement in Transition Activities

Activity	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Never <i>n</i> (%)	Rarely <i>n</i> (%)	Moderately <i>n</i> (%)	Highly <i>n</i> (%)
Including parents/families in the transition process	119	2.36	1.039	33 (27.73%)	27 (22.69%)	42 (35.29%)	17 (14.29%)

Activity	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Never <i>n</i> (%)	Rarely <i>n</i> (%)	Moderately <i>n</i> (%)	Highly <i>n</i> (%)
Informing and preparing parents/families to participate in transition processes	118	2.19	0.981	35 (29.66%)	37 (31.36%)	34 (28.81%)	12 (10.17%)
Gathering and/or analyzing student data relative to transition programs and services	118	2.17	1.015	40 (33.90%)	30 (25.42%)	36 (30.51%)	12 (10.17%)
Providing personnel with opportunities for appropriate professional development related to secondary transition	118	2.17	1.044	45 (38.14%)	28 (23.73%)	32 (27.12%)	13 (11.02%)
Actively participating in secondary transition team meetings	118	2.14	1.015	38 (32.20%)	40 (33.90%)	25 (21.19%)	15 (12.71%)

Activity	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Never <i>n</i> (%)	Rarely <i>n</i> (%)	Moderately <i>n</i> (%)	Highly <i>n</i> (%)
Collaborating with staff and community agencies to provide real-life instructional contexts such as paid/unpaid job/work experiences community-based experiences, etc.	119	2.05	1.032	47 (39.50%)	32 (26.89%)	27 (22.69%)	13 (10.92%)
Developing and/or allocating resources that highly prioritizes transition programs	119	1.97	1.012	52 (43.70%)	28 (23.53%)	29 (24.37%)	10 (8.40%)
Encouraging teacher participation on local transition planning councils	119	1.94	1.028	54 (45.38%)	30 (25.21%)	23 (19.33%)	12 (10.08%)
Developing and/or monitoring clear and effective policies and procedures for transition programs	118	1.92	0.983	54 (45.76%)	28 (23.73%)	28 (23.73%)	8 (6.78%)
Conducting and/or supervising transition program evaluations	119	1.90	0.995	5 (4.79%)	25 (21.01%)	29 (24.37%)	8 (6.72%)

Activity	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Never <i>n</i> (%)	Rarely <i>n</i> (%)	Moderately <i>n</i> (%)	Highly <i>n</i> (%)
Communicating with and encouraging outside agencies to be actively and effectively involved in supporting students with IEPs	119	1.83	0.986	62 (52.10%)	22 (18.49%)	28 (23.53%)	7 (5.88%)

*n* = 118 - 119

**Research Question 2:** *What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?*

Participants were asked to rate barriers when providing effective transition programs to students with disabilities in their respective schools using a four point Likert scale (1 = significant barrier, 2 = moderate barrier, 3 = minimal barrier, and 4 = not at all a barrier). Table 4.4 below shows 56.43% of respondents rated families not prepared to participate in the transition process as either a significant (22.77%) or a moderate (33.66%) barrier, 52.47% rated absence of real life instructional contexts for students with IEPs (paid/unpaid work experiences) as either a significant (20.79%) or a moderate barrier (31.68%), and 51.48% of respondents rated lack of effective supports for students with IEPs from outside agencies as a significant (18.81%) or moderate (32.67%) barrier. When looking at high school administrator responses compared to middle school responses, 26.8% of high school administrators and 16.7% of middle school identified families not prepared to participate in transition processes as a significant barrier; 25% of high school administrators and 14.3% of middle school administrators

identified absence of real-life instructional contexts for students with IEPs as a significant barrier, and 21.4% of high school and 14.3% of middle school administrators rated lack of or ineffective supports from outside agencies as a significant barrier.

The barriers mostly rated by participants as not at all a barrier were school faculty and staff unable to support active student participation in IEP development (32.67%), lack of academic skill supports for students with IEPs (31.68%), and inappropriate, missing, or problematic assessments for students with IEPs (29.70%). All 18 items in question 28 had mean scores ranging from 2.31 to 2.93 with the top rated significant barrier identified by administrators, families not prepared to participate in the transition process, having the lowest mean (2.31) and the barrier most identified by administrators as not at all a barrier, school faculty and staff unable to support active student participation in IEP development, having the highest mean (2.93).

Table 4.4 Participants' Perceptions of Barriers

Barrier Category	Total <i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate <i>n</i> (%)	Minimal <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)
School faculty and staff unable to support active student participation in IEP development	101	2.93	0.941	8 (7.92%)	24 (23.76%)	36 (35.64%)	33 (32.67%)
Lack of academic skill supports for students with IEPs	101	2.85	1.004	12 (11.88%)	23 (22.77%)	34 (33.66%)	32 (31.68%)

Barrier Category	Total <i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate <i>n</i> (%)	Minimal <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)
Inadequate personal knowledge of IDEA and requirements regarding secondary transition services	100	2.85	0.925	7 (7.00%)	30 (30.00%)	34 (34.00%)	29 (29.00%)
Inappropriate, missing, or problematic assessments for students with IEPs	101	2.84	0.967	10 (9.90%)	26 (25.74%)	35 (34.65%)	30 (29.70%)
Lack of life, social, and emotional skill supports for students with IEPs	99	2.78	0.985	12 (12.12%)	25 (25.25%)	35 (35.35%)	27 (27.27%)
School faculty and staff unable to support comprehensive transition IEP development	102	2.77	0.943	11 (10.78%)	26 (25.49%)	40 (39.22%)	25 (24.51%)
Students not involved in transition processes	100	2.77	0.973	11 (11.00%)	28 (28.00%)	34 (34.00%)	27 (27.00%)

Barrier Category	Total <i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate <i>n</i> (%)	Minimal <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)
Little to no personal, active, and effective involvement in secondary transition meetings	101	2.71	0.993	14 (13.86%)	26 (25.74%)	36 (35.64%)	25 (24.75%)
Inadequate personal background knowledge or experience in special education and transition	101	2.71	0.942	11 (10.89%)	30 (29.70%)	37 (36.63%)	23 (22.77%)
Missing or ineffective policies and procedures for transition	101	2.66	1.080	20 (19.80%)	21 (20.79%)	33 (32.67%)	27 (26.73%)
Lack of resources allocated for the development of transition programs	99	2.65	1.100	21 (21.21%)	20 (20.20%)	31 (31.31%)	27 (27.27%)
Lack of employment and occupational skill supports for students with IEPs	101	2.62	1.008	18 (17.82%)	23 (22.77%)	39 (38.61%)	21 (20.79%)

Barrier Category	Total <i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate <i>n</i> (%)	Minimal <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)
Lack of data pertinent to transition program evaluation or program effectiveness	101	2.60	1.021	17 (16.83%)	29 (28.71%)	32 (31.68%)	23 (22.77%)
Insufficient professional development opportunities for personnel related to secondary transition	100	2.57	0.998	16 (16.00%)	32 (32.00%)	31 (31.00%)	21 (21.00%)
Lack of or ineffective support for students with IEPs from outside agencies	101	2.50	1.016	19 (18.81%)	33 (32.67%)	29 (28.71%)	20 (19.80%)
Absence of real-life instructional context for students with IEPs (paid/unpaid work experiences)	101	2.46	1.025	21 (20.79%)	32 (31.68%)	29 (28.71%)	19 (18.81)
Families not involved in transition processes	101	2.44	1.014	23 (22.77%)	27 (26.73%)	35 (34.65%)	16 (15.84%)

Barrier Category	Total <i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Significant <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate <i>n</i> (%)	Minimal <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)
Families not prepared to participate in the transition process	101	2.31	0.935	23 (22.77%)	34 (33.66%)	34 (33.66%)	10 (9.90%)

*n* = 99 - 102

An open-ended item, Question 29, was included on the survey to allow participants the opportunity to identify any other barriers not already listed in question 28. Thirty respondents answered Question 29; however, 14 participants answered with “n/a,” “not involved with,” “don’t have any,” or “none” leaving 16 responses which the researcher copied from SurveyMonkey onto an EXCEL spreadsheet and coded for common themes. Analysis resulted in 14 identified barriers by respondents. The researcher then calculated frequencies and percentages for each identified barrier, and results are shown in Table 4.5. Additional barriers identified by respondents included administrators not having enough time to devote to transition activities (13%), general education curricula being too difficult for students with disabilities (3%), administrators not having identified roles on transition teams (3%), the pandemic (COVID 19) impeding with student opportunities (7%), administrators not being familiar with students to effectively give input in meetings (3%), the amount of paperwork involved in special education processes (3%), poor early identification processes for students with disabilities (3%), parents having unrealistic expectations of their child with a disability (3%), and lack of transportation to community opportunities for students (10%).

Table 4.5 Frequencies and Percentages for Open-Ended Responses

Category	<i>n</i>	% ( <i>n</i> /30)
Parent participation	1	3%
Time/Scheduling	4	13%
General Ed Curricula	1	3%
Real job experiences	1	3%
No Identified Role in Transition Team	1	3%
Pandemic (COVID 19)	2	7%
Administrators not being familiar with students	1	3%
Too much paperwork in SPED/transition processes	1	3%
Poor early identification processes	1	3%
Parents having unrealistic expectations	1	3%
Not having a person dedicated to transition	1	3%
Lack of community agency involvement	3	10%
Transportation	3	10%
Lack of personal knowledge and training in transition	1	3%

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview of the Study**

Despite legislative efforts to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities in relation to non-disabled peers, disparities continue to exist. Secondary administrators, specifically principals and assistant principals, play important roles in providing and managing effective educational and transition programs for students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cob, 2015; Bateman et al., 2017; Lynch, 2016; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). While secondary principals and assistant principals play important roles in the provision of effective instructional and special education programs including transition programs and services, they are often presented with challenges and barriers that impede with their efforts to support secondary transition (Lubbers et al., 2008; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Miller, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2013; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Sun & Xin, 2020; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the perspectives of secondary principals and assistant principals on their involvement and engagement in providing effective transition programs for students with disabilities, and to examine their perceptions of barriers to providing and supporting secondary transition programs. Two research questions guided this study: (1) What are secondary administrators'

perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities? and (2) What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?

The survey instrument was created by the researcher for the purpose of this study based on review of the literature relative to secondary administrators' roles and responsibilities in providing effective transition programs and services to students with disabilities and barriers to the provision of these programs. Survey data from middle and high school principals and assistant principals were collected and uploaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program for analysis to examine their perspectives on their involvement in transition activities and perceived barriers to supporting transition efforts. This chapter summarizes the study findings, limitations, and discusses implications for further research and practice.

### **Summary of Findings**

**Professional experience.** Results were analyzed to determine participants' current position and their experience in secondary administration. Findings show the majority of respondents (56.16%) were high school and middle school principals and the remaining (39.72%) identifying as assistant principals. The majority of respondents (51%) reported working in middle schools. Interesting to note is although the survey asked specifically for only principals or assistant principals to participate, 6 respondents (4.11%) indicated "none of the above" for this question. When asked for years of experience in school administration, results show the majority (59.58%) of respondents

indicated having served as a school principal or assistant principal 6 years or more.

Findings also show the majority (58.04%) of participants indicated serving as a secondary administrator 6 years or more; however, when asked about years served in current position, the majority of participants (76.03%) indicated having been in current position 5 years or less. Responses were also analyzed to determine participants' level of experience and training in special education and transition. Findings show the majority of participants in this study (63.27%) reported having 25 hours or less SPED professional development and 17.01% reported having none.

**Involvement in transition activities.** Findings from this study indicate principals and assistant principals in SC are involved in secondary transition to some degree; however, their level of involvement and engagement varied across transition activities and across school levels. Findings show the majority of respondents (64.17%) indicated never attending secondary transition team meetings; however, the majority of respondents (80%) indicated they attended IEP meetings for students with disabilities weekly (38.33%) or monthly (41.67%). Half of respondents (50%) indicated they were "highly" (14.29%) or "moderately" (35.29%) involved with including parents and families in transition processes. Findings also showed 43.1% of middle school administrators and 30.3% of high school administrators reported not being a transition team member, and 66.7% of middle school and 63.1% of high school administrators reported not attending secondary transition team meetings at all; however, 96% of middle school and 67.70% of high school administrators reported attending IEP meetings weekly or monthly.

When asked to rate their level of involvement in transition specific activities, the majority of respondents indicated they were “rarely” or “never” involved in developing and/or allocating resources that prioritizes transition programs (67.23%), collaborating with staff and community agencies to provide real-life instructional contexts such as paid or unpaid job/work and community-based experiences for students with IEPs (66.39%), or in communicating with or encouraging outside agencies (DDSNB, VR) to be actively and effectively involved with supporting students with IEPs (70.59%). By school level, 60.8% of middle school administrators and 31.3% of high school administrators reported being never or rarely involved with developing or allocating resources, 60.8% of middle school and 23.4% of high school administrators reported never or rarely being involved in collaborating with staff or outside agencies to provide real-life instructional contexts; and 74.5% of middle school and 35.9% of high school administrators reported being never or rarely involved in communicating with and encouraging outside agencies to be actively involved in supporting students with IEPs. In summary, secondary administrators reported more involvement in transition activities. This is not surprising given high school professionals are traditionally more immersed in secondary transition activities (Johnson et al., 2002; Mazzotti et al., 2012; Plotner et al., 2016).

Responses from this study were analyzed to determine if participants’ districts or schools have individuals dedicated to transition efforts. When asked if their district had a transition coordinator, results show 41.67% indicated “yes,” 33.33% indicated “no,” and 25.00% indicated “unsure.” When asked if their school had a transition specialist or transition coordinator, the majority of participants (52.89%) indicated “no,” and 10.74%

indicated they were “unsure.” Responses were also analyzed to determine if assistant principals lead transition efforts in their school. Results show the majority (59.50%) indicated “no.”

**Perceived barriers to supporting transition.** Findings from this study were analyzed to identify factors participants perceived as significant barriers to supporting transition efforts. The top barriers rated by participants as either significant or moderate barriers to supporting transition efforts included: families not prepared to participate in the transition process (56.43%); absence of real-life instructional contexts (i.e. paid/unpaid work experiences) for students with IEPs (52.47%); lack of or ineffective support for students with IEPs from outside agencies (51.48%); and families not involved in the transition process (49.50%). Examination of the data by school level showed middle and high school administrators almost equally identified these as either moderate or significant barriers. An open-ended question provided participants the opportunity to identify other barriers they personally experienced in supporting transition efforts, and here, 4 out of 30 respondents identified lack of time devoted to transition (13%).

## **Discussion of Findings**

Secondary administrators are primarily responsible for providing quality, effective programs for all students, and they are responsible for improving post-secondary outcomes for all students including those with disabilities. Whereas research supports the important and impactful role administrators play in special education, the extant research is sparse relative to secondary administrator perspectives on their involvement in transition and on barriers that impede with supporting transition efforts. This study adds to the literature by examining secondary administrator perceptions of their involvement in secondary transition and their perceptions of barriers to providing and supporting transition efforts.

Given the important roles principals play in schools and their impact on student achievement, research supports the importance of administrators having knowledge of special education, transition, and evidence-based practices to improve instructional programming, student achievement, and post-school outcomes (DiPaola et al., 2004; Sun & Xin, 2020). Respondents in this study indicated they, too, believed it important for middle and high school principals and assistant principals to be familiar with IDEA and federal IEP requirements and with secondary transition service delivery practices; however, when asked to rate their familiarity with secondary transition service delivery and practices, the majority of respondents (65%) indicated they were either not at all familiar or only somewhat familiar with these practices. Further, both middle (64.8%) and high school (64.6%) administrators almost equally reported being somewhat or not at all familiar with secondary transition service delivery and practices. This finding is

consistent with previous studies (DiPaola et al., 2004; Cobb, 2015; Sun & Xin, 2020) in that principals lack knowledge of special education and transition which impacts their decision-making and could negatively impact their ability to lead and provide effective instruction and transition programming for students with disabilities in their buildings.

Lack of participants' familiarity with transition could be attributed to their lack of knowledge and experience in secondary administration as interestingly, the majority of participants (76.03%) reported having served in their current position 5 years or less and the majority (80.28%) reported having less than 25 hours of formal training (63.27%) or no formal training (17.01%) in special education. This study finding concurs with previous study findings (Christensen et al., 2013; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Protz, 2005) where secondary administrators reported having fewer than 5 years' administrative experience and reported lacking formal training in special education and transition.

In addition to lacking knowledge and experience in special education and transition, findings from this study indicate secondary administrators were unfamiliar with their school's post-secondary outcome data and not utilizing this data in their decision-making about programs for students with disabilities. For example, the majority (81.66%) of participants in this study indicated they were not at all familiar (35.83%) or only somewhat familiar (45.83%) with their school's or district's post-secondary outcome data for students with disabilities, and a greater percentage of middle school administrators (84.3%) than high school administrators (78.5%) reported being only somewhat or not at all familiar with post-secondary outcome data. The majority of participants (56.30%) also indicated they never (31.09%) or rarely (25.21%)

used their school's or district's post-secondary outcome data in decision-making regarding special education and secondary transition programming. Again, a higher percentage of middle school administrators (41.2%) than high school administrators (25%) reported never or rarely using post-secondary outcome data in decision-making. The majority of respondents (59.32%) indicated they never (33.90%) or rarely (25.42%) engaged in gathering or analyzing student data relative to transition programs and services. When compared by school level, 47.1% of middle school administrators compared to 23.8% of high school administrators reported never or rarely being involved in gathering or analyzing study data relative to transition programming. Lack of knowledge and use of post-secondary data could be attributed to the majority of respondents in this study (51%) reporting working in middle school (51%) where expectations of administrators knowing about and using post-secondary outcome data is less than those for high school administrators. However, it is still important for administrators in both middle and high schools to be knowledgeable of post-secondary outcome data as transition services are required for students with disabilities as early as age 13 in SC. Previous research (Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb 2015; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003) supports knowledge and use of student data is essential in administrators' decision-making about effective programming and services to all students.

Results from this study show varying degree of involvement by secondary administrators in providing and supporting transition efforts and activities in their schools. The majority of participants (59.50%) in this study indicated assistant principals

did not solely lead transition efforts in their schools which is promising as it suggests principals and assistant principals share the responsibility of leading and managing secondary transition programs in their schools. A concerning finding is secondary administrators' lack of involvement in transition teams as the majority of respondents (64.17%) indicated "never" attending secondary transition team meetings. Further, 30.3% of high school administrators and 43.1% of middle school administrators reported not being transition team members, and 63.1% of high school and 66.7% of middle school administrators reported not attending transition team meetings at all. These findings could be attributed to the majority (47.93%) of participants indicating their school did not have such a team or to the majority (51%) of participants working in middle schools where transition teams are less likely to exist. Research supports having established in-house transition teams as best practice and a predictor for transition program and student outcome success (Lehman et al, 2020; Little, 2012; Plotner, et al. 2020; Wehman, 2020); thus, it would be beneficial for secondary administrators at both high and middle school levels to increase their involvement and participation in transition planning processes.

In contrast, the majority of respondents (80%) indicated they attended IEP meetings for students with disabilities in their schools either weekly (38.33%) or monthly (41.67%). This finding concurs with previous study findings (Wakeman, 2006) where secondary principals reported attending IEP meetings regularly. Thus, secondary administrators in this study are actively participating in transition processes to some degree by participating in IEP team meetings; however, their contributions in IEP team

meetings is questionable given their lack of knowledge and experience in transition which should be the very core of IEP meetings for students of transition age.

Another finding from this study included administrators' reporting involvement with including families in transition processes. Nearly half of respondents (49.58%) indicated they were highly (14.29%) or moderately (35.29%) involved with including parents and families in transition processes, and by school level, 56.3% of high school s and 39.2% of middle school administrators reported being highly or moderately involved in including parents and families in transition processes. However, these percentages are still relatively low as this researcher expected a greater percentage of administrators involved in collaboration efforts with parents and families at both the middle and high school levels as in SC, transition services are at age 13 and given research supports the importance of family involvement in transition processes in supporting effective transition programming and improving outcomes for students with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016; Test et al., 2009; & Weyman, 2020). It is important for middle and high school administrators to increase and improve their efforts in promoting family engagement given the impact and benefits of family involvement on student success.

This study also examined administrators' perceptions of barriers to supporting transition efforts. Findings show participants' top rated significant or moderate barriers included families not involved in and not prepared to participate in the transition process, lack of resources allocated for the development of transition programs, and absence of real-life instructional contexts (i.e. paid/unpaid work experiences) for students with IEPs. Participants' rankings of these areas coincide with findings in

previous studies (Geenan et al., 2005; Lubbers et al., 2008; Shogren & Plotner, 2012) where identified barriers to effective transition programs included lack of family involvement, inadequate resources allocated to transition, and lack of real-life occupational supports for students. Interestingly, participants identified these as significant barriers; however, when asked to rate their level of involvement in transition activities, the majority of respondents indicated they were rarely or never involved in developing and/or allocating resources that prioritizes transition programs (67.23%), collaborating with staff and community agencies to provide real-life instructional contexts such as paid or unpaid job/work and community-based experiences for students with IEPs (66.39%), or in communicating with or encouraging outside agencies to be actively and effectively involved with supporting students with IEPs (70.59%). In addition, findings show higher percentages of middle school administrators reported never being directly involved in these activities in comparison to high school administrators. Research supports the importance of these activities in supporting effective transition programming for students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2017; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Geenan et al., 2005; Kohler et al., 2016; Lubbers et al., 2008; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). If middle and high school administrators are to increase their support of effective transition programming and improve post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities, it is imperative they increase their involvement in these activities.

## **Limitations**

The limitations to this study are important to examine. First is the relatively small sample size. This study was based on responses received from secondary principals and assistant principals in middle and high schools across only one state, South Carolina. The survey used in this study asked participants to report on their perceptions of their level of engagement and involvement in special education and on their perceptions of barriers. Results reported do not indicate that these administrators are fully involved in every aspect of transition in their schools, nor do findings indicate the barriers identified as significant are the most challenging for all secondary administrators, only that these findings are singular to the participants in this study.

It is important to note also, the majority of respondents (55%) in this study indicated they worked in schools serving rural communities. This factor should be considered when interpreting findings as results of this study could potentially be due to these participants' unique experiences and availability of resources in rural schools such as curricula, programs, funding, and personnel. In addition to working in rural schools and communities, the majority of respondents (51%) indicated they worked in middle schools where roles and expectations of administrators and transition programs and services differ somewhat from high school. Further, these factors could have impacted participants' responses to their involvement in and barriers to supporting transition programs in their respective schools.

Another limitation is the difficulty in determining a precise response rate. Using a state repository of schools, a link to the survey used in this study was emailed to

principals of middle and high schools in SC. The principals were then responsible for forwarding the link to all assistant principals in their buildings. Using this snowball approach affects the researcher's ability to calculate the response rate.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study present several implications for future research and practice. First, the majority of secondary administrators in this study reported having very little to no formal training and/or experience in special education and transition. Given their responsibility in ensuring quality and effective instructional and support programs for all students including those with disabilities, and given the high-stakes accountability measures placed on schools for student outcomes, results of this study indicate that secondary administrators would benefit from additional education and training in special education and transition.

Second, results of this study indicate the need for middle school administrators to increase knowledge of special education and transition and to increase their involvement in transition programming and activities. While job roles and responsibilities of middle school administrators and requirements for transition services differ to some degree from high school, SC requires transition services as early as age 13. Thus, it is important that middle school administrators increase their knowledge of and involvement in transition activities. Results support the need for more formal training and professional development specific to transition for both middle and high school administrators.

Lastly, participants in this study identified families not prepared to participate in transition processes, absence of real-life instructional contexts, and lack of or ineffective support for students with IEPs from outside agencies as significant barriers. Also, the majority of respondents indicated their school or district did not have personnel dedicated to transition nor established transition teams which indicates a need for having personnel dedicated to transition to help address these barriers. Personnel such as Transition Specialists can help coordinate and facilitate parent and staff training and expand collaborative efforts across home, school, and community. Results also indicate the need for districts and schools to establish and sustain viable transition teams where administrators have clearly defined roles and are active participants on those teams.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This was an exploratory, descriptive study in how secondary principals and assistant principals in SC are involved in secondary transition activities and of their perceptions of barriers to providing and supporting effective transition programs. Additional research is needed to better understand how principals and assistant principals can better support and prioritize transition programs and efforts for students with disabilities. Additionally, future researchers should explore and communicate to principals why transition and administrator involvement in transition is important for students with disabilities.

This study examined perceptions of secondary administrators, but further examination of teacher, parent, and student perceptions of transition could add to the literature base and better inform and guide secondary administrators in their decision-

making regarding transition programming. Specific examples of principals' involvement in transition efforts could be explored more deeply through qualitative research. Also, further exploration of rural and urban administrator perceptions of special education and transition is warranted. Finally, examination of administrator preparedness to lead transition efforts along with examination of school, district, and state policies and procedures relative to administrators and transition programming could better inform school leaders in their decisions and actions relative to transition.

### **Conclusion**

Secondary administrators play pivotal roles in providing and supporting effective transition programs and services for students with disabilities. As instructional leaders, administrator participation in transition efforts directly and indirectly affects student achievement and student outcomes. Examining secondary principals' and assistant principals' involvement in transition activities and their perceptions of barriers that impede with providing effective programming helps inform decision-making as to how to best support these efforts. Results of this study indicates variability in the level of secondary administrators' involvement and engagement in transition activities with the majority of respondents indicating they are highly or moderately involved in attending IEP meetings, including families in transition processes, and providing personnel with appropriate professional development relative to transition. Participants indicated low (or no) level of involvement in encouraging outside agencies such as VR to be actively involved in supporting students with IEPs, conducting transition program evaluations, and in developing policies and procedures for transition programming. The majority of

participants indicated not participating in transition teams. This could be due to the majority of participants who also indicated their school or district did not have an established transition team. This could also be due to the majority of respondents reporting working in rural schools and in middle schools where the availability of resources differs and where transition teams may not exist. Transition services are essential for improving post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities, and addressing barriers to providing transition programming is essential for program effectiveness and to student success. As essential stakeholders and primary decision-makers regarding programs and services, secondary principals and assistant principals should consider ways to increase their knowledge along with their direct involvement and engagement in transition activities to have a more positive impact on program effectiveness and on outcomes for students with disabilities.

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## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SURVEY ALIGNMENT

Table A.1 Research Questions and Survey Alignment

Research Question	Survey Questions/Items	Literature
What are secondary administrators' perceptions of their involvement and engagement in supporting secondary transition programs for students with disabilities?	#12-20, 23, and 26	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Brown et al., 2015; Cobb, 2015; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Kohler et al., 2016; Lehman, 2020; Morningstar & Liss, 2008; Lynch, 2012; Petcu et al., 2014; Plotner et al., 2020; Protz, 2005; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Wakeman et al., 2006; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2013; and Yell et al., 2006
What do secondary administrators perceive as the most significant barriers to providing effective transition services to students with disabilities?	#21, 22, & 27 (see items for #27 listed below)	Boscardin et al., 2018; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Gennen et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2002; Lubbers et al., 2008; Miller, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2012; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Petcu et al., 2014; Protz, 2005; Riesen et al., 2014; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Sun & Xin, 2020; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Yell et al., 2013; and Zhang et al., 2005
	<i>School faculty and staff's inability to support comprehensive transition IEP development</i>	Cruzeiro & Moran; 2004; Lubbers et al., 2008; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Kohler et al., 2016; Miller, 2018; Petcu et al., 2014; Protz, 2005; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Sun & Xin; 2020; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016

	<i>School faculty and staff unable to support active student participation in IEP development</i>	Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Lubbers et al., 2008; Petcu et al., 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016; Zang et al., 2005
	<i>Families not involved in the transition processes</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Geenen et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2013; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Test et al., 2015; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016
	<i>Families not prepared to participate in the transition process</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2013; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Protz, 2005; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016
	<i>Lack of data pertinent to transition program evaluation or program effectiveness</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lubbers et al., 2008; Roberts & Guerra, 2017;
	<i>Missing or ineffective policies and procedures for transition</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Petcu et al., 2014; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016
	<i>Lack of resources allocated for the development of transition programs</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003; Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020; Sun & Xin, 2020
	<i>Inappropriate, missing, or problematic assessments for students with IEPs</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Petcu et al., 2014; Yell et al., 2016; Zang et al., 2005
	<i>Lack of academic skill supports for students with IEPs</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002; Luecking &

		Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Test et al., 2015; Wehman, 2020;
	<i>Lack of life, social, and emotional skill supports for students with IEPs</i>	Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Test et al., 2015; Wehman et al., 2020;
	<i>Lack of employment and occupational skill supports for students with IEPs</i>	Johnson et al., 2002; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Test et al., 2015; Wehman, 2020; Zang et al., 2005;
	<i>Absence of real life instructional contexts for students with IEPs (i.e. paid/unpaid work experiences)</i>	Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Test et al., 2015; Wehman, 2020; Zang et al., 2005;
	<i>Lack of or ineffective support for students with IEPs from outside agencies</i>	Cobb, 2015; Lubbers et al., 2008; Oertle & Seader, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Riesen et al., 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Wehman, 2020; Zang et al., 2005
	<i>Inadequate personal background knowledge or experience in special education and transition</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2015; Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016
	<i>Inadequate personal knowledge of IDEA and requirements regarding secondary transition services</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman & Bateman, 2015; Bateman et al., 2017; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; DiPaola et al., 2018; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Petcu et al., 2014; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020; Wakeman et al., 2006; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016
	<i>Insufficient professional development opportunities for personnel related to secondary transition</i>	Cobb, 2015; Petcu et al., 2014; Protz, 2005; Sun & Xin, 2020; Yell et al., 2016;
	<i>Little to no personal, active and effective involvement in secondary transition meetings</i>	Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cobb, 2015; Kohler & Field, 2003; Lubbers et al., 2008; Protz, 2005; Sun & Xin, 2020; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Wakeman et al., 2006; Wehman, 2020; Yell et al., 2016

## **APPENDIX B: INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear South Carolina School Administrator,

I am a Ph.D. candidate in Special Education Leadership at the University of South Carolina conducting research to examine SC middle and high school principals' and assistant principals' perspectives of their involvement in supporting special education transition activities and their perceptions about the most prevalent barriers inhibiting transition efforts. You are receiving this email because you are a middle or high school principal or assistant principal in South Carolina, and I am inviting you to participate in this research. The research is intended to add to existing research on administrator perspectives and practices regarding special education transition efforts. Participation involves following this link and completing a short survey which should take about 10-15 minutes to complete:: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WZ8MSDZ>

Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Study information will be kept securely at the University of South Carolina and only results of this study will be published or presented at professional meetings. Your name will not be revealed, and you will not be asked for any personally identifiable information at any point during this survey. There are no known risks associated with completing this survey. There is no compensation for participating in this study, and you are under no obligation to participate. If at any time before or while taking the survey, you feel uncomfortable, please do not complete it.

Should you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at [dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net), or my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Anthony Plotner, at [plotner@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:plotner@mailbox.sc.edu). You can also contact the University of South Carolina's Office of Research Compliance at (803) 777-6670 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Again, thank you for your participation!

Dottie H. Brown, Ph.D. Candidate - Special Education  
University of South Carolina  
[dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net)

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Secondary Administrators' Perspectives On Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts

#### 1. Introduction and Purpose

My name is Dottie Brown, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Special Education at the University of South Carolina conducting this survey as part of my dissertation research with the support of my dissertation committee of faculty. My research focuses on secondary school administrators supporting special education transition efforts in their school. Specifically, the purpose of this project is to examine middle and high school principals' and assistant principals' perspectives of their involvement in supporting special education transition activities and their perceptions about the most prevalent barriers inhibiting transition efforts. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Study information will be kept securely at the University of South Carolina. Results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings; however, your name will not be revealed. There are no known risks associated with completing this survey. You will not be asked for any personally identifiable information at any point during this survey.

There is no compensation for participating in this study, and you are under no obligation to participate. If at any time before or while taking the survey, you feel uncomfortable, please do not complete it.

Should you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at [dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net), or my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Anthony Plotner, at [plotner@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:plotner@mailbox.sc.edu). You can also contact the University of South Carolina's Office of Research Compliance at (803) 777-6670 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Again, thank you for your participation!

Dottie H. Brown, Ph.D. Candidate - Special Education  
University of South Carolina  
[dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net)

## Secondary Administrators' Perspectives On Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts

### 2. Demographics

For each question, select and/or type the answer that best describes your experience or current position.

1. How many total years of professional experience do you have in education?

- ☐ Less than 5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

2. Which of the following best describes your current position?

- ☐ High school principal
- ☐ High school assistant principal
- ☐ Middle school principal
- ☐ Middle school assistant principal
- ☐ None of the above

3. How many years have you served as a school principal or assistant principal?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

4. How many total years have you served as a secondary (middle or high) school principal or assistant principal?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

5. How many years have you served in your current position?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

6. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Masters +30
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Bachelors
- ☐ Other (please specify)

7. In what discipline is your highest degree?

8. Which option best fits the amount of formal training you have had in special education?

- ☐ A doctoral degree in special education
- ☐ A master's degree in special education
- ☐ A bachelor's degree in special education
- ☐ A college certificate in special education (i.e. added-on an area to teaching certificate)
- ☐ Less than 25 hours of professional development in special education
- ☐ No formal training
- ☐ Other (please specify)

9. How do you identify your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other (please specify)

10. How many total students are served in your current school?

- ☐ 0-250
- ☐ 251-500
- ☐ 501-1,000
- ☐ 1,001-1,250
- ☐ 1,251-1,500
- ☐ More than 1,500

11. How many certified special education teachers are currently employed in your school?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26 or more
- ☐ Don't know

12. How would you describe the community served by your school?

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Urban/Rural
- ☐ Urban/Suburban
- ☐ Rural/Suburban
- ☐ Urban/Rural/Suburban

## Secondary Administrators' Perspectives On Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts

### 3. Perceived Involvement and Engagement in Secondary Transition

13. Does your district have a district transition coordinator?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

14. Does your district have a group of professionals from the district and local adult services agencies that meet regularly to support young adults with disabilities in transition (secondary transition team)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

15. Does your school have a transition specialist or transition coordinator?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

16. Does the assistant principal in your school lead transition efforts?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

17. In your current role, how often do you meet with transition personnel?

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Bi-annually
- ☐ Annually
- ☐ Never

18. Does your school have a group of professionals from the school and local adult services agencies that meet regularly to support young adults with disabilities in transition (secondary transition team)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

19. If your school has a secondary transition team, are you a team member?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ My school does not have a secondary transition team

20. How often do you attend secondary transition team meetings?

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Bi-annually
- ☐ Annually
- ☐ Not at all

21. How often do you attend IEP meetings?

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Bi-annually
- ☐ Annually
- ☐ Not at all

22. What is your perceived level of familiarity of secondary transition service delivery and practices?

- ☐ Not at all familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Moderately familiar
- ☐ Extremely familiar

23. How familiar are you with your school's or district's post-secondary outcome data (Indicator 14) for students with disabilities?

- ☐ Not at all familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Extremely familiar

24. How often do you use your school's or district's post-secondary outcome data in your decision-making regarding special education and secondary transition programming?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Always

25. How important do you feel is it that a middle or high school principal or assistant principal have a high level of familiarity with IDEA and federal IEP requirements related to secondary transition?

- ☐ Not at all important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Extremely important

26. How important do you feel it is that a middle or high school principal or assistant principal have a high level of familiarity with secondary transition service delivery practices?

- ☐ Not at all important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Extremely important

27. In your current role, to what extent are you involved in each of the secondary transition related activities listed below.

	Never directly involved	Rarely involved	Moderately involved	Highly involved
Including parents or families in the transition process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informing and preparing parents or families to participate in the transition process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never directly involved	Rarely involved	Moderately involved	Highly involved
Gathering and/or analyzing student data relative to transition programs and services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conducting and/or supervising secondary transition program evaluations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and/or monitoring clear and effective policies and procedures for transition programs and services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and/or allocating resources that highly prioritizes transition programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with staff and community agencies to provide real life instructional contexts such as paid and unpaid job/work experiences, community-based experiences, etc. for students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicating with and encouraging outside agencies (i.e. DDSNB, VR, etc) to be actively and effectively involved with supporting students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing personnel with opportunities for appropriate professional development related to secondary transition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encouraging teacher participation on local transition planning councils	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Actively participating in secondary transition team meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Secondary Administrators' Perspectives On Their Involvement In and Barriers to Supporting Transition Efforts

### 4. Perceived Barriers

For this section, think about your current role and your personal experiences in leading and supporting special education transition programs for students with disabilities and think about your perceptions of barriers when providing effective transition programs.

28. Based on your personal experiences in leading and supporting special education transition programs for students with disabilities, please indicate the degree to which each area below acts as a barrier to providing and supporting those programs in your school.

	Significant barrier	Moderate barrier	Minimal barrier	Not at all a barrier
School faculty and staff unable to support comprehensive transition IEP development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School faculty and staff unable to support active student participation in IEP development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students not involved in transition processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families not involved in the transition processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families not prepared to participate in the transition process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of data pertinent to transition program evaluation or program effectiveness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Missing or ineffective policies and procedures for transition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of resources allocated for the development of transition programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inappropriate, missing, or problematic assessments for students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Significant barrier	Moderate barrier	Minimal barrier	Not at all a barrier
Lack of academic skill supports for students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of life, social, and emotional skill supports for students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of employment and occupational skill supports for students with IEPs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Absence of real life instructional contexts for students with IEPs (i.e. paid/unpaid work experiences)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of or ineffective support for students with IEPs from outside agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inadequate personal background knowledge or experience in special education and transition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inadequate personal knowledge of IDEA and requirements regarding secondary transition services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Insufficient professional development opportunities for personnel related to secondary transition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Little to no personal, active and effective involvement in secondary transition meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>29. As a middle or high school principal or assistant principal, please indicate any other challenges or barriers you have experienced while supporting secondary transition efforts in your school.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>				

## APPENDIX D: SURVEY FEEDBACK FORM

### Secondary Administrators' Perspectives on their Involvement in and Barriers to Supporting Secondary Transition Programs for Students with Disabilities

Thank you for agreeing to review the survey instrument for my research study aimed at examining secondary administrators' perspectives on their roles in providing special education transition services and supports to students with disabilities. Should you have any questions, please contact me by email at [dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net).

1. Were the items within the *Demographics* section clear?

Clear					Unclear
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

2. Were the items within the *Perceived Roles* section clear?

Clear					Unclear
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

3. Were the items within the *Perceived Facilitators* section clear?

Clear					Unclear
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

4. Were the items within the *Perceived Barriers* section clear?

Clear					Unclear
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

5. Did the survey items adequately cover principals' perceived *Roles* in providing special education transition programs to students with disabilities?

Comments

6. Did the survey items adequately cover principals' perceived *Facilitators* in providing special education transition programs to students with disabilities?

Comments

7. Did the survey items adequately cover principals' perceived *Barriers* in providing special education transition programs to students with disabilities?

Comments

8. Were there any items on the survey that you felt were redundant or that need to be deleted?

Comments

9. Were there any items on the survey that need to be added?

Comments

10. Please provide any additional feedback you feel would help improve the survey instrument.

Comments

**Thank you for your participation and feedback!**

**Please save the document in the following format "PPSFeedback\_[Your initials]" and send via email to [dbrown@bamberg1.net](mailto:dbrown@bamberg1.net)**

## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

Dottie Brown  
264 Tanglewood Drive  
Bamberg, SC 29003

Re: Pro00111780

Dear Dottie Brown:

This is to certify that the research study *Secondary Administrators' Perspectives on their Involvement in and Barriers to Supporting Secondary Transition Programs for Students with Disabilities* was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on 6/15/2021. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at [lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu) or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson  
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager