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**POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION AND FOLLOW-UP SERVICES IN PUBLIC  
EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL  
DISABILITIES**

by  
Nicole F. Haldeman

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Science and Mathematics  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Masters of Arts in School Psychology  
at  
Rowan University  
May 6, 2014

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my faithful friend, Duke. Thank you for your unconditional love and companionship.

Nobody can fully understand the meaning of love, unless he's owned a dog.

-Gene Hill

## Abstract

Nicole F. Haldeman

### POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION AND FOLLOW-UP SERVICES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES

2013/14

Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of the present study was to (a) examine the post-secondary transition services that are being utilized by students of differing disability categories, (b) determine if students with emotional and behavioral disabilities receive the same services as their other disabled peers, and (c) investigate if the profession of the participants impacts the services they utilize and the regularity in which they do so. In order to investigate the usage of post-secondary transition services, New Jersey child study team members completed the questionnaire, *Post-Secondary Transition and Follow-up Services in Public Education*, designed by the principal researcher. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that there was no significant difference between disability groups regarding the amount of services received. Despite this, the data gathered did provide valuable insight into what services students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are receiving most regularly and which services they are not. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance determined that there was not a significant difference in the amount of services provided by each individual profession. Interpretations of these findings is discussed with regards to the limitations presented by the research design, as well as the information gathered concerning the individual transition services that are utilized by students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Need for Study**

The current study will be addressing the issue of whether there are adequate post-secondary transition and follow-up services from New Jersey child study team personnel (CST) for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (E/BD). This population of special education students, when compared with other students with disabilities, are most at risk for dropping out of high school, being involved in the criminal justice system, not continuing with their education upon graduation, poor job retention, and not utilizing the services available to them within their community (Bullis & Cheney, 1999 as cited in Sitlington & Neubert, 2004). The study will be examining what services are available for students who are transitioning from high school, how regularly these services are being used, which populations of students with disabilities are using them, and if there is any follow-up services being utilized from the public school with their graduated students. Additionally, the data gathered from this study will delineate the amount of transition services provided by the individual professionals who comprise the child study team.

The need for post-secondary transition services is vital, as adults with disabilities are an underrepresented portion of the workforce, job training and educational programs available. According to Johnson (2008), 35% of youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities and 37% of youth with “other disabilities” were not participating in the workforce, job training programs or receiving a higher education. Of the special education students contacted, only 27% were enrolled in any type of post-secondary education (4 year university/college, 2 year community college, vocational or technical

school), and a mere 56% of special education students were employed (Johnson, 2008). It is imperative that the CST provides appropriate and adequate transitional programs and services for students with emotional and behavioral disorders in order for them to remain in school, receive their diploma, become employed or pursue advanced skills.

### **Purpose**

The main purpose of the research is to determine the types and frequency of the transition services that are being utilized in public education by students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (E/BD). Additionally, information regarding the transition services provided to students with Autism, Cognitive Impairment (Severe-Moderate), and Specific Learning Disabilities will also be gathered for comparison. Through the data collected it will be evident if students with E/BD receive less transition services and opportunities than their other disabled peers. The data collected from this study will also help to portray if and how often students who have E/BD receive follow-up services from their school's multi-disciplinary team. Through examining the data, insight will be provided into what areas can be improved upon to provide more successful transition services for those students with E/BD.

### **Hypothesis 1**

The types and frequency of transition services provided to a student will differ significantly according to the type of disability that the student has. Students with E/BD will receive less transition services than their peers with Autism, Cognitive Impairment, and Specific Learning Disabilities.

## **Hypothesis 2**

Based on the profession of the service provider, transition services provided to students with disabilities will differ significantly.

## **Operational Definitions**

Transition services are defined by the State of New Jersey Department of Education as a formal process of long-range cooperative planning that will assist students with disabilities to successfully move from school into the adult world. High quality transition planning and services will enable students with disabilities to pursue their desired postsecondary goals (Transition from School to Adult Life, n.d.). As defined in Special Education Transition Requirements- N.J.A.C. 6A:14, the term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—

(A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post- school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Follow-up transitional services can be defined as the multi-disciplinary team corresponding with special education students after they have completed their secondary schooling. This may be in the form of phone calls or in person interviews (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008; Bullis & Cheney, 1999).

CST stands for Child Study Team. The child study team is a multidisciplinary group of professionals who provide a wide variety of services and resources for children with special education needs. The personnel who comprise the CST have many common skills such as: advocacy for children, understanding how a school functions, having knowledge of special education law, implementation of special education law, case management, information regarding transition planning, and collaboration with the community.

However, each member of the CST has a specific discipline that guides the intervention and eligibility process. Their differing perspectives are based on the training and skills of each individual profession. Some of the different professions who make up the CST are: school psychologists, learning disability teacher consultants (LDTC), social worker, speech language specialists, behaviorists, and directors of special education services (“New Jersey Association of School Psychologists -New Jersey Coalition of Child Study Teams”, n.d.).

IEP: The Individualized Education Plan is a detailed plan that guides a child’s special education program. The IEP will describe how a child is currently performing and if there are any instructional needs. Additionally, the IEP will include measurable annual goals and short term objectives (Cerf, Gantwerk, McDonald, 2012).

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the nation's federal education law that ensures that public schools serve the educational needs of students who have disabilities (What Is IDEA, n.d.)

Emotional and Behavior Disabilities (E/BD)- May be referred to as Emotional Disturbance as per IDEA. Can be characterized by a child exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

(ii) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia

(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-300.8A, 2004).

Autism- Autism can be defined as a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal/nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, and it will adversely affect a child's educational performance. Other characteristics include, engagement in repetitive activities, stereotyped movements, resistance to

environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-300.8A, 2004).

Cognitive Impairment (Severe-Moderate) (CI)- May also be referred to as Mental Retardation as per IDEA. CI is marked by sub-average general intellectual functioning with concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-300.8A, 2004).

Specific Learning Disabled (SLD)- SLD is a disorder that occurs in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes that is involved in understanding or in using spoken/written language. It may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical problems. Conditions may be: perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-300.8A, 2004).

### **Assumptions**

It will be assumed that the persons participating in the survey will be honest in their self-reporting and that they have worked with students who are receiving special education services. It will also be assumed that any participants taking the survey will be over the age of 18.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations of this study are that it is self-reported which can lead to misinformation or representation and that the sample size is small.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### What is a Transition Plan?

One of the main goals of secondary schooling is to educate students so that they will be able to function and compete in an increasingly global society. For many students this would require gaining the necessary skills to function successfully as an adult; whether that is to attend college or a vocational/technical school, or enter the workforce (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). For students with disabilities, the outcome of secondary schooling is essential. The outcome of their education can impact whether or not they may live a satisfactory life and if they are able to function in society after leaving school (Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1996; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010; Herbert, Lorenz, & Trusty, 2010). Having knowledge and a solid plan in regards to preparing for the future is extremely important. Students with disabilities often do not inherently know what is required of them once they have graduated high school (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). It is vital to the success of students with disabilities to receive comprehensive, detailed, and individualized transition plans and services throughout high school. Transition planning should take into account a student's preferences, needs, interests, and strengths in order to aid in the development of a curriculum and transition plan that will help them to meet their post-secondary goals (Mazzotti et al., 2009). These goals may include receiving a post-secondary education or securing a job upon graduation.

With the reauthorization of IDEA, the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act, in 2004, changes were made to what constitutes post-secondary transition services.

IDEA (2004) clarifies that transitional services should now focus on multiple facets of a child's needs:

[transition services] facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation... based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests. (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 2007)

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) includes measurable goals that are based on “age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills...the transition services need to assist the child in reaching these goals” (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1414 (2007)). It is the responsibility of the multi disciplinary team to provide the necessary assistance and planning to help ensure students are able to reach these goals and that their needs in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, and independent living are appropriately met (Peterson, Burden, Sedaghat, Gothberg, Kohler, & Coyle, 2013). For many students, the IEP has a central focus on their deficits. In regards to transition, it is central that student strengths are kept in the forefront for job and skills training purposes when drafting their IEP and transition plan (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2002). Student strengths can be vital in job training, which may help the student to become successful post-graduation. In addition to outlining what is expected during transition services, IDEA also provides a broad outline regarding certain aspects of the transitional services that students with disabilities may benefit from in order to reach their goals, such as “community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living



skills and functional vocational evaluation” (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (2007)). These services, outlined by IDEA, are fundamental in ensuring that student’s are able to leave high school and function independently. IEP’s are not successful unless they include in detail the services and programs needed for each student, not only in academics but also in employment and recreation. The practical implementation of the IEP, i.e., the student’s program, rather than merely the written document, is what produces a successful transition (Steele, Konrad, & Test, 2005).

The start of the student’s transition services should begin during their first IEP meeting in which they turn 16 years old, as outlined by IDEA (Shearin, Alma, & Schriener, 1999). However, according to data regarding student drop out rates, 54% of students [with learning disabilities] are dropping out before graduating, with many of these students dropping out at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In response to this, some states have recognized the need for earlier transition planning, and have mandated that transition planning begin when students are 14 years of age (e.g., New Jersey) (Brinckerhoff, 1996). According to Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley (2013), when comparing states, those who have students participating in transition plans at age 14 have significantly better results in employment after graduation than those who have students who begin transitioning at age 16 (80.8% vs. 58.9%). Not only were students from these states more often employed, they also earned higher wages. Students generally earned 12.7% more in wages than students from states with a later transition age. Having an integrated vocational program that is embedded into a student’s K-12 curriculum may yield more effective transition results for students with disabilities. Attempting to transition a student into post-high school life shortly before graduation will hinder their ability to be as

successful as their peers who receive transition services at an earlier age (Levinson & Ohler, 1998). Transition planning at the age of 14 affords students the opportunity to participate in two additional years of transition instruction. The correlation between opportunity for transition instruction and positive results is evident.

### **The Challenges Facing Graduated Students with Disabilities**

Students with special needs face a unique challenge ahead of them after graduation; they must now join the workforce or attend college, and they must rely on the knowledge that they have gained from the transition services that they were given in high school. After the age of 18, or the age of 21; if it is deemed necessary by the students multidisciplinary team that the student take advantage of the three additional years they are allowed to stay in school (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (2007), the support services once provided to them in high school have now ended, and they are left with the task of managing their future on their own. Many students face an unexpected and sudden end to the public services they had received through the education system. In many cases, students and their families are not aware of or do not know how to access adult services, such as vocational rehabilitation, that are available to them in their community (Camacho & Hemmeter, 2013). Community and agency services that are offered to disabled adults can prove to be extremely helpful for recently graduated adolescents who have a disability and are looking for support and additional job training and resources. However, without receiving the proper guidance and instruction while in high school, these agencies can appear overwhelming for those applying for the first time. Adolescents must formally request assistance by identifying themselves as disabled and by providing documentation of their disability. For many

students, this would be their first time doing so without the assistance of their educational facility (GAO 2009 as reported in Camacho & Hemmeter, 2013). For a person with a disability, who does not possess the proper training or knowledge regarding community and government assistance, the experience could seem daunting and impossible. This mindset may lead many students to forgo outside assistance upon graduation.

Although IDEA has made strides in the formation and implementation of transition plans for post-secondary students, it appears that special education students are not leaving school as prepared for adult life as they need to be in order to be employed or to continue on with post-secondary higher education. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS 2), a 10-year study of the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of youth who received special education services, youth with disabilities, when compared with their general education peers, are less likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education (43% vs. 53%) and less likely to be employed (57% vs. 66%). The greatest variance in the data was regarding youth with disabilities having both checking accounts and credit cards. Only 28% of youths with disabilities, compared to 50% of the general population, owned a credit card and only 46% have a checking account (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Special education students, when compared to their general education peers, are not leaving school with the knowledge necessary for enrollment in post-secondary education, securing a job, or the skills needed for independent living. This population of students, as outlined by IDEA, needs to be taught the skills needed to function successfully once they have graduated from high school. They need to acquire the skills that are inherent for adult life. More importantly, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the transition from school to work for students with

disabilities (Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley, 2013).

### **The Need for a Comprehensive Transition Plan for Students with E/BD**

One particular group of students, those with emotional and behavioral disabilities (E/BD), are at a greater risk for having setbacks and challenges both while they are in high school and once they leave. Students with E/BD can prove to be quite challenging to teachers, multidisciplinary team members, and those close to them due to the nature of their disability:

These students have externalizing (e.g., delinquency, aggression, noncompliance) and internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression, somatic complaints) behavior patterns, with many students displaying behaviors in both domains... [they] struggle in many aspects of their life including interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, academic demands of the classroom setting, and self-determined behaviors. (Lane, Jolivette, Conroy, Nelson, & Benner, 2011, p. 423-424).

The term, “emotional and behavioral disorder”, is a wide reaching term and what constitutes an emotional or behavioral disability varies depending on the state in which the student resides. In some states, the term behavioral is not included while others include both terms emotional and behavioral (Wery & Cullinan, 2013). Although IDEA does regulate the term emotional disturbance, there are multiple disorders that may be included under the term emotional/behavioral disorder, such as, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, depression, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenic or psychotic disorders. Additionally, it is not uncommon for children with E/BD to have multiple and co-occurring disabilities (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (3)/(30), 2007; Forness & Kavale, 2000; Mattinson & Felix, 1997). Children and adolescents with E/BD may not meet the diagnostic criteria for a special education classification if their disability is mild

and does not seem to impact them educationally (Forness & Kim, 2012). The maladaptive behaviors displayed by those who have E/BD tend to make it difficult for them to form relationships with those around them. This may lead to setbacks and difficulty academically, when trying to find and keep employment, and when forming social relationships (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004; Balagna, Young, & Smith, 2013). On account of this, E/BD students seem to do poorly in every transition outcome that has been studied. In the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS 1/2), students with E/BD performed worse on nearly every transition outcome variable that was studied in relation to their peers with other types of disabilities (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, Shaver, 2010).

### **The Causes and Effects of Dropping-out of High School for Students with E/BD**

Students with E/BD have higher rates of dropping out of high school than their peers, both with disabilities and without. According to statistics from the last two *Annual Reports to Congress* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; 2002) 51% of students with E/BD aged 14 and above drop out of school when compared to 29% of students in all disability areas (Sitlington & Neubert, 2004). The rate of dropout for student's with E/BD is almost double that of those students with other disabilities. Utilizing research based effective drop out prevention strategies for students with E/BD may help them to remain in high school until graduation. Students with disabilities, especially those who have E/BD, are more likely to have academic and behavioral difficulties, which make them more at risk for dropping out. Targeting academic failure, increasing extracurricular activities, providing counseling, and limiting the rate of grade retention have been recommended for preventing dropping out for students without disabilities. Despite this,

there has been a limited amount of research conducted on drop out prevention programs targeting students with disabilities (Kemp, 2006).

Dropping out of high school, and not receiving a GED, greatly reduces the chances that a young adult with E/BD will receive post-secondary training. In research conducted by Frank and Sitlington (1997), 50% of students with EBD received no postsecondary training after exiting high school, compared with 31% for all high school graduates in their study (Wood & Cronin, 1999). Typically, only 1 in 5 E/BD students pursues a post-secondary education after graduation, the lowest rate of all of the disability categories studied (Zigmond, 2006). Additionally, studies have shown that although all E/BD students are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, those who have dropped out are 73% more likely to become arrested (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005). The correlation between E/BD students and criminal activity is already high, however, dropping out appears to be an antecedent to a future life of crime for these adolescents.

The school to prison pipeline is facilitated through E/BD students who have dropped out and found their way into the criminal justice system or who have graduated but still become involved in criminal activity upon graduation. According to the data in the NLTS 1/2, the arrest rate for this population of students is higher than for those with other disabilities, with approximately 58% of the students involved in the study being arrested within three to five years (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005). In addition, involvement with the criminal justice system starts much earlier, with approximately one-third of students with ED already having been arrested once while still being enrolled in high school. In 2009, the data showed that around 60% of young adults

with ED have been arrested at some point in their lives, and 44% had been on probation or parole at one point (Wagner & Newman, 2012).

With more than half of the young adults with emotional disturbances being involved in the criminal justice system, and one-third of those beginning in high school, transition planning for students' with E/BD should incorporate certain precautions to greatly reduce the likelihood of students falling into criminal activity. In many educational facilities, students with "soft" disabilities, disabilities that have no physical markers, which includes emotional and behavioral disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012), are targeted for suspensions, expulsions, and alternative learning programs. Suspension, expulsion, and a special education classification have all been moderate predictors of under education and future incarceration for students. There is a direct link between education and incarceration; a decrease in education relates to a higher rate of future incarceration (Meiners, 2011). Transition plans offered to youth during incarceration are often neglected or are non-existent, putting a youth with disabilities who is incarcerated at a greater disadvantage (Hosp, Griller-Clark, & Rutherford Jr., 2001). Moreover, transition plans for youth with disabilities who are incarcerated are exceedingly important due to the fact that many students do not graduate from high school upon leaving prison or they find themselves involved in criminal activity again. Getting students involved with work or education is necessary for students with disabilities who are exiting prison and finding themselves thrown into the adult world (Hogan, Bullock, & Fritsche, 2010). Due to this correlation, it is imperative to keep students with E/BD in high school. The links between dropping out of high school, criminal activity, and unemployment are indisputable.

## **The Utilization of Community, Family, and Mental Health Support Services**

Furthermore, once E/BD students' dropout of school, they remain at a disadvantage because in many cases, they do not receive or take advantage of the available support services that are offered in the community. Many adolescents with EBD do not continue their education after leaving high school nor do they receive services from community-based social service agencies, causing them to enter into an unwelcoming and "cold world" as adults in our society (Bullis & Cheney, 1999). Not only are students with E/BD more likely to dropout and not receive the variety and depth of services available to them from within school, they also do not take advantage of the services that are offered through the community, state, and government. Involving a student's family helps to prevent many of the negative outcomes associated with students with E/BD. Having supports in place for students and their families helps to lower the instances of dropout and criminal activity, while raising academic achievement. If support services are provided to families of youth with disabilities, the likelihood of them becoming involved in the education and treatment of their children while in school will rise (Bickman, Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen, & Schilling, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd, & Hamby, 1995).

Despite these findings, research by Wagner, Friend, Bursuck, Kutash, Duchnowski, Sumi, & Epstein (2006) has indicated that mental health or behavioral support services are being under utilized by ED students and their families inside school and at home, even though services are available to them. As earlier research has indicated, when families take advantage of support services and become involved in their child's education, the chances of them engaging in criminal activity or dropping out of



high school lessen (Bickman, Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen, & Schilling, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd, & Hamby, 1995). Dropping out of high school and engaging in criminal activity make it more difficult for young adults with E/BD to receive their high school diplomas, enroll in courses of higher education, become gainfully employed, and maintain a satisfying and content life. Students who do drop out of school often find themselves struggling with the negative psychological effects of unemployment. Students who have dropped out of high school and are unemployed reported feelings of boredom, helplessness, and unhappiness. Additionally, these students scored lower on assessments of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depression than their employed peers (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984; Dooley & Prause, 1995; Feather & O'Brien, 1986). The consequences of leaving school earlier are more paramount with adolescents and young adults who are disabled because they may not be able to seek out the community and government services necessary to aid them in the negative psychological feelings that may be a result of leaving school without receiving a diploma.

### **Supporting Students with E/BD for Positive Future Vocational and Life Outcomes**

Students with E/BD face many challenges as adolescents and adults. With higher incidences of dropping out of high school and being involved with criminal activity, finding employment can be more difficult. Even if a student with E/BD is able to graduate from high school and maintain a clean criminal record, they will find it difficult to maintain a job upon graduation. Students and adolescents with E/BD have a far greater time with both job attainment and retention than their peers with other disabilities, with only 3 out of 10 securing a job upon graduation (Zigmond, 2006). According to D'Maico & Marder, 1991, 35% of E/BD students who had a job 1 year after graduation no longer

had that job 2 years later (Carter & Wehby, 2003). Many of the jobs that adolescents with E/BD do receive are low paying and do not offer opportunities for advancement (Bullis, Nishioka-Evans, Fredricks, & Davis, 1993). In a study conducted by Walsh (2010), employers revealed the skills and attributes that they most desired from future employees who were emotionally disturbed. These skills and attributes included higher cognitive skills, improved communication skills, compliance, better personal hygiene, physical fitness, social skills, and a strong work ethic. These desired traits can at times be problematic for those who have disabilities, and especially difficult for those who have E/BD (Walsh, 2010). According to research conducted by Carter & Wehby, employed adolescents with E/BD had the most challenge with work performance behaviors. Few students participate in job training that teaches valuable and essential employment skills causing a lack of knowledge on what employers value in their workers. Additionally, they also struggled with social skills and a misrepresentation between how they viewed their work performance versus how their employer viewed their work performance. Students with E/BD may show a resistance to work training caused by this misrepresentation (Carter & Wehby 2003). It is important for students with E/BD to receive the skills and training necessary to aid them in obtaining these attributes desired by employees to help them with job retention.

In order to be successful post high school, students need to receive the skills that are necessary for adult life while still in high school. Results in a study conducted by Frank & Sitlington (1995) suggest that students with behavioral disabilities (BD) may need the most attention while in high school when compared with other mildly disabled students. The BD students included in the study did significantly worse than those

students with learning and cognitive disabilities in adjustment to adult life upon graduation, despite them functioning at a level equal to or higher than their peers with learning and cognitive disabilities (1995). In many cases, students with E/BD do not receive the same level of instruction as their peers who have a cognitive impairment, although as data suggests, E/BD students struggle with the responsibilities associated with functioning as a successful adult. One reason for this may be that more than half of students diagnosed with E/BD find themselves in an alternative education placement. Their placement, widely determined by the difficulties they have with academics, behavior, and social relationships, in these alternative settings does not always address their needs (Downing, 2007). Students with E/BD who are in alternative education placements must receive appropriate and effective academic and behavioral instruction in order to help prevent the negative outcomes that are common for these students. According to research conducted by Tobin and Sprague, 2000, there are eight practices that can help support positive outcomes for students with E/BD; a low student to teacher ratio, a highly structured classroom with behavioral classroom management, positive methods to increase appropriate behavior, a school-based adult mentor, a functional behavioral assessment, social skills instruction, effective academic instruction, parent involvement, and positive behavioral interventions and supports (as cited in Flower, McDaniel, Jolievette, 2011). Despite the importance of utilizing effective practices, the inclusion of these in alternative educational settings seems to be limited (Flower, McDaniel, Jolievette, 2011).

An increase in problematic behaviors can have negative long-term educational and life related outcomes for students with E/BD (Bowen, Jensen, & Clark, 2004).

Students may not leave these restrictive settings with the general education curriculum knowledge to fully function in a normal educational classroom or facility. In addition, they may not have the required social skills to function with their general education peers and with people who they may encounter upon exiting high school. This can lead E/BD students to do poorly academically and socially, drop out from high school before graduation, and have a difficult time finding and keeping adequate employment (Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback, Stainback, & Ayres, 1996; Will, 1986 as cited in Simpson, 1999). Placing E/BD students in alternative classroom settings may have potential unseen consequences, such as a lack of skills hindering their ability to function as adults in society both career wise and socially.

As the data shows, youth with E/BD have a difficult time finding and keeping a job. Currently, many students are not receiving sufficient vocational training during high school. According to research conducted by Frank & Sitlington (1997), almost half of the special education students in their study were not receiving vocational training. More importantly, the students who were receiving vocational training were not receiving it in a regular vocational education setting. Additionally, of the sample identified, only half were enrolled in post-secondary training despite the benefits (Frank & Sitlington , 1997). Students who participate in regular vocational training are less likely to drop out of high school than their E/BD peers who do not participate in vocational training (Corbett, Sanders, Clark, & Blank, 2002). Vocational training can prove to have a positive outcome on future career outcomes for students with E/BD as well, with more than half of the students being able to gain employment and 67% maintaining this employment three years after high school graduation (Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010). Similarly,

according to data obtained by Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) students who participated in two or more career-related paid jobs while in high school were two times as likely to be employed or continuing with their education after graduation. Students can expect to earn more money in these careers than their peers who did not participate in vocational training (Corbett, Sanders, Clark, & Blank, 2002).

As effective as these programs can be, unfortunately, with the shift of education to a greater emphasis on academics, their usage in schools is decreasing (Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, & Frank, 2009). Vocational training can teach students workplace norms, the responsibilities of certain jobs, and what their employer may expect from them before they enter the workplace. By being able to witness the connection between the skills they are learning in school and the role they will play in the workplace, students may begin to value what they are learning because they will see it as useful and relevant (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). When students' participate in meaningful and relevant vocational training they are more likely to maintain and show a high level of satisfaction with their employment post high school than if they had participated in a traditional educational experience (Taylor, 2002). Based on the effectiveness of these programs, it is important for special educators and school districts to incorporate vocational training into the curriculum in order to raise employment rates and retention for this population of students.

Unlike other disabilities, adolescents who have E/BD may not be as easily recognized as disabled to others (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). The result of this could lead to employers not having the proper knowledge or understanding of their employee with E/BD. In addition to this, students with E/BD may not get the same employment or

academic supports as some of their peers with more severe cognitive or physical disabilities. Students with severe cognitive and physical disabilities are more likely to take advantage of the opportunity to stay in school to age 21, an opportunity offered to some groups of students with disabilities. During these additional three years students often enter into supported employment, community programs, additional life skills training, or a combination of all three. Student greatly benefit from these additional three years educationally, emotionally, economically, and socially (Neubert, Moon, & Grigal, 2002; Grigal, Dwyre, & Davis, 2006). Students with E/BD could take advantage of these additional three years by enrolling in vocational or college courses, learning life skills, or enrolling in supported employment. Supported employment is a community-based approach to employing those who have a disability, with its main goal being to help those who have a disability find and keep employment. Supported employment often involves the assistance of the human resource department of the employer who is hiring (Post, Campbell, Heinz, Kotsonas, Montgomery, & Storey, 2010). Supported employment helps to ensure that those who are disabled will not be taken advantage of by being forced to work for a low wage, supports the community by having more taxable workers, improves employer and community attitudes towards those who are disabled, and increases the skills of individuals with disabilities. Although widely utilized with adolescents and young adults with developmental disabilities and mental illness, supported employment could also be beneficial to students and adolescents who are diagnosed with E/BD (Maag & Katsiyannis, 1999).

## **Self-Advocacy and Determination Skills**

Along with traditional job training, E/BD students benefit from learning self-advocacy and determination skills. Self-determination is a set of teachable skills which can assist students in making positive choices and thought-out decisions, problem solving, setting and achieving goals, self advocacy management and regulation, as well as being aware of who they are and their own wants, needs and likes. Educating students of the behaviors, attitudes and skills of self-determination can enhance post-school outcomes (Lane, Carter, & Sisco, 2012). Students are able to benefit from learning how to make individualized goals and evaluating their progress towards these goals. Self-determined adolescents are more likely to live and be financially independent, earn higher wages, and receive benefits from employers upon graduation (Benitez, Lattimore, & Wehmeyer, 2005). Self determination skills can be included in a student's IEP and in their transition plans to ensure that these skills are being taught in their curriculum (Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004). Students can practice these skills by being involved in their IEP meetings through participation and taking an active role in the formation of their transition plans during and after the IEP meeting has concluded (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, & Johnson, 2004). Through taking an active role, students can see their goals and what they need to do to achieve them. Students can provide insight into what goals are valuable to them and if they are aligned with their interests and preferences. Moreover, because they are involved in the process students will be more likely to have a desire to achieve these goals (Steere & Cavauiolo, 2002; Wagner & Burnette, 2000). Additionally, according to the U.S. Department of Education (1999), many college-enrolled students with disabilities do not finish college with a degree. Only

37% of college students with disabilities attained a degree within five years of college enrollment, compared to 51% for peers without disabilities (as cited in Cooper & Pruitt, 2005). In order to be successful in college, students must be able to advocate for themselves, meaning, they need to be able to express their needs to their academic advisor and campus disability support office (Cooper & Pruitt, 2005). Self-determination is an important step for E/BD students because it enables them to advocate for their needs, set, examine, and adjust realistic goals, and to receive the correct modifications when they are in college.

### **Follow-up Services in Public Education**

One area that is lacking in research is the benefits of follow-up services performed by school districts targeting students with disabilities who have graduated. School districts can benefit from following-up with students because the data obtained regarding student outcomes can aid them in understanding ineffective areas of their transition program and curriculum, as well as help them to make the appropriate changes that are needed. This type of service can be performed, through the use of a phone interview, by the CST, transition specialist, or another designated person, and will help those working with transitioning students to feel a personal connection to the future successes of the students who they have and are working with (Bullis & Cheney, 1999). School districts interested in doing follow-up with their graduated students would need to obtain contact information prior to the student graduating and it is recommended that they conduct an initial follow up six months post graduation to maintain contact (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008). Data obtained from follow-up can have a significant impact on the development of future transition programs for students with disabilities.



Follow-up services can positively affect students because they help to ensure that students are taking advantage of services offered and to see if they need assistance in obtaining additional services (Bullis & Cheney, 1999). If it is found that the student is not participating in community and government assistance programs, appears to be struggling with employment, or needs assistance in another sector, the individual appointed to performing follow-up services can refer them to a program that is suitable for their needs. Unfortunately, post high school follow-up services for students with disabilities appears to be limited.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate whether students in public education, with E/BD, are receiving the same services that are utilized by their peers in other disability categories. The evidence gathered will shed light on the transition services that are being currently utilized by E/BD students and who is administering these services. Students with E/BD are at risk for having negative outcomes during and post high school; therefore it is imperative that they receive appropriate and thorough transition plans and that they are able to utilize the same or similar services afforded to students with more severe disabilities.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Participants

The first component of the research was to gather data regarding the post-secondary transition services being utilized by transitioning high school students with disabilities. It was determined that in order to get accurate data, members of multiple New Jersey child study teams would need the opportunity to participate in the study. A child study team (CST) may consist of multiple personnel with varying roles based on their training and skill set. The most common members of a CST are the school psychologist, school social worker, behaviorist, learning disabilities teacher consultant (LDTC), and the director or supervisor of special services. It was determined that each member of the CST would need to be given the opportunity to participate. The child study team (CST) plays a large role in the creation and implementation of the post-secondary transition plan so it is important to include each member in the participant pool (“New Jersey Association of School Psychologists -New Jersey Coalition of Child Study Teams”, n.d.).

Due to the nature of the questionnaire, CST members needed to be employed in either a high school or late middle school position. Elementary school psychologists were excluded from the participant pool. Additionally, participants were deemed ineligible if they were not employed in a public school setting. Participants were recruited to take the survey via e-mail or a written letter containing a link to complete the survey anonymously online. At the start of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their profession. There was minimal risk involved for participants and they had the

opportunity to decline to answer any question within the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary which resulted in the sample being self-selected. There were twenty-one surveys returned. Twenty surveys were utilized within the study. One survey was unable to be utilized due to it being incomplete.

## **Materials**

The questionnaire utilized in this study, *Post-Secondary Transition and Follow-up Services in Public Education*, was developed by the principal researcher to assess the usage and frequency of post-secondary transition services for students with varying disabilities. These disabilities included, Autism, Cognitive Impairment, Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities, and Specific Learning Disabled. The disabilities utilized for comparison in this survey were chosen in accordance with the disabilities outlined in IDEA and due to their regularity of occurrence in a school setting. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions; twelve questions pertained to individual domains of post-secondary transition, while the remaining survey item addressed the participant's profession. For each of the twelve items addressing transition procedure, a Likert scale was utilized to indicate with what regularity students with disabilities were utilizing each service. The Likert scale correlated with a numerical score for data analysis: *Rarely (1)*, *Sometimes (2)*, *Often (3)*, and *Almost Always (4)*. The results from the data were utilized to compare transition services across disability categories to see the correlation in the services that are utilized during transition. The questionnaire was distributed to participants in the form of a written letter or e-mail directing them to complete the survey electronically through an online survey distributor, Survey Monkey.

## Design

The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine the correlation between various disabilities and the usage and frequency of transition services by these students. The survey was comprised of questions that reflect what defines transition services according to IDEA. According to IDEA, transition services should be a coordinated set of activities that help a student to be able to function effectively in post-school activities, including post-secondary or vocational education, employment, adult services, independent living or community participation. In order to facilitate effective functioning post-school, students should be given a comprehensive set of activities that include, academic instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and adult living objectives, and if applicable the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational assessment (20 U.S.C. 1401(34)).

In addition to using IDEA to guide the construction of the survey questions, the Quality Indicators of Secondary Transition (QUIST) questionnaire was also utilized. The QUIST, a research-based indicator, was developed by the Center for Change in Transition services in conjunction with OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction-State of Washington), and it was designed to be used by school districts to assess transition services that are being utilized by students with disabilities (“Technical Assistance Secondary Transition”, n.d.) The literature review was also advantageous in deciding which transition services should be included within the study. A copy of the questionnaire, *Post-Secondary Transition and Follow-up Services in Public Education*, is located within the Appendix.

By utilizing the information available regarding appropriate transition services and procedure, questions were developed that reflect the necessary skills and knowledge that a transitioning high school student would need to acquire. The first question of the survey asked participants to choose their occupation. Participants could select one of four different answers, including, school psychologist, learning disabilities teacher consultant, social worker, or behaviorist. If the participant's occupation was not listed, then they had the opportunity to fill in their answer. The information gathered from this question was utilized to determine if the participant's profession had an impact on how they responded to the questions regarding transition services. The remaining twelve questions addressed a diverse set of activities related to transition services, please refer to the appendix for the complete survey. Participants responded to each of the twelve-transition question in Likert format to indicate the regularity of service usage for each disability. Survey questions were included in a random order and disability categories were listed alphabetically.

### **Procedure**

In order to reach the largest amount of possible participants, surveys were distributed to New Jersey CST members who fit the participant criteria. Participants were recruited through either e-mail or a written letter containing a direct link to an electronic survey hosted on the online survey service, Survey Monkey. E-mails and letters were distributed via colleagues, professors, and other professionals. Electronic surveys were the preferred method of survey distribution due to the ease they offered participants. Twenty-one surveys were completed. One survey was unfinished so it was not utilized within the study. Of the 20 eligible participants, 7 were School Psychologists,

5 were Social Workers, 4 were Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants, 1 was a Behaviorist, and 3 were Other-Supervisory positions (Special Education Supervisor, District Supervisor of Special Education, and Director of Special Services).

The survey was made available to the participant pool for the duration of four weeks. During this time, submissions were stored on the host site, Survey Monkey. After four weeks had elapsed, the survey data was transferred to statistic software for analysis. The function of the researcher-developed questionnaire, *Post-Secondary Transition and Follow-up Services in Public Education*, was to investigate differences between disabilities and the services that are utilized and to explore whether the participants profession impacts the services they provide to students with disabilities. For this reason, a one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA), utilizing descriptive statistics, was the most appropriate test to explore whether a student's disability impacts the amount or type of services that are received and if the profession of the service provider has an impact on the types and regularity of provided services. The data collected from each questionnaire was analyzed to investigate whether the transition services provided to students will differ depending on the type of disability that the student has. Secondly, the data gathered will help to determine if students with Emotional and Behavioral disabilities received less services than their peers with disabilities. An analysis was also conducted to investigate whether the profession of the service provider impacted the quantity and regularity of the transition services that they provided to transitioning students.

## Chapter 4

### Results

When interpreting the results, it is important to have an understanding of how the numerical scores relate to the responses on the Likert scale. The Likert scale correlated with a numerical score for data analysis in the following way: *Rarely (1)*, *Sometimes (2)*, *Often (3)*, and *Almost Always (4)*. A higher score indicates that a service is used more frequently, while a lower score would indicate that a service is used less frequently. The highest possible score a participant could give to one disability category would be 48. This score would transpire by the participant selecting *Almost Always* for all 12 questions pertaining to transition services. The lowest score a participant could give to a disability category would be a 12, and this would occur if a participant answered *Rarely* for each of the 12 transition questions.

#### **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)-Descriptive: Mean Sum of Transition Services Provided to Students with Disabilities**

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) descriptive statistic procedures were utilized to calculate the mean sum of transition usage for each disability category. The results in Table 1 indicate that students with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) have a mean score of 24.35 (SD = 4.09). Students with SLD participated most frequently in the range of transitional services described within the survey. Students with Autism had a mean score of 22.45 (SD= 6.39). Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (E/BD) had a mean score of 21.9 (SD= 4.64). Students who are Cognitively Impaired (CI) had a mean score of 21.2 (SD= 7.13) and they received the least amount of transition services. The total mean score, or the overall amount of transition services provided to all

disabilities, is 22.48 (SD= 5.71). Table 1 represents the mean scores for each disability category.

Table 1

*The Mean Sum of Transition Services Provided to Students with Disabilities*

Disability	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Autistic	20	22.45	6.386
CI	20	21.20	7.127
E/BD	20	21.90	4.644
SLD	20	24.35	4.095
Total	80	22.48	5.712

**One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Between Disability Groups**

In order to assess if one group of students with disabilities received more transition services than the other groups, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated. There was no significant difference found between the type of disability that a student has and the services that they receive ( $p = .345$ ). Students with E/BD did not receive significantly less transition services than their peers with other disabilities.

**One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Between Profession Groups**

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) between groups was utilized to examine whether a participant's profession impacted the frequency and usage of services that they give to students with disabilities. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there was no significant difference ( $p = .681$ ) between participant's professions and the services that they provide to the different disability categories.



## **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Between Disability Groups on Individual Transition Services**

Although there was no overall significant difference between the services provided to students and the disability that they have, there was a significant difference between disability groups on individual questions assessing transition services. By utilizing a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) between groups, there is noted significance between the disability categories for 5 transition services. When assessing individual transition services, it is essential to understand how the likert scale correlated with a numerical value. The Likert scale correlated with a numerical score for data analysis in the following way: *Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3), and Almost Always (4)*. A higher score indicates that the service is utilized more frequently. The highest mean a specific disability category could receive is a 4, meaning that they receive that service Almost Always. The lowest mean score, a 1, would indicate that that disability group rarely uses the service. Table 2 represents the significant differences that can be found on each individual transition service between disability groups.

There is a significant difference ( $p = .005$ ) that can be noted on question 2, which assesses the frequency in which students with disabilities receive IEP preparation prior to attending a CST meeting. Students with a SLD receive the most IEP preparation prior to attending a CST meeting ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .696$ ) followed by students with E/BD ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = .786$ ) Students with Autism ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .716$ ) and CI ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = .887$ ) receive IEP preparation prior to attending a meeting less often.

On question 3, there is a significant difference ( $p = .004$ ) between the disability categories in regards to the rate that students are able to learn self-advocacy skills.

According to the data, students with SLD are given more opportunities to learn self-advocacy skills ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = .657$ ) followed by students with E/BD ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = .688$ ). Students with Autism ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .786$ ) and CI ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = 1.005$ ) are not given instruction on self-advocacy skills as frequently.

There is a significant difference ( $p = .000$ ) that can be noted on question 4, which pertains to how regularly students are mainstreamed into regular education classes.

Students with SLD are mainstreamed most frequently ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .571$ ) followed by students with Autism ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = .587$ ). Students with E/BD ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .716$ ) and CI ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = .768$ ) are mainstreamed less often than their peers with SLD and Autism. Similarly, on question 6, there is a significant difference ( $p = .000$ ) concerning the rate in which students participate in vocational/technical (vo-tech) programming.

Examining the mean scores indicates that students with SLD ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = .745$ ) participate most frequently in vo-tech programming, followed by students with E/BD ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .718$ ), Autism ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = .875$ ), and CI ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = .826$ ).

A significant difference can also be found on question 7 ( $p = .000$ ), which assessed the opportunity students with disabilities have to receive instruction in daily living skills. For this question, students with CI received the most instruction in daily living skills ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .688$ ), followed by students who have Autism ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = .759$ ). Students with E/BD ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .447$ ) and SLD ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = .366$ ) received the least amount of instruction in daily living skills.

Table 2

*Significance (p) of Individual Transition Services Between Disability Groups*

		SS	df	MS	F	p
Question 2	Between Groups	8.238	3	2.746	4.571	.005
Question 3	Between Groups	9.038	3	3.013	4.755	.004
Question 4	Between Groups	23.850	3	7.950	17.929	.000
Question 6	Between Groups	15.037	3	5.012	7.961	.000
Question 7	Between Groups	31.650	3	10.550	30.487	.000

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### Examining the Transition Services Provided to All Students with Disabilities

The results of the questionnaire, *Post-Secondary Transition and Follow-up Services in Public Education*, indicated that regardless of disability, students receive similar transition services while in high school. The results were not significant ( $p = .345$ ) when examining overall mean scores between disability categories for the varying transition services included within the survey. Overall, students that are Specific Learning Disabled (SLD) received slightly more services than their peers with Autism, followed by students who have Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (E/BD), and Cognitive Impairment (CI). Despite some survey questions assessing individual transition services having a significant difference in their means, the discrepancies between the overall amounts of services that each disability category received were not as large or significant as expected.

Without the presence of a significant difference between the disability categories and the services that they receive, it can be presumed that the type of disability that a student has does not impact the overall amount of transition services that they receive. As my hypothesis indicated, I assumed students with E/BD would receive the least amount of transition services when compared to their peers who have dissimilar disabilities. Although they do not receive the least amount of transition services, the data does indicate that out of the 4 disability groups included, they were second to last in regards to the amount of services that they do receive, albeit the gap between groups was relatively

small. Students with E/BD do not receive significantly less transition services than their peers with differing disabilities.

The results of the study indicated that students with disabilities do generally receive similar transition services. These results are positive, however, the mean score overall ( $M = 22.48$ ,  $SD = 5.712$ ) regarding the amount of transition services provided to students is relatively low. If students *Almost Always* receive the twelve transition services assessed within the questionnaire then the score would be a 48, meaning they receive each service 100% of the time. The mean score, 22.48, indicates the rate in which students receive transition services is 46.83%. Students with disabilities receive transition services *Sometimes* (25-50%). This score may imply that students with disabilities as a whole are not receiving adequate or frequent enough transition services. Given the low rates of employment, enrollment in secondary schooling, and job training programs by adolescents with disabilities (Johnson, 2008), educational facilities should be more aware of the dismal usage of transition services by their special education students.

### **Examining the Transition Services Provided to Students with E/BD**

When discussing the ways to improve the transition outcome of students with E/BD, it is important to first investigate which services these students are not receiving regularly. There are some services that were indicated by survey participants as not being utilized as regularly with students who have E/BD. Students with E/BD ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .716$ ) are not mainstreamed into regular education classes as often as their peers with Autism ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = .587$ ) and SLD ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .571$ ). As research has indicated, students with E/BD often find themselves in self-contained classrooms or educational settings due to the difficulties they may have with academics, behavior, and

social relationships. However, these settings do not always adequately address their academic, social, and behavioral needs, which may lead to poorer outcomes post high school. E/BD students may lack the knowledge and social skills that are required for future employment (Downing, 2007; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback, Stainback, & Ayres, 1996; Will, 1986 as cited in Simpson, 1999).

According to the data collected from the questionnaire, daily living skills training appears to be most often provided to students with CI ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .688$ ) and Autism ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = .759$ ). Students with E/BD ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .447$ ) are second to last to receive frequent training in daily living skills. One can deduce that students with E/BD may not need daily living skills training to the extent that a student with CI or Autism may, due to their cognitive skills. In spite of this, students with E/BD often perform worse than their peers with disabilities in many aspects of adjustment to adult life, even though they have the same or higher cognition than their peers (Frank & Sitlington, 1995). Furthermore, students with E/BD performed worse on many of the transition outcomes studied in the National Longitudinal Transition Study in relation to their peers with disabilities (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, Shaver, 2010). Increasing the opportunities that students with E/BD have to participate in daily living skills training could make their transition into adulthood more successful and easier.

Equally as important, vocational/technical training and supported employment (on-site job coaching) can prove to be helpful to students with E/BD in increasing their likelihood of finding and keeping employment. The data compiled through the questionnaire indicates that although students with E/BD ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .718$ ) do

receive vocational/technical training more regularly than their peers with Autism ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = .875$ ) and CI ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = .826$ ), they do not receive it nearly as regularly as their peers with SLD ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = .745$ ). As previous research has indicated, vocational/technical training is an underutilized service that many E/BD students could benefit from. Vocational/technical training can increase graduation rates and positive future career outcomes for students with E/BD (Frank & Sitlington, 1997; Corbett, Sanders, Clark, Blank, 2002; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010). One reason for the low usage rate of vocational/technical programming is that the presenting negative behaviors of students with E/BD may be preventing this service from being utilized more frequently.

Supported employment, specifically on site job coaching, is also advantageous to students with E/BD, although it is not utilized within the E/BD population as often as it is with students with more severe disabilities. On site job coaching can help to increase the job skills of students with E/BD and assist them in finding and keeping employment (Maag & Katsiyannis, 1999). Nonetheless, according to the results of the questionnaire, on site job coaching is not regularly utilized by any of the disability categories included within the study. The average mean score, 1.36 ( $SD = .889$ ), is a relatively low score considering the benefits that students with disabilities can gain when participating in a supported employment program. As the literature suggested, students with E/BD do not typically utilize this service, however, it appears that students with CI do not participate in on site job coaching regularly as well.

Following up with students and obtaining feedback regarding student experiences and outcomes can be a vital resource in future program development. Additionally, obtaining feedback from the families of students can assist CST members in

understanding how to better assist students with disabilities and their families. In many cases, families are ill prepared to assist their disabled child upon graduation, as they may not know of community or education resources available to them (Camacho & Hemmeter, 2013). Involving families is also beneficial for the students, because having an involved family can raise graduation rates, lower criminal activity, and improve academic achievement (Bickman, Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen, & Schilling, 1998; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd, & Hamby, 1995). Receiving feedback from families and students can help CST members to form a more comprehensive transition program for students; however, it appears to not be employed regularly within schools for students with any disability.

Although obtaining feedback can help CST members make more informed decisions regarding transition programming while maintaining a connection to the families of students, the data implies that follow-up and feedback is not utilized very frequently for any of the disability groups. Following up with students after high school graduation had a mean score of 1.15 (SD = .424), which implies that for all disability categories, follow-up is rarely conducted. The literature available regarding follow-up with graduated students with disabilities is minimal, so it appears that this is a service that is rarely used, which was supported in the literature that was available. In accordance with this, student outcome data is not often utilized for any of the disability categories either (M = 1.36, SD = .844). Feedback from students and parents regarding their transition experience is also rather low, with an average mean score of 1.46 (SD = .885). Overall, according to the data received through the survey, CST members underutilize



follow-up with students and families, and the feedback that could possibly be gathered from this service, across all disability categories.

According to research, students with E/BD are two times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers with disabilities. After dropping out, students with E/BD are 73% more likely to become involved in criminal activity (Sitlington & Neubert, 2004; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005). Students with E/BD, and other at risk students could benefit from dropout prevention programs that strive to help students remain in high school. For students with E/BD, these dropout prevention programs may also help them to avoid participating in criminal activity and entering into the prison system. As previous studies have suggested, there is little available information regarding dropout prevention programs for students with disabilities. My research supported this, with the mean score regarding the regularity of using dropout prevention programs being the lowest of all transition services ( $M = 1.03$ ,  $SD = .157$ ). One reason for this may be that it can be difficult to target students who are at risk for dropping out early enough to make a definitive change, however, it appears that according to the research, students with E/BD would benefit greatly from a program geared specifically to dropout prevention.

### **Exploring the Impact Profession has on Transition Service Usage**

It was hypothesized that the profession of the participant would impact the regularity in which transition services were utilized. The results indicate that there was no significant difference between the amount of services provided and profession ( $P = .681$ ). Students generally received similar services regardless of which member of the CST was their case manager. Out of the professions included within the study, a higher mean score ( $M = 102.3$ ,  $SD = 38.214$ ) can be noted by those in a supervisory position.

This discrepancy could be the result of a disconnect between the services desired for their transitioning students with disabilities and the actual services being provided by the other members of the CST.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations that can be expected with a voluntary and exploratory study. In view of the fact that the principal researcher developed the questionnaire, there has been no investigation of the reliability or validity of the measure. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, participants may have completed the study due to an interest in the subject matter. Additionally, the homogeneity of answers could be due to a participant bias. The Hawthorne effect may also be responsible for participants altering answers so that they provide services at a rate that is in opposition to what actually occurs due to the fact that they know they are being studied. Demand characteristics could have also affected the results of the study. First, participant responses may have been influenced by the good-participant role or the negative-participant role. When participants are influenced by the good participant role, they may answer survey questions in a way in which they hoped to validate the experimenter's hypothesis, or the opposite may have occurred where participants purposefully answered questions in a way that would disprove the experimenters hypothesis (negative-participant role).

Lastly, the sample size of participants was also relatively small which limits the validity of the research. The participant pool was limited to child study team members working in New Jersey. Extending the participant pool to include child study team members from other states may have provided more accurate and universal data. In

addition to this, public school employees were only given access to the survey and anyone employed through a private educational facility was excluded. The participant pool could have been expanded to include school psychologists, behaviorists, LDTC's, social workers, and supervisors from private educational facilities.

### **Further Directions**

The limited scope of this study lends itself to a few further directions. A small and inclusive sample size limited the number of possible participants and made the information gathered state specific. Utilizing multi-disciplinary team members from other states would make the research more reliable as well as universal. Secondly, including private educational institutions could provide valuable information in determining if students receive more adequate transition services in private versus public educational institutions. Students with disabilities may receive better transition services at a school that is better equipped for students with special needs.

The topic of post-secondary transition is becoming exceedingly important in a time where working class jobs are dissolving and a greater emphasis on education is emerging. The low rates of transition service usage reported within the questionnaire and the poor outcomes of special education students that are reported by the National Longitudinal Transition Survey is thought provoking. Students with E/BD, and their peers with other disabilities, are not receiving a comprehensive post-secondary transition plan to properly prepare them for careers, post-secondary education, or adulthood. Further direction is needed to identify the barriers that are causing the disconnection between the transition objectives outlined in IEP's and IDEA and the actual rate of transition service usage by service providers in public education.

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## Appendix A

### Transition Survey

#### *Post- Secondary Transition and Follow- up Services in Public Education*

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the current transition procedures for students who are graduating from high school. Nicole Haldeman, an M.A. student of the Psychology Department at Rowan University, is conducting the research, entitled “Post-Secondary Transition Planning and Follow-up Services in Public Education,” in partial fulfillment of her M.A. degree in School Psychology. For this study you will be asked to complete a survey regarding your experiences with post-secondary transitioning and student follow up. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The data collected in this study will be combined with data from previous studies and may be submitted for publication in a research journal. Your responses will be anonymous and all the data gathered will be kept confidential.

By taking this survey you agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education, provided that you are in no way identified and your name is not used. Additionally, by taking this survey you acknowledge that you are of 18 years of age or older.

Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study, please contact Nicole Haldeman, [haldem18@students.rowan.edu](mailto:haldem18@students.rowan.edu), or her faculty advisor, Dr. Dihoff, [dihoff@rowan.edu](mailto:dihoff@rowan.edu).

Thank you.

#### **1. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?**

- School Psychologist
- Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant
- Social Worker
- Behaviorist
- Other (please specify)

#### **2. How often are students given IEP preparation prior to attending a meeting?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**3. How often are students given the opportunity to learn self-advocacy skills?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**4. How often are students mainstreamed into regular education classes?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**5. At what regularity do students have a curriculum that is aligned with their vocational and post-secondary goals?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**6. At what regularity do students participate in vocational/technical (vo-tech) training or classes?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**7. How often are students given instruction in daily living skills?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**8. How often are students able to participate in on-site job coaching?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**9. At what regularity do students participate in research based drop-out prevention programs?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**10. How often are students informed about state and government agencies (ie: Dept. of Developmental Disabilities, Dept. of Mental Health Services, etc.) they may utilize post high school?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**11. After high school graduation, how often is follow-up conducted with each population of students?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**12. For each disability category, how often is student outcome data utilized?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments:

**13. For each disability category, how often is feedback obtained from students and parents regarding their high school transition experience?**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Autistic				
Cog. Impaired				
E/BD				
SLD				

Comments: