BRIDGING THE GAP:
TRANSITIONING STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education Student Accessibility Services (SAS) professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from their PreK–12 Individualized Education Programs (IEP) or Section 504 plans to higher education. This study also explored how PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year college students with disabilities.

The total number of participants, seven, included three staff members from a SAS office and four PreK–12 special education administrators. Data analysis revealed themes of collaboration, disparity, resources, and service. Furthermore, the findings provided implications that produced a transition plan to assist in the collaboration between the two educational environments. The implications not only provide recommendations for PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals, but also for students with disabilities and their families to assist in the transition to higher education. This plan is in addition to the IDEA mandated transition plan for PreK–12 students with disabilities. By implementing the recommendations, it is anticipated there would be benefits for all parties involved.
The recommendations for further research would help to extend the findings into different higher education environments beyond the case studied, develop an understanding of successful transitions beyond the first year of higher education, and lead to an understanding of varying definitions of a successful transition depending on the stakeholder. This understanding can help professionals recognize different worldviews and perspectives depending on contextual factors.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Personal Narrative

I was sitting on the brown carpet, Sesame Street on the television in the corner of the family room, and my dad was building Legos with me. I had a new baby brother, Michael, who I adored the moment I laid eyes on him. Those were the “good ole days.” My mom was a special education teacher and dad had a job in the business field. Money was never an issue and my mom and dad were happy, or so I thought.

Then it happened. I was five years old. I remember holding on to my dad’s leg in the hallway of Akron Children’s Hospital. The hallway was pale yellow with matching tiled floor. I looked up, a burn patient, with his whole upper body bandaged, walked by me. At that moment, my five year old self knew the reason my brother was in the hospital was significant. My brother, born in January, had failed to gain weight and had gastrointestinal difficulties. In August of the same year, my brother was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis, a genetically inherited disease, forever changing my family’s course in life.

Growing Up

After my brother’s diagnosis, life started to return to normal, except for my relationship with my dad. The medicines, if it had not been for insurance, would have cost thousands of dollars each month. We were fortunate that my mom’s insurance through the school system where she taught provided us with tremendous coverage. However, from my viewpoint, although we had insurance, it was not enough for my dad.
He wanted to make sure my brother would always be able to afford his medications regardless of the circumstances. During this time, my mom, brother, and I would spend time together and eventually became a very tightknit group. Between my brother’s doctor appointments and my extracurricular activities, I started to become interested in my mom’s lesson planning and Individual Education Program (IEP) writing. I was allowed to help her write IEPs (they were all handwritten at the time) as long as I copied word for word and in my best handwriting. If my school district had snow days and hers did not, I went into school with her. I was exposed to the profession at a very early age and grew up helping her prepare for each school year.

In addition to Cystic Fibrosis, my brother was also struggling with learning basic concepts in Kindergarten. The teacher suggested he be retained, but my mom refused knowing the stigma attached to retention. By the second grade he was diagnosed with a Development Handicap (DH). I remember sitting at the kitchen table helping him with his homework and my mom reteaching and reviewing the content.

Like most teenagers, I found high school to be a turbulent time. I was desperately trying to be my own independent person within the bounds of a strict dad and a flexible, understanding mom. It was not easy. I was trying to determine what my future would hold but I was also being pushed by my dad to decide which college I would attend and where I would go to graduate school. By this time, I was so tired of IEPs, hearing about the world of special education, and the amount of time my mom spent on just a few students, I vowed never to enter the profession of special education. I still was drawn to
teaching and decided to become a social studies teacher because of my interest in history, the political process, sociology, and psychology.

I began classes at Kent State University in 2001 just weeks after I graduated from high school. The four years of college was a learning and growing period for me. My parents were starting to separate, and eventually divorced, and my brother was healthy but needed regular medicines to remain healthy. By the time I was a senior and entering student teaching, I realized that what I had avoided for so many years was really my passion in life.

I wanted to become a special education teacher. I am most certain my mother knew this all along, but allowed me to pursue my own interests and learn from the experience. Student teaching was not a pleasant time because I was only half invested. I already acknowledged the fact I was going straight to graduate school to obtain my Intervention Specialist license and that I would not be seeking a career teaching social studies. To continue in the tradition of summer classes, I graduated from Kent State as an undergraduate in May 2005 and started my master’s degree four weeks later at Malone College, graduating two years later.

**Adulthood**

My career in special education led me to various districts where I experienced different types of communities, but most importantly, it allowed me to teach students along the entire continuum of needs. Throughout my years of teaching, I started to feel a void in my professional life. After much research and discussion with colleagues, I enrolled in the PreK–12 Educational Administration program in 2010 to obtain my
Educational Specialist degree and administrative license. I wanted to become a Director of Special Education Services to provide teachers with the support and guidance needed in an age of lawsuits, continuously changing funding, and stringent laws paired with increasingly demanding academic learning standards.

In my last semester of the program, I had a very intense professor who urged me to think and write beyond my comfort zone. My frustration at the beginning of her class led me to realize my potential by the end of the semester. She encouraged me to enter the Ph.D. program. Her encouragement, and my dad’s voice in my head insisting I should always push myself further, led to my choosing the road less traveled.

**Present Time**

After eight years in the classroom, I made the difficult decision to resign from my position to become a full-time Ph.D. student and graduate assistant. I wanted to have an authentic experience in academia while allowing me the flexibility to be available to my family. During my academic experience, my son was diagnosed with a speech delay as well as social/emotional difficulties and is now on an IEP, bringing my life full circle. My life is now parallel to my mom’s, only 25 years later. Knowing my son is likely to have an IEP for some or all of his formative school years, I began to become increasingly aware of the possibility he could travel from high school to college with his disability.

The more time I have spent in higher education, the more time I have realized how much I enjoy the academic atmosphere. I was fortunate to be able to take Higher Education Administration classes along with PreK–12 Educational Administration classes as part of my program. Because of the positive experiences and the possibility of
continuing to work with students with special needs in a different environment, I plan to enter into a career in higher education. My mission is to provide a bridge from high school to undergraduate to graduate studies.

**Narrative Rationale**

I share my narrative in this introduction to validate my interest in the transitioning of students with special needs to higher education. Because of my personal and family history, I have been cultivating a lifelong interest in the construction of this study. My interest peeked during my Ph.D. coursework and I believe this study will define the connection between my life and scholarly work.

**Problem Statement**

With the passage of both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the demographics of the college campus has changed in regard to ability levels as students with disabilities are now becoming more prevalent (Gil, 2004). Students with disabilities are filling college campuses faster than Student Accessibility Service offices can grasp the challenges students face during the transition from high school to higher education (Gamble, 2000). Because of the shifting emphasis on retention on college campuses, Student Accessibility Service personnel have to be more cognizant of the educational environment the students experienced in high school as well as the demand colleges place on the students’ self-advocacy skills (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Currently, one in every 11 students reports a documented disability, but despite an increase in postsecondary participation, there continues to be a significant disconnect.
between the expectation of the target population and university support (Dutta, Kundu, & Schiro-Geist, 2009). IDEA (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 2004) mandates that secondary school educators, via the IEP team, include a transition goal in the IEPs of students with disabilities (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Hitchings, Retish, and Horvath (2005) found the composition of the teams differ in each high school indicating there is no consistency in the IEP’s ability to support the transition of the student to higher education.

Furthermore, the laws do not mandate higher education staff be involved to support the student’s transition from high school to college nor do the laws mandate student and family education about what they may expect in college where only Section 504 and the ADA apply. Hitchings et al. (2005) discovered students interested in a postsecondary education option to further their education after high school tend not to have a disability service representative attend, or even consult, on the development of the students’ IEPs. This finding further illustrates the disconnection between students with disabilities and higher education assistance in the transition.

Despite the increase of students with disabilities entering higher education, every year many of those students fail to successfully complete their program of study (Quick, Lehmann, & Deniston, 2003). Students with disabilities are less likely to graduate from college than students without disabilities as 58% of students without disabilities obtain a college degree, whereas only 21%–34% of students with disabilities complete their degree (Barnard-Brak, Davis, Tate, & Sulak, 2009; Herbert et al., 2014). Additionally, 76.7% of high school students with disabilities aspire to attend higher education, but after
two years, only 19% are attending (Shaw, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2009). The National Council on Disability (2000) argued this is due to the continued lack of appropriate services, supports, and higher education assistance to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The literature regarding students with disabilities in higher education is quite overwhelming and frequently explains the laws (Section 504 and ADA) but not responsibilities of the personnel at institutions of higher education. Much literature addresses the different types of transition activities for students to engage in before they enter higher education but does not include how Student Accessibility Services (SAS) personnel can assist in the transition once the student is accepted into the college or university.

Due to the amount of traditionally-aged, first-year students qualifying as disabled in higher education, the need for SAS support has increased. The lack of information of the specific roles and responsibilities of the transition from high school to college continues to hinder the success of degree completion among students with disabilities.

**Significance and Purpose of Study**

Higher education is an important transition for students with disabilities because of the impact of a college degree on future adult events (Shaw et al., 2009). Because of the degree completion disparity between students without disabilities and those with disabilities, the National Council On Disability (2004) stated, “it should be more apparent than ever before that, wherever possible, higher education is key to the economic prospects and aspirations for independence of youth with disabilities” (p. 69). Although
IDEA requires the IEP to include transition services, “the failure to provide clear explanations of the differences in the legal frameworks . . . results in false expectations, disappointments, and frustration for students with disabilities” (Wolanin & Steele, 2004, p. 10).

There are a number of published studies regarding the transition of students with disabilities from high school to higher education, but the researchers either concentrate on the teacher’s role in PreK–12 or the SAS office’s role in higher education. Additionally, no literature outlines the roles and responsibilities of SAS personnel specific to the transition of students with disabilities from high school to higher education. For example, in PreK–12 there are specific steps outlined to qualify students under IDEA, but not the case for SAS offices. Section 504 and ADA do not govern the steps taken in the transition from high school to higher education.

The significance of this study was the examination of practices from both educational settings in a particular case study. No published literature interviews school administrators and SAS professionals together to compare perspectives, nor does any literature use the findings to create a specific college transition plan that complements the IDEA mandated transition plan but has no binding authority on SAS.

The purpose of this qualitative, comparative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from their prior IEPs or PreK–12 504 plans. This study explored how PreK–12 special education
administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year college students with special needs.

A review of literature and laws governing P-20 education indicates Student Accessibility Services staff are not required to help in the transition of high school students with disabilities to higher education nor are they required to have any knowledge of IDEA. Understanding PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS personnel’s perspectives of a successful transition on students with disabilities may provide us with the necessary information to bridge the P-20 communication gap. The findings of this study will support professionals as they develop a more comprehensive and specific transition plan between school districts and the university to benefit the students. My findings will also support professional development opportunities for PreK–12 special education staff and SAS personnel. This study will extend the understanding of transition of students with disabilities into higher education and help SAS offices understand the difficulties for students as they transition from one educational environment to the next.

**Research Question**

My study had one overarching question: How can the perspectives of PreK–12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK–12 schools to higher education?

**Conceptual Framework**

Maxwell (2013) defined conceptual framework of a study as, “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your
research” (p. 39). Furthermore, conceptual framework is used to learn from the experiences and expertise of others but allows for the articulation and rationale of a new study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). It allows the researcher to build a new study using a different lens or rationale than previous research.

I have created a conceptual framework, further developed in Chapter 2, based on the laws and legal challenges governing P-20 special education and disability services, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, and processual leadership theory. These three concepts were brought together to form the conceptual framework because the study focuses on the adherence to law, an understanding of young adult development, and leading to enact the best practices for transitioning students from high school to higher education.

**Legal Challenges**

Students with disabilities in PreK–12 and higher education are governed by specific laws. IDEA pertains to students in PreK–12 through graduation, or age 21, while Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities apply to all P-20 students with disabilities, but have a unique role in higher education as students are no longer protected under IDEA. The underlying principles of IDEA are: (a) all children with disabilities must be given an education, (b) education must be provided in the child’s least restrictive environment and determined by the IEP team, (c) education must be individualized and appropriate for the child’s unique needs, (d) education must be free, and (e) procedural protections are required to ensure requirements are met (IDEA, 2004; Rothstein & Johnson, 2010).
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law used for prohibiting discrimination directed at individuals with disabilities (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). The Department of Education has implemented regulations for higher education institutions to follow when serving qualified students and applicants with disabilities, in that they must ensure equal opportunity (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). Furthermore, the Americans with Disabilities Act follows the intent of Section 504, but, “provides broader protection, since a larger number of entities are subject to it and a larger number of activities are encompassed by it” (Kaplin & Lee, 2009, p. 702).

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

College students, regardless of ability, face many challenges during the transition from high school to college. Transitions alter a student’s life by changing roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg’s Transition Theory allows understanding of factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment, “that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 213). The 4 Ss are also part of the theory to help determine the individual’s ability to cope: situation, self, support, and strategies. Using the 4 Ss can help establish whether a person has the resources to manage the transition and leads to an increase of supports and strategies for success (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

**Processual Leadership Theory**

Processual leadership is an expansion of contingency theory by arguing that leadership is embedded in the context. Processual leadership theorists contend leadership
is “socially constructed in and from a context where patterns over time must be considered and where history matters” (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002, p. 798). Osborn et al. claimed, “leadership is not the only incremental influence of a boss toward subordinates, but most important it is the collective incremental influence of leaders in and around the system” (p. 98). The processual theory framework consists of three assumptions including the substance of change, politics of change, and context of change (Dawson, 1994).

My study is situated at the central point of intersection (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Conceptual framework](image)
Summary of Methodology

Careful consideration was given to both the paradigm and methodology used in the study. To align with processual leadership theory’s notion that leadership is socially constructed, the social constructivist paradigm was employed. This paradigm allows the participants and me to co-construct their realities rather than acquire disconnected facts. The research design is a qualitative case study. Case studies are used when “how” or “why” questions are asked, the researcher has a lack of control over events, and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2003). A case study allowed me to focus on the complexity and interactions within the bounds of the specific case.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms used in the study requiring a further explanation or definition for those unfamiliar with the terminology used in the field of special education and disability services. It is important to note, some terms are state specific and may be named differently in other states.

*Accommodations*: Aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education related settings, or in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate (Ohio Department of Education, 2014).

*Individualized Education Program (IEP)*: A written statement for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in an annual meeting and includes: (a) a statement that discusses the child’s future; (b) a statement of the child’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; (c) a statement of measurable
annual goals, including academic and functional goals and benchmarks or short-term objectives; (d) a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services; (e) an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class; (f) a statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on state and districtwide assessments; and (g) transition services (Ohio Department of Education, 2014).

*Modifications:* Substantial changes in what the student is expected to demonstrate; includes changes in instructional level, content, and performance criteria; may include changes in test/assignment format (Wright & Wright, 2006).

*Student Accessibility Services (SAS):* An office on the campus of an institution of higher education to provide resources and support for individuals with disabilities attending the institution. Also known as Student Disability Services, Office for Students with Disabilities, or another title with similar duties.

*SAS Professionals:* Professional staff with proper credentials (background in special education, rehabilitation services, psychology, or related field) who are dedicated to the service of students with disabilities (Thomas, 2002). Also known as SAS personnel or Student Disability Services personnel/professionals.

*SAS Director:* The professional in charge of the SAS office who has a thorough understanding of college operations, the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty in addition to the proper credentials of a SAS professional (Thomas, 2002).

*Special Education Administrators/Leaders:* Waters (2014) defined:
a person who (a) previously has worked as a practitioner in the field of special education, defined as a special education teacher (i.e., intervention specialist) or related service provider (e.g., school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, etc.); (b) has an administrative license from the Ohio Department of Education; and (c) is employed by a public school district as a director of pupil services, director of student services, director/supervisor/coordinator of special education, or other under another title with similar duties. The definition does not include professionals who play dual roles as practitioner and quasi-administrator. Furthermore, it does not include other school district administrators (e.g., superintendents or principals) who have duties that may include, but range far beyond, student services. (pp. 13-14)

Transition: The process of moving from high school to a higher educational environment; to plan services to help students reach their educational and career goals related to their needs, interests, and preferences; IDEA requires transition planning for students with disabilities aged 16 and older as documented on the IEP (Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2013).

Conclusion

Using a qualitative, comparative in nature case study, I examined how PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS personnel prepare students with disabilities for the transition to higher education and how the administrators and SAS personnel can work together to formulate a transition plan. This chapter introduced my study by explaining the purpose and significance as well as outlined my research question. This
chapter concluded with operational definitions of terms used in the study. The next chapter further explores my conceptual framework by reviewing the literature related to the three parts of the framework.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature is divided into three main sections to align with the three pieces of the conceptual framework. The first section provides an overview of the present laws governing individuals with disabilities including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The second section explains Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, a theory used in higher education and other types of changes to help an individual through a life transition. The third section outlines types of leadership theories and expands upon processual leadership theory. These three concepts were brought together because the study focuses on the adherence to law, an understanding of young adult development, and leading to enact the best practice for transitioning students from high school to higher education. The three sections come together to represent my conceptual framework for the study, which has not been investigated in published research.

Legal Overview

Postsecondary education is considered a gateway to obtaining a successful career while learning how to be a critical thinker and responsible citizen. Although there is a steady increase in the cost of higher education, a college education is worth the time and energy (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). There are 6,500 postsecondary institutions in the United States that have enrolled about 16 million students, both full- and part-time (Dutta et al., 2009).
Barriers to Access

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (2003) identified student access and participation in postsecondary education as a major challenge impacting student transition. A comprehensive study of IDEA federal monitoring found 44 states failed to ensure compliance in transition related indicators (National Council on Disability, 2004). High school students with disabilities are not gaining the skills needed to achieve positive postsecondary success (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2003). The National Council on Disability (2004) concurred:

In the face of the data provided on transition needs, it should come as no surprise that an overwhelming number of youth with disabilities are under educated, under qualified for today’s job market or unemployed, and unprepared for the rigors of post-secondary education. (p. 23)

Secondary education barriers. “To have opportunities for higher education, students with disabilities clearly need strong academic preparation” (Wolanin & Steele, 2004, p. 43). In addition to academics, secondary education teachers are also responsible for non-academic skills for higher education such as: social skills, self-awareness and self-advocacy, daily functional skills, knowledge of accommodations and modifications, financial concerns, and responsibility (Babbitt & White, 2002). It is important for these skills to be acquired in secondary education because the transition to higher education is essentially the transfer of responsibility from the school and parents to the student (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009; Wolanin & Steele, 2004).
The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (2003) described IEP transition team deficiencies as: (a) only focusing on the immediate needs of the student rather than future skills required for higher education, (2) allowing minimal student involvement in the IEP process, and (3) the lack of relaying the differences in federal policy upon graduation.

**Self-determination.** By excluding the student from the IEP transition process, self-awareness and self-advocacy skills are not being cultivated. Gil (2004) stated, “Self-determination is a key skill that can be developed to assist students with disabilities in becoming strong self-advocates as they move through their educational experience” (p. 3). Students with self-advocacy skills demonstrate the following: (a) an understanding of their disability, (b) an awareness of legal rights, and (c) competence in communicating their rights and needs to authority (Skinner, 1998). Furthermore, students who possess self-advocacy skills are more likely to self-disclose in higher education, thus, more likely to receive accommodations (Gil, 2004).

**Differences in federal policy.** The transition from high school to higher education results in a change in legal status as access to education opportunities now becomes a civil rights issue rather than providing a free and appropriate education (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). PreK–12 special education is governed by IDEA whereas ADA applies to students with disabilities in higher education. Section 504 applies to both PreK–12 and higher education. Many parents and students are not aware of the fundamental differences between the laws; therefore, secondary schools should fully inform parents and students about the differences and how the differences will impact the
services provided in higher education (Stodden & Conway, 2002). Students with disabilities “need to know their rights and responsibilities prior to beginning their postsecondary journey” (Gil, 2004, p. 2).

Higher education barriers. In addition to lack of non-academic skills required for higher education, students with disabilities also face barriers from higher education institutions. Reed and Curtis (2011) found high school special education teachers believed higher education recruitment methods were not effective for students with disabilities. In addition, the teachers suggested the students should be provided with specialized recruitment in which accommodations are explained, campus tours are provided, parental involvement is encouraged, and transition services are included (Reed & Curtis, 2011). Moreover, the teachers also stated that institutions made little effort to recruit students with certain disabilities (Reed & Curtis, 2011).

Reed, Lewis, and Lund-Lucas (2006) interviewed parents and students regarding access to higher education. Results indicated that staff members in admissions did not understand the needs of students with disabilities. Students also commented that university recruiters and printed materials did not provide adequate information regarding accessibility services (Reed et al., 2006). Wessel, Jones, Blanch, and Markle (2015) suggested that institutions provide regular training for admissions staff members, have a well-developed accessibility services office, and ensure staff members in various departments be familiar with the accessibility services office.
Breaking Down the Barriers

Youth and young adults with disabilities historically have been less likely to participate in postsecondary education as compared to their peers; however, the tide is changing (National Council on Disability, 2000). Four-year graduation rates for students with disabilities in 2013 was 62% as compared to 59% in 2010 (“Graduation Rates Rise,” 2015); thus, students with disabilities are increasingly graduating with standard diplomas and are academically qualified to attend institutions of higher education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Attending college is an important and attainable goal for many students with disabilities (Madaus, 2005).

Students with disabilities are attending colleges and universities in growing numbers, making up 11% of undergraduate enrollment with 43% male and 57% female, the same percentages as for undergraduates without disabilities (Hadley, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). This number is three times the number reported in 1978 and will continue to grow due to federal laws prohibiting discrimination against qualified students with disabilities by postsecondary institutions (Rothstein, 2003).

According to Myers, Jenkins Lindburg, and Nied (2013a), the earliest evidence of accessibility in higher education was in the 1860s when President Abraham Lincoln established Gallaudet University, a school for deaf students. It would be nearly 100 years though before the movement gained enough momentum to respond to inequality for students with disabilities (Myers et al., 2013a). The 1960s Civil Rights movement focused on ending discrimination against students of color, especially African Americans,
but also inspired people with disabilities to take action as they faced barriers in education (Leake & Stodden, 2004). Successes came in the 1970s with the passage of what is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for children with disabilities ages 3 to 21, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by educational institutions receiving federal funding (Thomas, Cambron-McCabe, & McCarthy, 2009). In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed to extend the discrimination protection to all citizens with disabilities (West et al., 1993).

**Legal Challenges**

PreK–12 education and higher education are fundamentally different with respect to teaching students with disabilities as PreK–12 education is compulsory and higher education is voluntary and rejects many applicants (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Students with disabilities who are in the PreK–12 school system are covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) which requires a variety of components districts must follow in order to achieve compliance and maintain funding, or by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. After graduation, students with disabilities are covered by Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 was the first law that pertained to access to higher education for students with disabilities. It requires colleges to provide accommodations and access, while protecting students from discrimination, and was strengthened with the passage of the ADA in 1990 (Cory, 2011).
**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.** President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act into law in 1975 and since the original passage, the law has been amended four times and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Conroy, Yell, Katsiyannis, Collins, & Metseq, 2010). IDEA (2004) requires all students with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education to meet their unique needs while protecting their rights as well as students’ parental rights. The law also assists states in early intervention service implementation for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Additionally, IDEA ensures that teachers and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities and “to assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities” (IDEA, 2004).

**Free Appropriate Public Education.** Free and appropriate education (FAPE) is the individualized education and related services of a student with a disability between the ages of 3 and 21 years of age at public expense (IDEA, 2004). Services end only when the student withdraws or graduates from school, or fails to qualify for services (Thomas et al., 2009). FAPE must be provided in the student’s least restrictive environment. Education must be individualized and appropriate to the child’s unique needs while ensuring that required procedural protections are met (Rothstein & Johnson, 2010). In order to ensure an individualized program for the student with a disability, an Individualized Education Program is created for the student.

**Child Find.** IDEA’s Child Find requires districts to “identify, locate, and evaluate all children entitled to special education” (IDEA, 2004) regardless of the
severity of their disability or school of attendance (Thomas et al., 2009). The child and family are not required to request services or to provide documentation that a disability exists; rather the district evaluates the student to determine if a disability is present, free of charge to the family (Connor, 2012). That means that by law, the burden of locating, evaluating, and serving students in need of special education at the elementary and secondary school level rests on school officials (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

**Individualized Education Programs.** Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are prepared for the student after a multi-factored evaluation is completed. The information provided by the multi-factored evaluation is used to determine if the child qualifies as a student with a disability under IDEA. The IEP is created by the IEP team consisting of various staff members, the child, and the parent(s). It is a legally binding document and all staff must follow the accommodations and modifications determined by the team in order to help the student access the grade level curriculum. IDEA placed parental rights as a high priority mandating that:

Parents must play a significant role in the development of an IEP, parents must serve as members of the IEP team, and concerns of parents must be considered by the IEP team. The IEP team must revise the IEP when appropriate to address certain information by the parents, and states must ensure that parents serve as part of any group making placement decisions for their child. (Conroy et al., 2010, p. 7)

**Transition.** In the 1990s IDEA was amended to include transition services in the IEP for students with disabilities in response to the increasing emphasis in the education
field on transitioning from the secondary level to the workplace or postsecondary opportunities (Rothstein & Johnson, 2010; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). IDEA also mandates that secondary school educators include a transition goal and transition services in the IEPs of students with disabilities. IDEA 2004 stated:

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter—(aa) appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate independent living skills; (bb) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching these goals. (IDEA, 2004).

Transition services are expressed in broad terms so that decisions regarding the services are made on the basis of the individual’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2006).

IEP teams can include postsecondary preparation activities as a transition service. Shaw et al. (2009) agreed that schools should be, “identifying transition goals and activities that will prepare the student for postsecondary education in terms of becoming an independent learner and developing social and interpersonal skills” (p. 186). Webster and Queen (2013) contended students should be active participants in the process:

At the postsecondary level, the students themselves bear a significant responsibility for the impact of their own college experience, and, therefore, students who have taken a more active role in their high school education will be in a better position to succeed in a postsecondary program. (p. 271)
Students should be writing their own short- and long-term goals with activities directly linked to needs, preferences, and goals of their experiences in higher education (Webster & Queen, 2013).

It is important to note transition planning is not an easy or quick process. It is a personalized journey ideally implemented over many years. There are four misconceptions of transition planning: (a) there is one transition planning process for all students; (b) planning occurs only in the transition meeting; (c) transition plans cover one year; and (d) transition teams meet only annually much like the IEP team (Baer & Flexer, 2013). Baer and Flexer explained transition planning must be individual and families should be given time to discuss the desired postsecondary outcomes prior to the transition meeting. In addition, multiyear planning is encouraged, with yearly updates. The transition team should meet more frequently if there is a change in goals or services (Baer & Flexer, 2013).

Section 504. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is regarded as the first national civil rights legislation for Americans with disabilities. It applies to both public and private recipients of federal financial funding, and is enforced by the Office for Civil Rights (Myers et al., 2013a; Thomas et al., 2009). This legislation recognized that, “the functional limitations engendered by disability did not diminish the individual’s status as a person whose right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is guaranteed by law” (Jarrow, 1993). When Section 504 was enacted, recipients of federal financial funding were required to comply with its standards for equal treatment of people with disabilities (Myers et al., 2013a).
The wording of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 reads:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

**Qualification.** Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a qualified individual with a disability is, “any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment” (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). Kaplin and Lee (2009) explained in the context of postsecondary and vocational education services: “A qualified person with a disability is someone who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the recipient’s education program or activity” (p. 738). Section 504 also specifically prohibits discrimination in the areas of recruitment and admissions, academic and athletic programs and activities, student examinations and evaluations, housing, financial aid, counseling, and career planning and placement (West et al., 1993).

**Equal access.** Section 504 ensures that students have equal opportunities for access but does not mandate equal opportunity for success, nor does it mean that a student is entitled to admission to a university or one of its programs (Kelepouris, 2008; Madaus, 2005). It does require institutions, both public and private, which receive direct or indirect federal aid, to consider the applications of qualified students with disabilities.
and to implement necessary accommodations and auxiliary aids for students with
disabilities (Madaus, 2011; Thomas, 2002). In order for students to have equal access,
Section 504 requires “accommodations to be provided to those qualified in order to level
the playing field” (Myers, Jenkins Lindburg, & Nied, 2013b, p. 34). According to the
legislation, “each agency is required for enforcing its own regulations” (U.S. Department
of Justice, 2009). To ensure Section 504 policies are enforced, each college is required to
designate a coordinator to oversee college-wide efforts to make programs and buildings
accessible, to instruct faculty and staff regarding the mandates of federal law, and to
fulfill compliance requirements (Thomas, 2002).

**Americans with Disabilities Act.** A series of lawsuits indicated schools were not
complying with Section 504 mandates, which led to the passage of the Americans with
Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Jarrow (1993) considered ADA to be the most
“sweeping piece of civil rights legislation passed in more than twenty-five years” (p. 15).
Myers et al. (2013a) opined, “The law was very much a joint effort of both political
parties, all branches of federal and state government, and Americans with and without
disabilities” (p. 17). ADA provides protections for individuals with disabilities in five
areas: employment, public accommodations, state and local government services,
transportation, and telecommunications (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Because
entities in the five areas are not required to be recipients of federal funds, a larger number
are subject to it and a larger number of activities are encompassed by it (Kaplin & Lee,
2009).
The term “disability” is defined by ADA “as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2009). To constitute a disability, its severity must result in substantial limitation to one or more major life activities, such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2009). According to Thomas (2002), four standards have been proposed to assess when an impairment is substantially limiting: (a) in comparison to the average person in the general population; (b) in comparison to the average person having comparable training and abilities; (c) in comparison to the average unimpaired student; and (d) the disparity between inherent capacity and performance. However, number one, in comparison to the average person in the general population, is the assessment endorsed by the vast majority of appeals courts (Thomas, 2002).

Both Title II and Title III applies to colleges and universities if they were to discriminate against students with disabilities, regardless of their intent. Specifically, Thomas (2002) explained Title II of the ADA affects public higher education institutions by:

Prohibiting public entities from denying qualified persons with disabilities the right to participate in or benefit from the services, programs, or activities they provide and from subjecting such individuals to discrimination if their adverse treatment is due to the person having a disability. (pp. 24-25)
Additionally, public entities are not required to take actions that would result in undue financial burdens but, “are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures where necessary to avoid discrimination, unless they can demonstrate that doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity being provided” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

Title III of the ADA pertains to private colleges by:

Prohibiting private entities that operate places of public accommodation from discriminating against persons with disabilities by denying them full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations they provide (Thomas, 2002, p. 25).

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2009), “Public accommodations must comply with basic nondiscrimination requirements that prohibit exclusion, segregation, and unequal treatment.” They must also “comply with reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures; effective communication with people with hearing, vision, or speech disabilities; and other access requirements” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

More specifically, according to Simon (2011), ADA prohibits higher education institutions, both private and public, from engaging in any actions that:

1. deny qualified students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in programs or activities;
2. provide aides and services that are equal to or as effective as those provided to others;  
3. provide different or separate aide, services, or benefits than those necessary for providing meaningful access;  
4.
provide significant assistance to third parties that discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities; (5) use methods of administration that result in discrimination; (6) use eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out individuals with disabilities; and (7) fail to provide reasonable accommodations. (p. 96)

In addition, colleges and universities must not only avoid discrimination against students with disabilities, they must also make reasonable accommodations to best ensure meaningful access to programs and activities (Simon, 2011).

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 expanded upon Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but did not take the place of it; therefore, higher education institutions are held to the mandates in both pieces of legislation (Myers et al., 2013a). The main result of ADA has been additional program development, increased student access to higher education, and heightened public awareness of disability rights (Madaus, 2011).

**Moving from PreK–12 to higher education.** The transition from high school to college results in a change of the law as well as educational rights and responsibilities for students (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). The IEP, the document outlining the student’s educational program based on the disability, is no longer required, and ends on the day of high school graduation. Kaplin and Lee (2009) explained, “Many students who have received special services and other accommodations under IDEA are now enrolled in college, and due to their experiences with IDEA services, may have heightened expectations about receiving services at the postsecondary level” (p. 427). To prepare for
the transition, students with disabilities need to be well informed of their rights and responsibilities as well as the responsibilities colleges have toward students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

**Documentation.** Students with disabilities at the postsecondary level face an additional challenge in that they can no longer rely solely on an existing Individualized Education Program (IEP), the written document that describes the student’s disability and the educational program to be provided to him or her. In the PreK–12 system, when a student graduates from elementary school and transitions to middle school, graduates from middle school and transitions to high school, or simply changes schools or district, the IEP travels with him/her but this is not the case in college.

Kelepouris (2008) explained that higher education institutions set their own standards on the documentation to prove a disability. Furthermore, most documentation requirements include the diagnosis of the disability, the date of the diagnosis, how the diagnosis was reached, the credentials of the professional, how the disability affects a major life activity, and how the disability affects academic performance (Kelepouris, 2008; Stein, 2004; Thomas, 2002). Many students already have this documentation but those who need new or updated documentation may have difficulty obtaining it because of the cost of private providers (Stein, 2004). To defray the cost, high school students with disabilities who plan to attend college should obtain a final multi-factored evaluation from the school psychologist documenting not only the academic weakness but also justify the need for accommodations under Section 504/ADA (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).
**Student disclosure.** Student disclosure is a distinct difference between PreK–12 legal protection and higher education legal protection. IDEA mandates through Child Find that districts seek out and provide free testing to students who may have a disability rather than having the child’s family ask for an evaluation. If students with disabilities want the higher education institution to provide an academic adjustment, they must identify themselves as having a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Upon entering postsecondary education, the student is expected to request accommodations by providing a third-party documentation of the disability to the Student Accessibility Services office that provides a clear diagnosis and the functional impact of the disability on college-related activities such as participating in classes, doing homework, taking tests, and/or working with others (Cory, 2011).

Self-disclosure is a major barrier to students with disabilities seeking services in higher education. The stigma associated with students who have disabilities is frequently internalized by the student and therefore a hindrance in developing self-advocacy skills. In addition to the stigma associated with self-disclosure, students also have concerns about peer perceptions, may struggle with feelings of normality, and have difficulty managing a sense of self-efficacy (Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, & Floersch, 2005). Kranke et al. discovered students who did not seek accommodations were at risk for increasingly poor academic performance and potentially withdrawing from college. Sahlen and Lehmann (2006) agreed with Kranke et al. (2005) that students with disabilities must become proactive self-advocates in order to survive in higher education.
Additionally, Reinschmiedt, Sprong, Dallas, Buono, and Upton (2013) found that freshmen and sophomores self-disclose at lower rates than juniors and seniors. This implies that new college students have not been adequately informed of the services available in higher education (Reinschmiedt et al., 2013). It is important to note that maturation may be a factor in Reinschmiedt et al.’s study and may have affected the findings. Juniors and seniors, or those freshmen and sophomores who did self-disclose, may have matured in their self-advocacy skills and sought out accommodations and services from the SAS office.

On the other hand, it was found that many students seeking services did not receive them due to one of three reasons: (a) the student did not provide the appropriate documentation to initiate services (33% of entire sample); (b) the student did not provide correct documentation (8.8% of entire sample); or (c) the student provided documentation but it was found not to be considered an eligible disability under ADA guidelines (8.6% of entire sample; Herbert et al., 2014). Although this study was completed at one, large mid-Atlantic university, Herbert et al. found their results are consistent with that found in the Florida College System (2009) study.

**Student Accessibility Services.** Student Accessibility Services offices range in staff, services, and budget, but regardless of size, still play an important role on a college campus. Thomas (2002) stated that Student Accessibility Service offices have become “increasingly important within colleges and play a primary role in assuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act” (p. 39). Although staffing is different in every office, ideally it will include a
director/counselor, secretarial support, and specialists in assessment, sign language, assistive technology, and counseling (Thomas, 2002). All staff should be formally trained in their given expertise. This can include higher education administration, rehabilitation counseling, or special education.

**Roles and responsibilities.** The main service provided by the office is assuring compliance for college students with disabilities. This includes suggesting accommodations and modifications for the student to be successful in his or her program. Services for students provided by the office may also include: collaboration with health care services, repair of assistive devices, information on renting assistive devices, developing a career plan, provision of information on further academic opportunities, employment options in the community, assistance in overcoming barriers to employment, and training in writing resume/interviewing skills (Dutta et al., 2009).

The Student Accessibility Services office also has the role of working with faculty and staff to ensure the campus commitment to students with disabilities through training and one-on-one meetings with instructors and staff. Administrators, faculty, and staff should see the office as a resource for all aspects of access including the larger picture of accessible curriculum design and universal design on campus, as well as the smaller picture of problem-solving situations with individual students or specific course components (Cory, 2011).

In response to the need to demonstrate outcomes and to better define the role of the profession, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) developed
Professional Standards for Student Accessibility Service personnel to follow when making a determination about a student (See Table 1; Shaw & Dukes, 2006).

Table 1

*AHEAD Program Standards*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Need</th>
<th>Program Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Consultation/Collaboration</td>
<td>1.1 Serve as an advocate for issues regarding students with disabilities to ensure equal access.</td>
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<td>1.2 Provide disability representation on relevant campus committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Information Dissemination</td>
<td>2.1 Disseminate information through institutional electronic and printed publications regarding disability services and how to access them.</td>
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<td>2.2 Provide services that promote access to the campus community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.3 Disseminate information to students with disabilities regarding available campus and community disability resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Faculty/Staff Awareness</td>
<td>3.1 Inform faculty regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, and curriculum modifications.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.2 Provide consultation with administrators, regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.3 Provide disability awareness training for campus constituencies such as faculty, staff, and administrators.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.4 Provide information to faculty about services available to students with disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Academic Adjustments</td>
<td>4.1 Maintain records that document the student’s plan for the provision of selected accommodations.</td>
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<td>4.2 Determine with students appropriate academic accommodations and services.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4.3 Collaborate with faculty to ensure that reasonable academic accommodations do not fundamentally alter the program of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Counseling and Self-Determination</td>
<td>5.1 Use a service delivery model that encourages students with disabilities to develop independence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
### Table 1 (continued)

**AHEAD Program Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Need</th>
<th>Program Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>6.1 Develop, review, and revise written policies and guidelines regarding procedures for determining and accessing “reasonable accommodations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 Assist with the development, review, and revision of written policies and guidelines for institutional rights and responsibilities with respect to service provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Develop, review, and revise written policies and guidelines for student rights and responsibilities with respect to receiving services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.4 Develop, review, and revise written policies and guidelines regarding confidentiality of disability information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.5 Assist with the development, review, and revision of policies and guidelines for settling a formal complaint regarding the determination of a “reasonable accommodation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Program Administration and Evaluation</td>
<td>7.1 Provide services that are aligned with the institution’s mission or services philosophy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2 Coordinate services for students with disabilities through a full-time professional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3 Collect student feedback to measure satisfaction with disability services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.4 Collect data to monitor use of disability services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.5 Report program evaluation data to administrators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.6 Provide fiscal management of the office that serves students with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.7 Collaborate in establishing procedures for purchasing the adaptive equipment needed to assure equal access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Training and Professional Development</td>
<td>8.1 Provide disability services staff with on-going opportunities for professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2 Provide services by personnel with training and experience working with college students with disabilities (e.g., student development, degree programs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3 Assure that personnel adhere to relevant Codes of Ethics (e.g., AHEAD, APA).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures.** Many student affairs offices have procedures in place for student-use approval, such as student housing, and the office for Student Accessibility Services is no different. The Student Accessibility Services office needs to have procedures not only to avoid lawsuits and legal liability, but to protect students, faculty,
staff, and visitors from reasonably foreseeable harm by reducing unnecessary risk (Lundquist & Shackelford, 2011). Sahlen and Lehmann (2006) also stated postsecondary institutions should “implement, adhere to, and institutionalize a clear policy, with associated procedures outlining the process of providing students with accommodations” (p. 29) which is in alignment with the AHEAD Professional Standards “Policies and Procedures” area of need.

Thomas (2002) recommended the following guidelines for all Student Accessibility Services offices: (a) hire credentialed staff; (b) establish, publish, and promulgate procedures to be followed for a student to qualify for disability services and to receive reasonable accommodations and program modifications; (c) uniformly follow procedures; (d) require students to be fully responsible for documenting the disability/impairment; (e) follow professional practice in establishing cut-off dates for documentation; (f) accept documentation only from credentialed professionals; (g) review documentation promptly; (h) document all interactions with students; (i) deliver services at the appropriate times; (j) return all calls, letters, and emails promptly; and (k) establish positive, supportive relationships with students (pp. 51, 54).

**Accommodations process.** As previously determined, a college student with a disability is required to disclose his or her disability to the Student Accessibility Services office in order to start the process to request accommodations. The staff will engage in a diagnostic interview to acquire information regarding the student’s academic history and learning process as well as any developmental, medical, social, family, and employment histories, and a description of the perceived problem (Thomas, 2002). This conversation
will also explore how the disability may have an impact on the student in the college environment, and access to all aspects of the campus (Cory, 2011).

Traditionally, students must provide documentation of their disability that shows a disability exists and that indicates the student is otherwise qualified under Section 504/ADA (Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006). It is common for colleges to request new students to submit the documentation at least four to six weeks prior to the start of the student’s first semester for proper evaluation of the student’s file (Thomas, 2002). After the initial documentation is received, a meeting is held with the Student Accessibility Services staff and the student. Using the student’s suggestions for accommodations and verifying those suggestions with the documentation, the staff member will make accommodation recommendations.

When accommodations are agreed upon, the student receives a letter for each instructor from the office to present to faculty about accommodations. The letters are given to students who deliver them to their instructor and teaching assistants personally (Cory, 2011). Cory expressed, “Ideally, students use the letters to initiate conversations about their needs” (p. 4). It is the responsibility of the student to gather the letters from the office at the beginning of each academic semester to ensure accommodations are provided throughout their college experience.

AHEAD calls for personnel to start with the recent historical data about the student’s needs for accommodation before demanding more current and costly documentation (Shaw, 2007). Shaw also recommended a three-phased approach to determining accommodations:
(1) Use all available data (including documents that reflect education and accommodation history);

(2) If those data are not comprehensive, conclusive, or sufficient, review successive levels of documentation until the student’s functional limitations and need for accommodation are clear; and

(3) Work collaboratively with secondary personnel to improve quality of IEPs. (p. 281)

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 rejected the heightened standard for demonstrating a disability; therefore, no current legislation or regulations requires documentation be requested in order to demonstrate the need for reasonable accommodations (AHEAD, 2012). Higher education institutions may still request documentation but must be aware of the amount of documentation needed to make the decision. AHEAD acknowledged documentation can take a variety of forms: (a) primary documentation of the student’s self-report of how his or her disability is limiting a major life function; (b) secondary documentation of the impressions and conclusions formed by the accessibility professionals during interviews and conversations with the student; and (c) tertiary documentation from external sources that includes educational or medical records, reports, and assessments (AHEAD, 2012).

**Academic adjustments.** Under IDEA, accommodations and modifications are required to provide the students with a disability with the opportunity to access the general education curriculum alongside their peers. The IEP must also contain a statement of appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic
achievement on state and districtwide assessments (Wright & Wright, 2006). When the student enters college and is protected only by Section 504 and the ADA, academic adjustments, or accommodations, are required to ensure equal educational opportunity but are not required to lower or substantially modify essential program requirements (Kaplin & Lee, 2009; Thomas, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The higher education institution may deny the request for accommodations if it is evident that the request would either require a modification of the essential nature of the program or force an undue burden on the college (Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006).

Accommodations at the postsecondary level are different for each student and are based on the individual’s needs. Test taking accommodations can consist of format alterations, additional time, readers, or the ability to take the test in a separate room to minimize distractions (Kaplin & Lee, 2009; Stein, 2004). Additionally, accommodations for class support can consist of note-taking services, recording lectures, or flexibility regarding attendance (Stein, 2004).

**College Student Development**

Students with disabilities transitioning from high school to colleges or universities can face additional difficulties as previously discussed. Although transitions provide opportunities for growth and development, a positive outcome cannot be assumed (Evans et al., 2010). The second section of my conceptual framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, is an attempt to “describe the extraordinary complex reality that accompanies and defines the capacity of human beings to cope with changes in their lives” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 160). By applying this theory to the transition of students with
disabilities into higher education, professionals can understand the students in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they need to cope (Evans et al., 2010).

It should be noted that there are two seminal transition models specific to students with disabilities: (a) the Transition Service Integration Model developed by Luecking and Certo (2003) and Certo et al. (2003) and (b) the Transition Supports Model developed by Hughes and Carter (2011). The Transition Service Integration Model requires school districts to contract with a local private non-profit community rehabilitation program so students gain work experience during their last year of school and continues working at the program upon graduation (Luecking & Certo, 2003). The Transition Supports Model has two main components to assist students for successful outcomes in adult life: (a) developing support to increase participation and (b) teaching skills that promote success (Hughes & Carter, 2011). While both of these models directly impact the student’s transition, they are specific to students with disabilities. Not only is Schlossberg’s Transition Theory applicable to all students, it also serves the adult participants of the study as they navigate through their profession.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

The framework of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory simplifies the transition people experience by identifying the type of transition, the degree to which their lives have been altered, and the resources persons can apply to make it a success (Schlossberg, 2011). A transition is defined as, “an event or nonevent that alters the individual’s perception of self and of the world, that demands a change in assumptions or behavior, and that may lead either to growth or to deterioration” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 14). An
event can be an anticipated event that is expected to occur, an unanticipated event that occurs unexpectedly, or nonevents that are expected but that fail to occur (Schlossberg, 2011).

**The transition process.** According to Schlossberg (1995), transitions consist of a series of phases: moving in, moving out, and moving through. Moving in is the phase in which people move into a new situation and need to become familiar with rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system (Schlossberg, 1995). Moving through is the period that begins when people learn the new rules, regulations, norms, and expectations; moving out is the period of ending one series of transitions and beginning to anticipate what comes next (Schlossberg, 1995). Schlossberg emphasized the understanding that people can start in either the moving in or moving out phases.

**4 S System.** The second piece of the theory is the reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with change (Schlossberg, 1995). The potential resources or deficits the person brings in coping with the transition can be clustered into four major categories called the 4 S System: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1995, 2011). The 4 S System identifies the features common to all transition events and nonevents (See Figure 2) and as Schlossberg (2011) explained, “however dissimilar they appear, some of the mystery can be taken out of change” (p. 160). The features in each of the Ss are an interwoven set of variables that help in identifying the potential resources or deficits, with the goal of facilitating optimal adaptation to change (Goodman & Anderson, 2012).
Situation. Situation refers to the person’s situation at the time of the transition and relies on the following factors and questions (Schlossberg, 2011): (a) trigger (What set off the transition?); (b) timing (How does the transition relate to one’s social clock?); (c) control (what aspects of the transition can one control?); (d) role change (Does the transition involve role change?); (e) duration (Is the transition seen as permanent or temporary?); (f) previous experience with a similar transition (How has the individual met similar transitions?); (g) concurrent stress (What and how great are the stresses facing the individual now, if any?); and (h) assessment (Does the individual view the situation positively, negatively, or benign?; p. 53). Each person going through the transition will have a unique situation due to a variety of personal factors.

people cope and receive transition based on a range of interrelated personal factors, including: socioeconomic status, gender, age/stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, ego development, commitment and values, spirituality, and overall outlook (optimism and self-efficacy). The relationship between these aspects of self can be complex and professionals need to address the factors most relevant for the person in transition (Goodman & Anderson, 2012).

**Support.** Support is composed of three segments: types, functions, and measurement. The types of support people in transition receive are social support, and four types are identified: intimate relations, family unit, networks of friends, and institutions and communities (Evans et al., 2010). The functions of social support are an incorporation of one or more of the following: affect (expressions of liking, admiration, respect, or love), affirmation (expression of agreement of the rightness of an act of another person), aide (assistance), and honest feedback (reactions offered that might be negative or positive; Schlossberg, 1995).

**Strategies.** Schlossberg (2011) explained, “There is no single magical coping strategy. Rather, the person who flexibly uses lots of strategies will be better able to cope” (p. 161). Schlossberg’s theory suggests three types of strategies: those that change the situation, those that change the meaning of the situation, and those that manage the stress of the transition (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). In addition to the three categories previously stated, people may also use four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Evans et al., 2010).
Application of theory. In applying Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the ultimate goal is for the person in transition to move to adaptation. Adaptation from transition “is the process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). Schlossberg’s theory supports the given study because it is said to be helpful when working with traditionally-aged students who are dealing with changes in their lives (Evans et al., 2010). Evans et al. agreed with Schlossberg (1981):

Schlossberg’s openness to criticism and her willingness to revise and extend her theory since its inception have resulted in a practical resource for assisting college students in dealing with change. Because the structure of the theory places so much emphasis on consideration of the individual’s perspective and the specifics of the situation, Schlossberg has provided a tool that readily allows for the integration of individual and cultural differences. (Evans et al., 2010, p. 225)

Leadership Theory

The effective functioning of social systems from the local PTA to the United States of America is assumed to be dependent on the quality of their leadership.

--Victor H. Vroom (Palestini, 2013, p. 7)

The above quote emphasizes the need for a strong leadership in any social system, including SAS offices. The last component of my conceptual framework, leadership theory, investigates the role of leadership in the transition of students from the PreK–12 education to higher education. Leadership can take the form of many different ideas, actions, and personality types. What may be leadership for one person may not
necessarily constitute leadership for the next person. The dimensions and definition of leadership are unclear. The analysis of leadership and the leadership processes should be dependent on context rather than set boundaries or categories (Pfeffer, 1977).

Northouse (2007) argued there are four components identified as the core of leadership: (a) leadership as a process, (b) leadership and influence, (c) leadership in a group context, and (d) leadership and goal attainment. Sergiovanni (1992) added an additional component: the moral dimension of leadership. Sergiovanni simply stated, “The leadership that counts, in the end, is the kind that touches people differently. It taps their emotions, appeals to their values, and responds to their connections to other people” (p. 120). It is a leadership that is morally based and a form of stewardship (Sergiovanni, 1992). When one places one’s leadership practice in service to ideas, and to others who also seek to serve these ideas, issues of leadership role and of leadership style become far less important (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Because the analysis of leadership comes from different perspectives based on the researcher, various approaches, or theories, are employed. The study used processual theory as part of the conceptual framework to assess how leaders use their context and influence over followers to facilitate the transition of students with special needs from high school to higher education. Processual theory uses a social constructivist lens to reexamine and build upon contingency theory. In order to understand processual theory and its origins, an overview of contemporary leadership theories are described. The last section provides an in-depth examination of processual theory.
Power and Influence Theory

Power and influence theory, prominent throughout the 20th century, sees leadership as a social exchange process characterized “by the acquisition and demonstration of power” (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 7). Kezar et al. also stated that power and influence theory “introduces a process-oriented view of leadership that emphasizes the needs and values of followers as well as leaders” (p. 8). Power and influence theories fall into two types: transactional and transformational.

**Transactional leadership theory.** Transactional leadership theory considers leadership as using rewards or punishment to motivate followers (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010). It also “considers leadership in terms of mutual influence and reciprocal relationships between leaders and followers” (Bensimon, 1989, p. 37). According to Northouse (2007) there are two types of transactional leadership factors: contingent reward and management-by-exception. Contingent reward is an exchange process between leaders and followers in which the leaders get an agreement from followers on what must be done and the rewards for the followers when the tasks are completed (Northouse, 2007). Management-by-exception is the leader either actively or passively gives corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement (Northouse, 2007). In transactional leadership, contingent reward plus management-by-exception equals expected outcomes. Northouse (2007) expanded expected outcomes by introducing intellectual stimulation to equal performance beyond expectations.

**Transformational leadership theory.** Burns (1978) looked beyond transactional leadership, by adding a moral and ethical piece to leadership theory. Burns asserted
transformational leadership emphasizes end-values, such as liberty, justice, and equality. Transforming leaders “raise their followers up through levels of morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 426). Burns articulated:

The transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (p. 4)

Transformational leadership theory is also the influence or effects that leaders have on their followers to promote a vision (Bensimon, 1989). Bensimon explained, “Unlike goals, tasks, and agendas, which refer to concrete and instrumental ends to be achieved, vision refers to altered perceptions attitudes, and commitments” (p. 40). The transforming leader must encourage his or her followers to accept the vision created by symbolic actions (Bensimon, 1989). Transformational leadership is how the leader affects followers in three ways: (a) increasing the followers awareness of task importance and value; (b) getting followers to focus first on the organization’s goals, rather than their own interests; and (c) activating their higher-order needs (Bass, 1990).

The transformational leader changes an organization by developing a vision, communicating the vision, building trust in the vision, then achieving the vision by motivating the followers (Palestini, 2013). The leader motivates his or her followers by creating a connection that raises the level of motivation and morale in both the leader and the followers (Northouse, 2007). The leader must possess qualities such as charisma,
visionary leadership, and authentic concerns in order to achieve follower motivation (Kezar et al., 2006).

Northouse (2007) discussed three positive features to power and influence theories: (a) it is a strong descriptive approach that explains how leaders use some followers more than others to accomplish goals, (b) it makes the leader-follower relationship the focal point and directs attention to the importance of effective communication, and (c) it is supported by studies that link high-quality leader-follower exchanges to positive organizational outcomes. On the other hand, Kezar et al. (2006) argued power and influence theories lack conceptual clarity and perpetuate directive and hierarchical views of leadership.

**Contingency/Situational Theory**

Contingency/situational theory, hereby written as contingency theory, emerged during the last half of the twentieth century (Kezar et al., 2006). It is built less around the person and more around the situation surrounding the leader in the workplace. Contingency theory assumes that leadership can vary across situations and that different contexts may call for different kinds of leadership (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010). Depending on situational factors, leaders assess and then choose the leadership style that will be most effective, and then implement the required style (Palestini, 2013). There are three well known contingency theories to be reviewed: Frederick Fiedler’s Theory, Hersey-Blanchard’s Situational Model, and House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory.

**Frederick Fiedler’s theory.** Frederick Fiedler was the first theorist to develop and test a contingency or situational model. Fiedler asserted that his model can predict
the relationship between certain leader attributes and organizational performance (Grint, 1997). Palestini (2013) described Fiedler’s Theory:

Fielder’s theory suggests that managers can choose between two styles: task oriented and relationship oriented. Then the nature of leader-member relations, task structure, and position power of the leader influence whether a task-oriented or a relationship-oriented leadership style is more likely to be effective. (p. 9)

Leader-member relations is the extent to which the members trust and respect the leader and task structure is the degree to which the task is defined (Palestini, 2013). Fiedler’s theory relies on an assessment, Least Preferred Coworker Scale. The scale determines the effectiveness of a leader’s style dependent upon the favorableness of the situation (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010).

**Hersey-Blanchard’s situational model.** Hersey and Blanchard developed a model to determine which leadership style to use based on the developmental levels of the leader’s followers (Gorton & Alston, 2012). Follower developmental levels include level of achievement motivation, ability and willingness to assume responsibility, and education and experience relevant to the task (Palestini, 2013). Hersey-Blanchard’s model suggests leader behaviors fall into two categories: (a) directive behavior and (b) supportive behavior (Gorton & Alston, 2012). The two categories involve four styles: delegating, participating, selling, and telling (Blanchard & Hersey, 1996; See Table 2). The four styles of Hersey and Blanchard’s model highlight the need for leaders to be flexible since there will be situations in which leaders have to employ different styles.
Table 2

*Hersey-Blanchard’s Situational Model Leadership Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Task Style</th>
<th>Relationship Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delegating</strong></td>
<td>Allowing followers to take responsibility for task decisions</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participating</strong></td>
<td>Shared ideas on task directions</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selling</strong></td>
<td>Explaining task directions in a supportive and persuasive way</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telling</strong></td>
<td>Giving specific directions and closely monitoring work</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal theory.** House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory is how leaders motivate their followers to accomplish predetermined goals (Northouse, 2007). Northouse stated the goal of path-goal theory is “to enhance employee performance and employee satisfaction by focusing on employee motivation” (p. 127). Not only does this theory depend on the situation, but also the follower’s capability and motivation, the difficulty of the job, and other contextual factors (Gorton & Alston, 2012). The path-goal theory has four styles of leadership including:

- Supportive leadership: The leader shows concern for the followers and creates a friendly work environment. This approach is best when the work is stressful, boring, or hazardous.
• Directive leadership: The leader tells followers what needs to be done but gives them guidance along the way. The leader gives the followers schedules and uncertainty is decreased.

• Participative leadership: The leader consults with the followers and decisions take into account the followers’ ideas. This approach is best when the followers are experts.

• Achievement-oriented leadership: The leader sets challenging goals while high standards are demonstrated and expected. The leader also shows faith in the capabilities of the follower. This approach is best when the task is complex (House, 1974).

**Rethinking Contingency Theory: Processual Theory**

To reiterate, contingency theory is used to improve organizations by teaching the leader “how to diagnose and modify situational control in order to maintain an optimal match between leadership style and situation” (Fiedler, 1997). Not adequately explaining the link between styles, situations, and complex interactions which are inherent in leadership is a major criticism of contingency theory (Fiedler, 1997; Northouse, 2007). Furthermore, the lack of the political dimensions of change strategies and a typology of change strategies are also criticisms of contingency theory (Dawson, 1994).

A modern view of contingency theory, processual theory, considers both the leader’s personality and behavior, but also the context in which the leader works (Fiedler, 1997). Dawson (1994) explained the differences between contingency theory and processual theory can be summarized into three points: (s) the context in which changes
are occurring; (b) the substance or content of the change program; and (c) the process, rather than snap-shot analyses, of change.

**Framework.** According to Dawson (1994), the processual change process consists of three assumptions: (a) substance of change, (b) politics of change, and (c) context of change (See Figure 3). The substance of change is the type and scale of organizational change (Dawson, 1994). This includes new management techniques or new technologies being implemented. The politics of change refers to the political activities of consultation, negotiation, conflict, and resistance, “which occurs at various levels within and outside an organization during the process of managing change” (Dawson, 1994, p. 42). Lastly, the context of change is the past and present work environments, both internal and external, as well as the influence of future expectations of the work environment (Dawson, 1994).

![Processual Theory Framework](image)

*Figure 3. Processual Theory Framework*
Context. All organizations have a distinct context, or situational factors. Situational factors include incidents, activities, actions, sequences, and time in addition to skills, values, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Hinings, 1997; Kezar et al., 2006).

There are two types of contexts in organizations: outer context and inner context. Outer context includes the economic, social, political, and sector environment in which the organization is located while inner context is the structural, cultural, and political environments in which ideas and actions for change happen (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). Unlike traditional contingency theory, processual leadership theory accounts for the context of the organization because every organization faces different leadership needs and contexts (Kezar et al., 2006).

Shifting paradigm. Processual theory uses a constructivist lens to study leadership and contexts rather than a functionalist lens used in classical leadership theories. Functionalists argue if the organization is to function smoothly, its various situational factors must work together in harmony (Henslin, 1993). On the other hand, processual theorists contend leadership is embedded and socially constructed in the context (Osborn et al., 2002). Leader behaviors are not based on fixed variables rather contextual characteristics, but rather are interpreted by various people in the context (Kezar et al., 2006). According to Osborn et al. (2002), the meaning of leadership will vary considerably across time and across organizations and by person.

Social process. According to Parry (1998), many theorists suggest that leadership is a process that occurs naturally in a social system and is shared among the members of the social system. Because of this view, leadership should be studied as a
social process rather than a study of leaders versus followers. Social process is a process
concerned with humans in their relations to each other (Parry, 1998). Pettigrew (1997)
articulated the dynamic process behind processual thinking as social reality is not a
steady state. Human behavior is perpetually in the process of changing and the idea of
processual analysis is to catch the reality while it is occurring (Pettigrew, 1997;
Pettigrew et al., 2001). By completing the social process of interactions, by people
working together and obtaining information from one another, a common language and
understanding can be developed in the organization (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

**Duration.** Processual leadership examines leadership longitudinally and watches
the process of change unfold over time (Hinings, 1997). Processual theory examines the
process of change and decision making, “not in a timeless vacuum” but looks at the past
to find the motivation of the present (Fincham, 1992, p. 743). Unlike a snapshot study,
processual theory uses time to chart “the complex and muddied waters of organizational
life” (Dawson, 1997, p. 404). Because of the recognition that processes of change are
embedded in the context, it creates the need to study the leadership over time to see what
changes have emerged (Pettigrew et al., 2001). A caveat to researching the past is using
it to predict the future. Pettigrew (1997) warned, “Trajectories of strategy processes are
probabilistic and uncertain because of changes contexts and human action” (p. 341).

**Macroissues.** Earlier contingency theory focused on microcontextual issues such
as task design, employee motivation, and leadership style but ignored macro issues
(Kezar et al., 2006). Macroissues, or macrovariables, constitute the organizational
environment and structure, society, and global economics (Osborn et al., 2002). Osborn
et al. contended the inclusion of macroissues is necessary because the context in which leaders operate is now very diverse, and traditional microcontextual issues exist, but are only one of many contexts.

Leadership is defined an ambiguous construction of how people influence followers for organizational change (Pfeffer, 1977). Although this section provided an overview of traditional leadership theories, it also examined the contemporary work of processual leadership based on contingency/situational theory. The importance of context in processual theory in organizations can be best summarized by Kezar et al. (2006):

Organizations differ in many important conditions such as how people achieve positions of authority (elected, appointed, volunteer), how people influence one another in the organization, channels of communication, conditions of employment, and type of people employed (professionals, untrained workers, volunteers). Every organization also has a distinctive organizational culture and history that further make the context unique. (p. 61)

By taking into consideration the micro and macro contexts in addition to the leader’s behaviors, processual theory is an important piece of interpreting successful (or unsuccessful) leadership.

**Conclusion**

Upon review of the current literature regarding the transition of high school students to higher education, there is an obvious gap in the research specific to the roles and responsibilities of Student Accessibility Services personnel in the transition of
students with disabilities. There is also a void in the communication between PreK–12 special education leaders and their higher education counterparts. IDEA lacks recommendations about the involvement of SAS personnel nor does the law specify best practices involving the transition from PreK–12 to higher education. Although AHEAD has created professional standards for SAS personnel, there is no standard that directly addresses student transition into higher education. Furthermore, there are no standards guiding professionals on any type of student transition.

Due to the absence of professional standards in facilitating transition, my study investigated how grounding SAS practices in Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and processual leadership theory assist in students’ transitions.

The next chapter, I describe how I investigated the transition of students with disabilities from the perspectives of PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals. The chapter outlines the study’s research methodology.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As noted in Chapter 2, there is a distinct void in the literature outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of SAS personnel in the transition of traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs to higher education. My goal for this research was not only to contribute to scholarly literature but also to help SAS personnel and school district personnel to have a better understanding of how to better assist students transitioning from high school to higher education through professional development guidelines.

The purpose of this qualitative, comparative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from high school to higher education. This study explored how higher education PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs. These findings could shape the type of services most effective in the transition of PreK–12 students who are on IEPs transitioning to higher education.

Situating Myself as a Researcher

A paradigm is described as a worldview, or a way of thinking about and making sense of the real world (Patton, 2002). The paradigm used for this study was social constructivist which supports processual leadership theory’s assumption that leadership is socially constructed in and from a context (Osborn et al., 2002). Constructivists assume
that absolute realities are “unknowable” and individuals construct their own reality (Hatch, 2002). Social constructivists also “seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). This paradigm also allows for multiple realities based on the context. Hatch (2002) further explained the ontology, the nature of reality, of constructivism as the ability to research where multiple realities are constructed and the epistemology, what can be known, is knowledge of human construction.

During the research, using the social constructivist lens, the participants and I co-constructed their realities. During the construction of understanding, Patton (2002) suggested that the social constructivist researcher use the following questions throughout the research: How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, “truths,” explanations, beliefs, and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact? Keeping Patton’s questions in mind allowed me to gain a better understanding of the participants’ perspectives through the social constructivist lens.

I expected each of my participants to bring different experiences, worldviews, and perceptions to the research. The social constructivist does not see this as problematic, “since meaning is always contextual and always interpreted” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 16). The purpose of this research study was the understanding and the reconstruction of the constructions the participants hold rather than the accumulation of singular facts.

**Researcher as Instrument**

I am a former Intervention Specialist and future administrator, who believes that all people construct their own reality based on their experiences in life. As a teacher, I
frequently used action research to improve student learning and now continue to use research to understand the transition of students with disabilities as demonstrated in this study.

   During my time in the classroom, I taught high school students with special needs. Some of my students went on to higher education and some of my students went into the work force with support from various organizations. I always tried my best, within the bounds of financial and administrative directives, to help prepare each of my students for what the future holds. My interest in the transition to college came after I understood the differences in IDEA and ADA. I participated in an internship in a local college’s Student Accessibility Services office to allow myself to fully immerse in how higher education embraced students with special needs.

   Because of my knowledge and experiences in special education in both PreK–12 and higher education, my bias might have become an issue in the study. To avoid bias in my data analysis and construction of the participants’ experiences, I used various techniques, such as writing memos and peer debriefing. These techniques are explained later in the chapter.

   **Research Design and Method**

   The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from high school to higher education. This study explored how higher education PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of
traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs. The research question was:
How can the perspectives of PreK–12 special education leaders and SAS professionals
lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year
students with disabilities to transition from PreK–12 schools to higher education?

In order to research this question, I used a qualitative case study design. Denzin
and Lincoln (1994) described qualitative research as, “multimethod in focus, involving an
interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2). This means researchers
study things in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of, or interpret,
phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 2). Specifically, Stake
(1995) described qualitative case study research design as:

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. A single leaf,
even a single toothpick, has unique complexities—but rarely will we care enough
to submit it to case study. We study a case when it itself is of very special
interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the
study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand
its activity within important circumstances. (p. xi)

Yin (2003) explained case studies are the preferred strategy when the study falls
into the following criteria: when “how” or “why” questions are being asked, when the
investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary
phenomenon within a real-life context. In reviewing the criteria posed by Yin, I believe
this study was well suited for a case study design.
I collected data by interviewing participants, collecting documents, and analyzing archival records. In a case study, each data source is one piece of the “puzzle.” Each piece, or data source, leads the researcher to a better understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Specifically, the type of case study utilized was an intrinsic case study. An intrinsic case study is completed because the researcher has a genuine interest in the case and wants a better understanding of the particular case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1994). Stake (1994) further explained: “It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problems, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (p. 237). Additionally, the purpose is not to understand an abstract construct and is not to build theory; it is simply undertaken because of an intrinsic interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1994, 1995).

**Data Sources**

The case was bound by a geographical radius and included school districts of differing typologies based on the Ohio Department of Education. For the purpose of this study, the participants were selected from a large, public research institution’s student accessibility services offices. Additionally, there were four special education administrators from school districts surrounding the institution who participated.

**Setting**

This case study was bound by a 60-mile radius around a large, public research institution of higher education in Ohio including four feeder school districts within the
radius. The school districts were chosen after identifying which districts in the surrounding area feed the most students to the institution based on data from the Institutional Research office. The school districts were representative of suburban and rural districts with typologies confirmed through the Ohio Department of Education. A concerted effort to include an urban district failed as they did not wish to participate in the study. The SAS site was chosen because of my interest in the institution, the large number of personnel in the SAS office, and my familiarity of the school districts surrounding the institution.

To enter the setting, I personally met with the SAS director to gain approval for the study. During the meeting, I explained the purpose, significance, research questions, and a draft of the interview protocol. SAS professionals were asked to participate via email which I obtained from the director. Upon obtaining the four feeder school districts, I sent an email to the district special education administrator to ask their participation in the study.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were purposefully selected based on the number of professionals in the SAS office willing to participate and the recommended school district’s special education administrators. Maxwell (2013) explained purposeful sampling as the deliberate selection of particular settings, persons, or activities to provide information that is significant to the research goals. There are four goals for purposeful sampling: (a) achieving representativeness of the setting, (b) capturing the heterogeneity in the population, (c) establishing comparisons to illustrate the reasons for differences
between settings or individuals, and (d) selecting participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful sampling has an emphasis on in-depth understanding which leads to selecting information-rich cases to study in depth (Patton, 2002). Patton opined, “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 46).

The purposeful sample in the SAS office was based on several criteria. First, the professionals included in the sample worked specifically with traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs on a regular basis. The professionals also frequently performed intake interviews with first-year students every year, or were in a counseling and/or advisor role for first-year students at the time of the study. After obtaining the school districts represented by the largest number of students from the university’s Institutional Research office, I then contacted the administrators in charge of special education for the district to set up interviews.

To gain access to the SAS office, I was first granted permission by the gatekeeper, “the individuals at the site who provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done” (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). In the SAS office, the gatekeeper is the Director of Student Accessibility Services. In the surrounding school districts, the gatekeepers were the participants themselves with the exception of the urban district. The urban district I contacted had its own research department and did not allow the Director of Special Services to participate in the study. However, most special education administrators are directors of their own office and are able to make the decision to complete an interview
without needing the permission of a higher-ranked administrator. The following are the steps taken to recruit my participants:

1. Set up meeting with Director of Student Accessibility Services and explained my research questions, goals, and interview protocols. I discussed the qualifiers for each of the participants from the SAS office.

2. Asked permission for an informal focus group in the SAS office to better define my interview questions for both SAS professionals and special education administrators from the feeder school districts.

3. Using the criteria (as indicated above) for the SAS professionals, I obtained contact information from the Director of SAS of the prospective SAS participants.

4. I emailed all of the qualified prospective participants to introduce myself, describe the nature of the study, and explain why they were chosen to participate. I also informed them their names were to remain confidential and sought permission for their participation.

5. I contacted the university’s office for Institutional Research to determine which school districts were most represented on campus. Using the top 10, I narrowed them down to five based on the bounds of the case. I used information from the Ohio Department of Education to confirm the typology each of the districts represent (urban, suburban, or rural).

6. For each school district chosen, I contacted, by email, the administrator in charge of special education using the school district’s website. I introduced
myself, described the nature of the study, and explained why they were chosen to participate in the study. I informed them their names were to remain confidential and sought permission for their participation.

After completing the steps to recruit my participants, a total of 7 qualified participants agreed to partake in the study (see Table 3).

**Ethical Considerations**

“Protection of human subjects procedures are now an affirmation of our commitment to treat all people with respect. And that is as it should be” (Patton, 2002, p. 271). Interviews with all participants were treated with confidentiality and respect as I know and understand each of their responses were different based on their context. A completed and approved IRB from Kent State University was a prerequisite for completing the research. I provided each participant with an informed consent form which include permission to audio record each of the interviews as well.

While I did not foresee any physical, mental, or social harm during the study, beyond the risks associated with everyday life, the participants may have found a risk related to their professional roles. The risk was only evident if participants were to share certain information about their colleagues, work environment, or community. It was left to the discretion of the participants to protect themselves professionally, and they were informed before any interviews that they may opt out at any time if they feel the risk harmed him or her professionally.
### Table 3

**Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>SAS or PreK-12 SPED Admin</th>
<th>Organization Pseudonym</th>
<th>Number of Years in the Position</th>
<th>Racial Self-Identification</th>
<th>Religious Self-Identification</th>
<th>Ethnic Self-Identification</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>White, non Hispanic</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Mixture</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>German/Slovak</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Bachelor; working on M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Ohio Suburban School District</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Italian/German</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Ohio Local School District</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Irish/Italian</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Midwest City School District</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>M.A. with post-masters certificate in administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Northeast City Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To further protect the participants, all school districts, participants, and the institution were given pseudonyms regardless of the content of responses from participants. Additionally, all data were collected, analyzed, and stored by me, with only a review from a peer debriefer and my dissertation committee chair to ensure confidentiality of all information.

**Data Collection**

Patton (2002) emphasized that qualitative research is not the collection of one type of data, rather multiple sources of information are sought and used because, “no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (p. 306). Using multiple types of data, also known as triangulation, is used to increase validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weakness of another approach (Patton, 2002). Triangulation, further explained later in the chapter, helps to reduce the possibility that conclusions only reflect the biases of the specific method and allows for the insight of different aspects of the phenomena under investigation (Maxwell, 2013).

Data collection consisted of three sources of data: semi-structured interviews of SAS personnel and PreK–12 special education administrators, documents, and archival records from the school districts and the university.

The early phases of designing this study included an observation component with students during their initial intake meeting in the SAS office. I argue observation would not have been an adequate way to obtain data, as students may have felt uncomfortable with my presence during a vulnerable time in their lives. My presence could have
changed the way the students and SAS staff acted, or may have discouraged the student from self-disclosing. I felt it was unethical to disrupt this very personal process.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds (Hatch, 2002). The interviews conducted were semi-structured because, “although the researcher will come to the interview with guiding questions, there will be an understanding to follow the lead of the informant and the willingness to probe into areas that arise during interview interactions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94).

Although I brought an interview protocol to each interview, the type of interviewing utilized was responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described responsive interviewing in four characteristics: (a) responsive interviewing emphasizes searching for context and richness while accepting the complexity and ambiguity of real life, (b) the personalities of the interviewer and participant impact the questioning, (c) interviewing is an exchange that occurs within a meaningful relationship, and (d) the design remains flexible (p. 38). The four characteristics of responsive interviewing lead to a more give-and-take conversation rather than direct questioning. During my interviews with participants, I allowed the pattern of questioning to be flexible by allowing other questions to develop in response to what the participant said.

Using responsive interviewing not only emphasizes building relationships, it also supports a friendly and supportive tone. The interviewer does not dwell on facts or contradictions as “responsive interviews are not interrogations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.
Responsive interviewing allowed for a flexible design of questions but each interview reached the same goal: to build a rich understanding of what I was studying based on the perspectives and experiences of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Each semi-structured interview was scheduled to last no more than 60 minutes and start with small talk “to get the informant talking and to make human connections between the researcher and informant” (Hatch, 2002, p. 108). The interview occurred at the participant’s choice of place; however, the location was conducive to being recorded (e.g., office or library). The interview was audio-recorded so the researcher could study the language participants used to describe their perspectives (Patton, 2002). The place of the interview was also private so the researcher was comfortable asking for sensitive information and the participant was comfortable giving it (Hatch, 2002).

During the interview process, to help guide me as a novice researcher, I utilized Creswell’s (2014) interview protocols. The interview protocol was used for asking questions and recording answers. Creswell recommended writing notes in the event that the recording equipment fails; therefore, the protocol had the questions with spaces for recording responses and making notes. The protocol also had instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures were used from one interview to another and a final thank you statement to acknowledge the participants’ time (Creswell, 2014).

I also used an adaptation of Creswell’s (2014) observation protocol for my personal organization of the participants, rather than using it to complete an observation. My participant organization sheet had a place for the time, place, and date of the
interview; descriptive traits of the participants; description of the physical setting; and reflective notes as Creswell described as, “the researcher’s personal thoughts, such as speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (p. 194).

Demographic information was also recorded on this form.

Interview questions were based on Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) guidelines for responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin advocated for the use of main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. Main questions ensure the research questions are being answered from the perspective of the participant. Follow-up questions explore the participant’s answers to gain, to “explore the interviewee’s answers to obtain further depth and detail, to ask for clarifying examples, and to clarify concepts and themes” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 117). Probes included questions, comments, or gestures to keep the interview on target and to manage the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A balance of main questions, follow-ups, and probes were used based on the conversation and how responsive the participant was during the interview to ensure each participant’s perspective was heard.

A second round of interviews were used to clarify themes, to ask any additional questions I needed to answer the research questions, and to member check. The second round of interviews were conducted by email due to the busy schedules of the professionals. Member checking is further explained later in this chapter.

Documents and Archival Records

Documents. Written documents and records can include public records, personal documents, and physical materials available for access (Merriam, 2002). Documents are
important for qualitative researchers because “the information provided may differ from and may not be available in spoken form” (Hodder, 1994, p. 393). Furthermore, documents can also serve as substitutes for records of activity that cannot be observed directly (Stake, 1995). Merriam (2002) explained one strength of using documents is the fact they already exist in the situation and they are not dependent upon the “whims of human beings whose cooperation is essential for collecting data through interviews and observations” (p. 13).

Archival records. Archival records, often in the form of computer files and records, were used in conjunction with other sources of information to produce the case study (Yin, 2003). Yin listed the following examples of archival records: (a) services records, (b) organizational records, (c) maps and charts, (d) lists of names or other relevant items, (e) survey data such as data previously collected about a site, and (f) personal records.

For this study, documents and archival records included public records from the Ohio Department of Education regarding the percentage of students with special needs in each of the districts chosen, SAS office records of the number of students served and other data already generated by the office for progress monitoring use, and job descriptions from both the university for SAS professionals and special education administrators from the school districts. Participants were also encouraged to provide other archival records and documents they believed would contribute to understanding the case.
Data Management

Due to the amount of data being collected, it was imperative I had a sound data management system to help assist in the retrieval process. A good storage and retrieval system “is critical for keeping track of what data are available; for permitting easy, flexible, reliable use of data . . . and for documenting the analyses made so that the study can, in principle, be verified” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 430). Yin (2003) promoted the creation of a case study database to increase the reliability of the study. The case study database includes case study notes, case study documents, tabular materials, and narratives (Yin, 2003). My database focused on case study notes and case study documents. I utilized a hard copy system as well as the data management software program, NVivo.

The hard copy system comprised of separate labeled folders. Each participant had a separate folder with my handwritten notes from each interview, documents, and archival records gathered or provided by the participant. These folders were grouped by location. The SAS office had a group of folders and the school districts had a group of folders. No names were attached to these folders, or to the transcripts, in order to protect confidentiality; rather they were labeled with pseudonyms. Each location also had a folder to collect documents and archival records associated with the location. These folders were kept in my locked home office and accessed only by me.

NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, was used to help me organize the information in a professional manner (Edhlund, 2007). A copy of each interview transcript was uploaded to the program to help assist in data analysis. NVivo
was installed on my personal computer that was password locked and only accessed by me.

Any data collected electronically through email was stored in my university issued, password protected Google account. The study had its own folder on the Google drive and was deleted, by me, upon completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a way to see patterns, themes, and relationships; develop explanations; and make interpretations (Hatch, 2002). Hatch’s explanation has bettered my understanding of the analysis process. “Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others” (p. 148). Analysis and interpretation of the data is taking impressions and observations apart to create a deeper understanding (Stake, 1995). Data analysis began early after the first round of interviews in order for me to generate additional questions used in the follow up, informal interviews, in the field as well as any areas needing further data collection.

Specifically for case studies, Stake (1995) called for categorical aggregation and direct interpretation as the means for data analysis in case study design. Because this study was an intrinsic case study, the primary goal was to come to understand the case. Categorical aggregation and direct interpretation was used “to tease out relationships, to probe issues, and to aggregate categorical data, but those ends are subordinate to understanding the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 77). Stake suggested case study researchers sequence the data, categorizes themes, and make tallies for aggregation.
My approach for data analysis used both deductive and inductive approaches. Both are legitimate and useful paths for research as the aim of all qualitative research is to explain patterns, “which can only be done with a set of conceptually specified analytic categories” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 431). Stake (1995) suggested, “For most important data, it will be useful to use preestablished codes but go through the data separately looking for new ones” (p. 79). Preestablished codes were derived from the research questions (i.e., successful student transition preparation, understanding of the differences between IDEA and ADA, and role differentiation of SAS professionals and special education administrators) and served as a template for analysis. As Stake (1995) suggested, I was open to inductive analysis and let the data lead me to emerging themes and patterns.

In order to sequence and categorize the data, I used Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) methods for coding. Rubin and Rubin stated the first step of the analysis process is to prepare a word for word transcript of the interviews. I sent each recorded interview to TranscribeMe, an online transcription service, for all of my transcription needs. I chose TranscribeMe because they are linked to NVivo, meaning each transcript was automatically uploaded to NVivo for coding. Upon receiving the documents, I then played back the corresponding interviews while reading the document to correct any mistakes, remark on any voice inflections, and add other notes. Throughout the analysis phase, informal data analysis was also conducted using memos. Memos were written to “capture and facilitate analytic thinking about the data and also stimulate analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105).
Next, I completed code excerpts that have relevant concepts, themes, events, examples, names, places, dates, new insights, or coding categories (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This type of coding is also called open coding. Open coding is “the analytic process though which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). All coding was completed in NVivo to enable all passages on a similar topic be brought together (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Upon completion of open coding, I then proceeded to Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) step 4 of sorting and resorting the material then comparing the excerpts between different subgroups. This step is also called axial coding, which is the process of linking categories to related categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin explained the purpose of axial coding:

The purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena . . . By doing this, the analyst begins to build up a dense texture of relationships around the “axis” of the category being focused upon. (p. 124)

Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested finding all excerpts marked with the same code, and sort them into a single data file; then summarize the contents of each file. Next, sort and resort the material within each file, comparing the excerpts between different subgroups (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
Categorical aggregation was used to tally the coded data to confirm themes and patterns (Stake, 1995). Huberman and Miles (1994) agreed that counting is a way to generate meaning to see “what’s there” and “to keep oneself honest” (p. 432). Aggregation was completed by creating a table. Vertically was the participant and horizontally were the themes. I also looked across interviews to make comparisons.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of qualitative research has historically been criticized for “lacking scientific rigor compared to quantitative research” (Cope, 2014, p. 89). Positivists may question qualitative research because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way (Shenton, 2004). Shenton explained qualitative researchers prefer to use different terminology than positivists. Quantitative researchers tend to use internal validity, external validity, and reliability whereas qualitative researchers lean towards the use of trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility. Maxwell (2013) stated:

> Validity is a property of inferences rather than methods, and is never something that can be proved or taken for granted on the basis of the method used. Validity is also relative: Is has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research. (p. 121)

Cope (2014) and Shenton (2004) explained that in order to develop trustworthiness in qualitative research Lincoln and Guba have developed four criteria: (a) credibility (in preference to internal validity), (b) transferability (in preference to external
validity), (c) dependability (in preference to reliability), and (d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth of the data and the interpretation by the researcher (Cope, 2014). Merriam (2002) posed the questions, “How congruent are one’s findings with reality?” and “Are we observing or measuring what we think we are observing or measuring?” (p. 25). To answer Merriam’s questions regarding credibility, I used peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation.

Peer debriefing. Frequent peer debriefing between myself and a peer helped keep me honest, assisted in developing the design, and helped me to recognize my own biases or preferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Shenton, 2004). My primary peer was my dissertation committee director, along with another Ph.D. student to discuss the study.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1986) explained member checking as:

The process of continuous, informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the investigator’s reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out and to the constructions offered by other respondents or sources, and a terminal, formal testing of the final case report with a representative sample of stakeholders. (p. 81)

Member checking was completed by providing all participants with a copy of their interview transcription. Participants had the option of an emailed copy or a hard copy delivered to their office. Upon receipt, participants were encouraged to read the
transcriptions to “consider that their words match what they actually intended” (Shenton, 2004).

**Triangulation.** As case study connoisseurs both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) recommended the triangulation of data. Yin (2003) contended that one of the three principles of collecting data is to use multiple sources of evidence; thus recommending case study researchers utilize triangulation. Triangulation is the combining of methods in order to strengthen a study (Patton, 2002). It also provides a verification or extension of information from other sources (Hatch, 2002).

There are four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002). My study employed data triangulation by using a variety of data sources to which Creswell (2014) agreed helped to build a case for the themes extracted from the data. Creswell also argued, “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (p. 201). Data sources in this case study included interviews (two strands—SAS personnel and special education administrators from school districts), documents, and archival records.

**Transferability**

Transferability “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 2002, p. 28). Shenton (2004) argued that since the findings of qualitative research are specific to environments and/or individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate the generalizability to other environments and/or
individuals. In order to meet the threshold of transferability, Cope (2014) contended, “researchers should provide sufficient information on the informants and the research context to enable the reader to assess the findings’ capability of being transferable” (p. 89).

In my study, I provided the readers with a full description of all the contextual factors including the following as suggested by Shenton (2004):

a) the number of organizations taking part of the study;

b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed to the data;

c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;

d) an explanation of the data collection methods;

e) the number and length of the data collection sessions;

f) the time period over which the data was collected. (p. 70)

The factors listed contributed to what Lincoln and Guba (1986) referred to as “thick descriptive data.” Thick description allows the reader into the context being described and take those who will use the findings into the experience of the study (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2014) concurred: “when qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting . . . or offer many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer” (p. 202).

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the reliability of the data in similar conditions through reporting, in detail, to allow for replication (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Merriam (2002) further explained, “rather than insisting that others get the same results as the
original researcher, reliability lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable” (p. 27). In order to demonstrate dependability, I applied Shenton’s (2004) recommendations by:

a) describing the research design and its implementation by explaining what was planned for the study and what was executed on a strategic level;
b) addressing the operational detail of data gathering;
c) evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry. (pp. 71-72)

**Confirmability**

Cope (2014) defined confirmability as the researcher’s ability to represent the voices of the participants without his or her own biases or viewpoints. Confirmability can also be described as reflective. Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self and clarifies the bias the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). It is also a way to allow for deep connections between me and the participants. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) concluded the following: “Reflexivity involves the recognition that an account of reality does not simply mirror reality but rather creates or constitutes as real in the first place whatever it describes” (p. 231). Confirmability was satisfied by using a personal narrative and reflective journaling.

**Personal narrative.** Creswell (2014) suggested that “self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative” and states how their interpretations of the findings is shaped by “their backgrounds, such as gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin” (p. 202). In the introduction, I shared my personal narrative about my personal and professional connections to special education. I wanted to allow the reader to understand
my background and my interest in the topic as well as contribute to the confirmability of the study.

**Journaling.** I used a reflective, research journal throughout the entire length of the study. This journal not only allowed me to record and reflect upon my reflections, questions, and decisions throughout data collection but provided a record of the experience (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Hatch (2002) described journals as a place “where researchers can openly reflect on what is happening during the research experiences and how they feel about it” (p. 88).

**Limitations**

The limitation of this study was, essentially, the design used: case study. My intent was not to provide results that were generalizable to all similar situations, but to provide the reader a deep understanding of the case. Stake (1995) used the term “naturalistic generalizations” to explain the type of generalization made in case studies. Naturalistic generalizations is the kind of learning that readers take away from reading the case (Patton, 2002). Stake (1995) further clarified these types of generalizations are “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feel as if it happened to themselves” (p. 85).

In order to help the reader to make naturalistic generalizations, I provided readers with rich descriptions and personal details by emphasizing time, place, and descriptions of people in Chapter 4 (Stake, 1995). Stake (1994) concluded:
Enduring meanings come from encounter, and are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter. In life itself, this occurs seldom to the individual alone but in the presence of others. In a social process, together they bend, spin, consolidate, and enrich their understanding. We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience. (p. 240)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methodological design of the case study using the social constructivist paradigm. In order to answer my research questions, I utilized semi-structured interviews using Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) responsive interviewing method, and collected both documents and archival records as data sources. As part of the social constructivist paradigm, my participants helped to co-construct meaning. Data analysis used Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) responsive interview coding with influence from Strauss and Corbin (1998). I used this method to help me dig deeper into the data to find information to answer my research questions.

I have also explained how I ensured trustworthiness. I implemented various techniques to fulfill credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. I sought to explain my method comprehensively and transparently to secure rigor and trustworthiness.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from high school to higher education. This study explored how higher education PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs. The research question was: How can the perspectives of PreK–12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK–12 schools to higher education?

In order to answer this question, I used a qualitative case study design. I interviewed a total of seven participants, three SAS professionals at a large, public university and four special education administrators of districts surrounding the university. I also analyzed documents and archival records from each participant’s organization to better understand the participant’s perspective on a successful transition of students with special needs. This chapter paints pictures of each participant through thick descriptions and detailed recounts of their stories.

Data Analysis

In case study design, Stake (1995) recommended researchers sequence the data, categorize themes, and make tallies for aggregation of the data. Following Stake’s (1995) guidelines, I aligned the data, pulled out and categorized themes, and finally made
a chart of tallies to determine the themes. More specifically, I started data analysis in Nvivo using Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) method for coding, by separating words, phrases, sentences, and ideas into three predetermined codes based on my conceptual framework (see Appendix F). Transition plan ideas, a fourth code, emerged through inductive analysis.

For each participant, I went through each of the four codes and extrapolated emerging themes. For clarity, I created a spreadsheet and placed each emerging theme under the assigned code. Next, I repeated the process for each of the four codes. On the spreadsheet, I looked at the emerging themes for each participant, then compared themes across the four codes resulting in three to four large themes. Finally, I aggregated the themes of all of the participants by creating a tally chart with themes down the left side, the participants across the top, and tallied the themes to the participants. Note that a detailed graphic of the coding process is located in Appendix G. Each stage of coding is further explained throughout the chapter.

The open coding findings are organized and presented by participant and each story is told in sequence by the predetermined and emerged categories. The findings of the second stage of coding, axial coding, are described. Finally, the discoveries of selective coding are illustrated.

**Open Coding**

The first step in the coding process was to organize the data in such a way that I was able to sort it into categories. The disaggregation process results in four categories, or codes. Then in each category, for each participant, I determined the themes present (see Table 4).
Table 4

*Codes by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Laws</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Transition Plan Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>collaboration empowerment professional development context dynamics influence impact openness service support</td>
<td>IDEA vs. ADA and 504 disparity responsibility modifications and accommodations self-advocacy parental involvement motivation early planning success</td>
<td>collaboration team approach forced to request services disparity outreach responsive successful transition understaffed relationships</td>
<td>collaboration outreach communication relationships impacting the learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>understaffed case load openness dealing with ambiguity service positive attitude stressful commitment flexibility</td>
<td>confusing impacting the learning environment self-advocacy reaching out service independence adjusting IEP/504 differences successful hand-holding disparity IDEA vs. ADA and 504 modifications and accommodations requesting services lack of motivation to change</td>
<td>successful transitions early planning team approach service openness impacting the learning environment requesting services forced to request services lack of motivation self-advocacy parental involvement understaffed reaching out successful supportive flexibility</td>
<td>understaffed resources needed IDEA vs. ADA and 504 outreach successful transition impacting the learning environment communication relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Laws</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Transition Plan Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>humanity</td>
<td>IDEA vs. ADA and 504 process</td>
<td>successful transition disparity</td>
<td>collaboration outreach communication experiential learning resources change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>influence</td>
<td>environmental influences</td>
<td>openness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenging context</td>
<td>team approach</td>
<td>parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
<td>modifications and accommodations</td>
<td>outreach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ethical</td>
<td>IEP driven</td>
<td>understaffed humanity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>courageous service</td>
<td>leveling the playing field</td>
<td>lack of awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>context</td>
<td>impact of learning environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>humanity</td>
<td>choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>evolving</td>
<td>IDEA vs. ADA and 504 responsibility</td>
<td>successful transition parental involvement</td>
<td>outreach responsibility confusion collaboration communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>impact</td>
<td>early planning accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>resources/staffing supportive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inclusive</td>
<td>self-advocacy</td>
<td>early planning self-advocacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>flexibility</td>
<td>team approach</td>
<td>student centered responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>efficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>openness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>morality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reflective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>IDEA vs. ADA and 504 support</td>
<td>successful transition support</td>
<td>communication outreach collaboration navigation connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationships trust</td>
<td>self-advocacy</td>
<td>early planning team approach resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>impact of the learning environment</td>
<td>parental involvement goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>access</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disparity</td>
<td>confusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>communication</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues*
Documents and archival records were collected from each participant. The SAS office provided program justification reports, intake packet of documents, and a program profile. The PreK-12 special education administrators provided job descriptions, district profiles, district report cards, and enrollment data reports. During data analysis, I collected data points from the documents and archival records in addition to participant interviews.

**Participants.** The study consisted of three participants from Midwestern State University who met the following criteria: (a) the professionals must work with
traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs on a regular basis and (b) the professionals also must perform intake interviews with first-year students every year, or be in a counseling and/or advisor role for first-year students at the time of the study. Additionally, there were four special education directors participants from surrounding school districts. The districts were decided upon based on the number of enrolled students at Midwestern State University, typology representation, and willingness to participate. Each administrator contacted was in charge of the special education program for the district. To assist the reader, I have repeated the Description of Participants presented in Chapter 3, describing the characteristics of each participant (see Table 5).

The conclusions made from open coding are presented by participants starting with the higher education professionals followed by the PreK–12 special education administrators.

**Midwestern State University.** Midwestern State University (MSU) is an eight campus system with an enrollment of 41,000 students. It offers graduate (masters, educational specialist, and doctor of philosophy) degrees in addition to undergraduate (bachelors and associates) degrees. Most of the enrollment at the university is in-state, with 87% of undergraduate students from the state as compared to 62% of graduate students. Full-time and part-time faculty are represented almost equally with 1,341 full-time faculty members and 1,282 part-time faculty members.

Midwestern State University’s Student Accessibility Services office strives to ensure that qualified students with disabilities are given appropriate accommodations. MSU’s SAS office serves approximately 1,200 registered students,
### Table 5

**Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>SAS or PreK-12 SPED Admin</th>
<th>Organization Pseudonym</th>
<th>Number of Years in the Position</th>
<th>Racial Self-Identification</th>
<th>Religious Self-Identification</th>
<th>Ethnic Self-Identification</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>White, non Hispanic</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Mixture</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>German/Slovak</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>Bachelor; working on M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Ohio Suburban School District</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Italian/German</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Ohio Local School District</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Irish/Italian</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Midwest City School District</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>M.A. with post-masters certificate in administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>Northeast City Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Did not disclose</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with 84% of the students exhibiting invisible disabilities (learning disabilities, ADHD, medical/chronic health, and psychological). Data from the university’s research department shows that students registered with SAS have an overall higher retention rate (over a 6-year average) of 80.5% compared to an overall 78% retention rate for non-SAS students.

Specifically, the retention rate for first year students, using the most current data of fall 2013, was 90.9%. Students who were blind, deaf, hearing impaired, physically disabled, had traumatic brain injury, and those classified as “other” had a 100% retention rate for the 2013–2014 school year. First year students with visual impairments had the lowest retention rate of 66.7%.

The office consists of a director, an assistant director, coordinator of Deaf and Hard of Hearing services, exam and office coordinator, assistive technology coordinator, two graduate assistants, and two staff interpreters. According to the criteria set out in Chapter 3, three of the nine employees qualified to take part in the study. Two of the stories are told below, whereas the third story is described later as her experience is distinctive compared to the other SAS participants.

**Person A.** Person A’s (Person A is the pseudonym chosen by the participant) office consists of modular walls, a modular door, and a cookie cutter desk, but is welcoming due to the amount of person mementos and accolades displayed. She sits comfortably at her desk, confident in her position, but with a body stance that welcomes anyone into her office. I immediately felt welcome and could tell she was excited to be a part of the study.
Leadership. Person A strives for a collaborative environment, by letting the professionals grow, but acts as a gatekeeper between them and the vision of the office. She explains, “Part of my job . . . is letting them do their work and not micro-managing them and sort of giving them the independence they need to do their job.” To promote growth, she sees herself as “forging the path, forging the way” by participating in various professional development opportunities.

Person A believes “everybody has influence and impact.” She strives to foster a workplace of collaboration, openness, and, “I want us as a staff to be certainly for our students and working for our students but also for each other.”

Laws. When asked if there are differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA, Person A acknowledged there is a difference and explained, “IDEA generally is focused on student success and because of that then the school has certain responsibilities and prescriptions relative to students as well as parents.” Prescriptions, as she called them, are the responsibilities of the school district, such as child find, under IDEA. On a post-secondary level she explained Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act govern what they do as well as the ADA and ADAA. Essentially, she explains, “what we are tasked with doing for post-secondary is providing equal access to the curriculum programs.” She also specifies in post-secondary “it’s the student’s responsibility, not ours so we don’t go looking for students, and any kind of assessments that need to be done . . . we don’t have the ability or capability to do those.”
Person A explained that some students’ accommodations could be mildly to dramatically different from the accommodations from PreK–12. She gave a common example:

So a student with a specific Math disability may get a calculator for their Math test. And in K–12 they may have had a calculator for every Math class, every Math test from the get go. And they can’t do Math without the calculator. And at post-secondary level you may indeed have a Math disability and you may be eligible for a calculator for Math test. However, if the whole purpose of the Math class is to teach basic Math functions—addition, subtraction, multiplication, division—then the calculator would not be permitted in that because that would impinge upon, or override, or interfere with what is intrinsic to what is being taught and what is being assessed.

When asked how the office informs students about the differences between PreK–12 to higher education, Person A matter-of-factly explained,

I don’t know that we believe that it’s our responsibility to ensure that they know any more than it’s an office’s responsibility to know or to educate a student about what’s it like in college. There’s a lot of differences.

Transition. Just as Person A explained in Leadership, she views the transition process in the office as a collaborative effort. “In this office, probably everybody from our student workers who sometimes take the first call and set up the appointment to whoever is going to meet with them.” The transition process, though, is hindered by
resources. She said more staffing could help alleviate the problem and would help the office be able to conduct outreach efforts to local high schools.

To her, a successful transition starts at the high school level with students talking to their high school counselor and intervention specialists. Ideally, “the student would come to higher education with an awareness of the new environment and how their disability impacts their learning;” however, she offered many ideas for the formation of a transition plan with districts to help ensure a successful transition.

*Transition plan ideas.* Different emotions emerged as Person A was describing how her office could contribute to a transition plan with local high schools. She was excited at the different possibilities, but also took responsibility for what the office has been lacking; “our office could . . . probably do a better job of talking with [high school] counselors that come here for the admissions event,” “we may be able to do a better job of getting . . . information out front,” and to coordinate with the admissions office “so that we can talk to whoever is coming to campus to best communicate . . . messages.” She also suggested her office host an event every year in March so schools could gain an understanding of the services offered, common accommodations, and what SAS would like incoming, first year students to know and understand about higher education.

*Kate.* I walked into a familiar office constructed of modular walls and door; however, the energy in this office was different than the other modular office I interviewed in. We sat down at the round table, Kate across from me. I immediately noticed the tired look in her eyes. Just like Person A, Kate explained the office was
understaffed. What I did not realize was how understaffed the office was as two employees had just gone on maternity leave with no temporary replacements.

Leadership. As Kate explained the effects of having to take on the work of two more employees, she humbly remarked that she tries to make herself available whenever possible for the staff. Her leadership is hands on and she likes to assist her staff in any way to make their jobs easier. Kate also finds herself mentoring new staff on the university policies and procedures. She tries to “have the open door where they can come in and we can help them at any point.”

Additionally, she added, “Hopefully, [chuckles] I am showing positivity to keep everyone as motivated as possible in light of all of the extra duties, and tasks, and chores that have been added to their already busy schedule.” Furthermore, Kate is very clear that students are the focus of her job and, “[does] whatever it is that we need to do to make sure that they’re as successful as possible.”

Laws. Kate acknowledged there are differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA:

I think probably one of the biggest differences in what is a lot of times confusing to students and their parents would be that K–12 disability law idea is all about this student being identified at the school level as a person with a disability. And then when you get to your post-secondary options, it then becomes students have to self-identify, and that’s very confusing to a lot of students.

Kate believes IDEA is serving K–12 students very well, but,
When they come to such a different place as post-secondary is, it doesn’t always serve those students in the best ways that they could have because they are not as independent as what they might need to be at the college level.

Students who are not fully aware of the differences between the laws have a disadvantage, potentially detrimental to their post-secondary experience. “So it takes a year, three semesters, four semesters for them really to get a grasp of the differences, and sometimes at that point, it’s too late and the students might be dismissed.”

Kate admitted to not being aware of K–12 terminology, but suggested hand-holding may be the cause of students’ struggles in higher education:

[The student] would sit down with their resource person and that person would say, “Oh, my gosh, you didn’t do homework number two. It’s due in 20 minutes. You need to get this done.” Or, “Have you planned out your study guide? Have you done this, this, or this?”

Kate again acknowledges that it is probably very helpful for the student in the K–12 environment. She believes “the hand-holding” helps them to be more successful by creating a supportive environment.

To help students transitioning into higher education, Kate explained in the student’s enrollment interview she always discusses some of the differences between the two educational environments and she poses the question: Have you thought about how you’re going to interact with your instructors? She explains to them that they are a student registered with Student Accessibility services for a documented disability. Kate advocates for the students to be able to explain, “This is how my disability might impact
me in the learning environment or this is how my disability might impact my learning capabilities.” In the enrollment interview Kate also uses publications specifying the differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA.

Transition. Kate describes her definition of a successful transition:

I would say successful transitions are really starting before the student even determines where they’re going to go to college, and that’s in making sure that they understand that they have a disability, and they have an understanding of how that disability might impact them, and they’re able to talk about that.

Furthermore, she explains, “successful transitioning is, to me, interviewing different disabilities services offices at the schools in which they’re interested in . . . And then also meeting with those disability services offices early in prepping for what accommodations they might need.” Kate claimed planning for accommodations early is the most beneficial step the student can take.

I asked Kate about her role in transitioning students, and she echoed Person A’s response. “It’s that kind of team approach that we can kind of work with that student to make sure that we’re serving them to the best of our ability. So really, everybody has a pretty strong role.” I then questioned how students would respond to my question of how Kate and her office assist in transition. She said the successful students follow her suggestions “to a tee.” She explained, “They are familiar with their disability, how it impacts them in an academic environment. They know what works for them and what doesn’t work, accommodation-wise, and they have a strong foundation in being able to advocate for themselves.” Those students are talking to their instructors, going to
tutoring services, and utilizing services available on campus. For the not so successful students, she opines, “their transition plans really are either very slim or nonexistent.”

Kate brought up an interesting point. “A lot of students I work with seem to be forced, for lack of a better word, by their parents to register with our office.” Moreover, Students come in and will say, “Well, I had an IEP or a 504 in high school, so they told me to come here.” Then when I say, “How can I help you?” or, “What are you looking for? What do you need from us?” You get that blank stare. I asked why she thought that was happening. Kate hypothesized:

I think students who just never had to advocate for themselves or really just having an understanding of how their IEP process worked high school, I think that those are the students who really have a difficult time and seem to struggle more so than other students.

*Transition plan ideas.* Kate’s frustration with the lack of staffing and resources in the office resurfaced when we began discussing ideas to formulate a transition plan with area districts.

Unfortunately, we probably haven’t had and currently don’t have the staff that we need to be able to serve our students exceptionally well, and do above and beyond programming, and things that we wish and hope for our first year students. Furthermore, she believes the office doesn’t reach out because of time and resources.

Finally, Kate explained that the SAS staff is so overwhelmed with their current students that they rarely get to focus on future students’ transitions.
Specific ideas she suggested included, “We could do orientation events specific to our students. We could do outreach to the local high schools a lot more so than just being the ones who are responding to invites.” Kate also proposed hosting transition resource fairs specifically for transitioning high schoolers to the college level. She would like to host transition fairs numerous times throughout the year to allow busy students more opportunities to attend. She also proposed an office resource person with walk-in hours for students so “they can help the students expand on the skills that they’ve learned in high school and expand them to what they might need to still know here at this level, and not have that a pay for service.”

In regards to developing a relationship with local districts, Kate explained the ideal situation would be knowing who the disability specialists are at each high school and developing a working relationship. By developing the relationship, if the high school had a student interested in the university, a SAS staff member could go to the school and meet directly with the student and their family.

**PreK–12 school district participants.** Each district in the state is identified by a typology code based on student poverty, population, and typology of the district. Table 6 describes the codes, the number of districts and students within the typology, and the number and percentage of students attending Midwestern State University.

To gain a represented sample from each of the typologies for the study, contact was made with eight districts, 1 urban, 2 suburban (type 5), 1 suburban (type 6), and 1 small town. These districts are all represented in the top 10 districts represented at Midwestern State University and are the closest in proximity to MSU. More specifically,
### Table 6

*District Typologies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013 Typology</th>
<th>Major Grouping</th>
<th>Full Descriptor</th>
<th>Districts Within Typology</th>
<th>Students Within Typology</th>
<th>MSU Students (Number)</th>
<th>MSU Students (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Rural–High Student Poverty &amp; Small Student Population</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>1419</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Rural–Average Student Poverty &amp; Very Small Student Population</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small Town</td>
<td>Small Town–Low Student Poverty &amp; Small Student Population</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>185,000</td>
<td>2644</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small Town</td>
<td>Small Town–High Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population Size</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban–Low Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population Size</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>320,000</td>
<td>6840</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban–Very Low Student Poverty &amp; Large Student Population</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>240,000</td>
<td>2737</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban–High Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>1589</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban–Very High Student Poverty &amp; Very Large Student Population</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students in schools that are not classified: 2291 (10.9%)
the number of students from each district enrolled at MSU is represented in Table 7. Unfortunately, the urban district did not respond to the invitation for participation in the study so the findings omit their story.

*John.* John has been the special education administrator at Ohio Suburban School District for four years. Ohio Suburban School District is home to approximately 3,000 students. Half of those students are economically disadvantaged whereas 500 students require special education services. At Ohio Suburban School District’s high school, 85% of the student body is enrolled in college preparatory, advanced, and AP classes. The high school is recognized as a School of Excellence by the state education department.

John’s office was like an office I had only seen once in my career—his mentor’s. I was fortunate to meet his mentor—the previous superintendent of the district—during a field experience for administration. His mentor had nick knacks on shelves, his alma mater proudly displayed on mugs and other paraphernalia next to his degrees, and recognitions hanging in frames. John’s office looked like he had taken over his mentor’s office. From first glance, I knew he went to Midwestern State University, had a family, received three degrees, and loved children.

*Leadership.* John was very honest as to why he was in his position. “I’m in this position because I care about children, and I especially—I just wanted to make a difference in the lives of students and children with disabilities. And so I hope to be making a positive impact.” He described his leadership as evolving:
Table 7

Typologies Represented at Midwestern State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>MSU Students</th>
<th>Typology Code</th>
<th>Major Grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast City</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Suburban</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest City</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban City</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Local</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small Town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think early on I had an idea with my theoretical base of what a leadership or what a leader should be. . . . I think that’s changed over time through practice, through reading, through observing how others lead, what to do, what not to do, trial and error.

Additionally, he tries to be balanced, taking into account different perspectives. He understands he needs to help support the staff but he admits oftentimes he has to take a step back from the situation. John explains that because he cares he wants to make quick decisions, but knows he has the responsibility of spending the taxpayers’ money. He makes decisions “wisely and . . . based on data and fact, rather than gut needs.”

John tries to promote inclusiveness from the community because “you learn over time that you have to get people to buy in. How do you do that? You include them in the decision-making process.” By including the community in the decision making process,
John better understands the culture of the community as well as what they value in the programs, facilities, and structures.

Similar to Person A, John provides growth opportunities for his staff. “I try to share information, share opportunities. I try to provide resources.” John elaborates:

I suppose as I glean or gain new information on maybe what’s working in other places that I share that, and then . . . to afford them the opportunity to learn more about those supports, those processes . . . I look at myself as a consultant and I provide people with information.

Laws. John was quick to respond “yes” when asked if there are differences between school age protections versus higher education protections. He explained, “Students with disabilities in the school age population are afforded rights and privileges that happen to go away, for one reason or another when they take their diploma.” At the higher education level, he replied, “Once they get into college, then they’re really just afforded accommodations, and that’s it. That’s if they go to the office, and say, ‘I have a disability. Here’s my proof.’”

John was asked how the district helps their students understand the legal difference between K–12 and higher education. He believes that higher education thinks it is not their job, but that of the schools, and “I wish that was more of a collaborative approach, and that everybody took ownership or took the opportunity to work together in the best interest of the student.”

Transition. For John, a successful transition for a student with a disability would mean the student would leave school with technical, social, and emotional skills and
abilities to be successful in what they pursue after leaving high school. At the same time he wants to ensure, “we have worked with state and/ or community agencies to ensure that there is support there for those kids and they’re not just on their own.”

Interestingly, John does not think students would know what a successful transition is because, “frankly, I’m not sure they think about it. Sometimes I worry that they get too used to adults doing things for them.” I questioned the support of the students and John said the people supporting the students are their intervention specialists and guidance counselors.

The district also tries to inform their students on the transition through the IEP process by educating the students and parents on the differences in services when the student graduates. John acknowledged,

We could probably do better at helping teach self-advocacy. But you’re also up against dealing with a 17-, 18-year-old brain who has an adult telling them something that they should consider doing. And they may think that they know how to do it best.

Transition plan ideas. As the conversation moved to how higher education institutions and the district could formulate a plan, a spark of passion became evident. “I would like to see colleges go over and above what the law requires. I would like to see them actively recruit individuals with disabilities.” Furthermore, he had the following questions for higher education: What are universities and higher education and institutions of higher ed doing for those kids with those mild to moderate needs? Who
are afraid of going to the accessibility office? Who don’t have the paperwork with them? Students whose parents didn’t keep track of those kinds of things?

John believes higher education institutions’ SAS staff should be recruiting similar to military recruiters by going to high schools, setting up a table, and talking with kids. He also thinks the SAS staff should also be contacting the special education chairs at that high school and saying, “we definitely want to meet with kids with disabilities who might be interested in college.” He also suggested:

It would be great if SAS professionals could be involved in the IEP process for . . . any IEPs which take place starting maybe December 1 of a student’s junior year and then continuing through their senior year to try to—with that annual review, that way you get somebody involved and they’re not six months away from graduating when it’s the first time you’ve met somebody . . . The IEP in the junior year . . . when they start looking at colleges—because that’s when they should start doing that—and narrowing things down, then they know how to effectively make that transition.

John believes his office could contribute to a transition plan by first identifying the players, and then planning how those players should collaborate, interact, and work together. The office could also try to make it a timeline of when specific steps in the process should occur.

Molly. Molly is in her sixth year as a special education administrator at Ohio Local Schools. Ohio Local Schools is home to 2,166 students with 75 students on 504 plans and 280 receiving special education services. The district’s high school offers more
than 100 possible course selections with 65% of the student body taking college preparatory classes and another 25% participating in career education programs. The remaining 10% are in general programs or specialized services.

I met Molly in a coffee shop that is close in proximity to both Midwestern State University and Ohio Local Schools. I could tell she was eager to meet outside of her office when I was in contact with her, and she suggested a coffee shop. The coffee shop was mildly busy with a few students in the corners studying. Molly was timid with the audio recorder at first, but quickly became confident in answers and her voice became stronger.

**Leadership.** Like many of the participants, Molly stated she believes in collaborative leadership. She leads this way because she believes that working together is in the best interest of the students and the district. Molly also said it provides ownership to the teaching staff. She further explains, “Everyone works together and collaborates together, and there’s a lot of freedom to engage and move where we want to go as a district with our vision. That’s what really helps us lead that way.”

When asked about the way she leads her staff, Molly emphasized the power of leading by example. She explained, “When you’re trusting of others and believe that they are professionals as well and treat them as professionals, then you’re going to get professionals out of that.”

**Laws.** I asked Molly if she perceives any differences between PreK–12 and higher education legal protections for students with disabilities. She explained, “Yes, because in K–12, you have the requirement to provide FAPE to those kids, where the
higher ed falls under the different laws of 504 and the rehab act.” She further added,
“The kids have to receive services from us, whereas in higher ed, they’re not entitled to
those services and they have to go through all the procedures to get services in that
environment versus a K–12 environment.”

She also notes:

In K–12, there’s always someone there to pick you up off your feet and say, “Hey,
let me help you, let me help you, let me help you. We’ll get through this.”

There’s no one really there to say, “Hey, don’t give up, don’t.”

To help students understand the differences, she suggests her district teach them
to advocate for their needs and help them understand how their disability impacts their
educational program. The students also need to be taught the specific supports they need
to be successful versus the supports they receive as a courtesy. She explains,
“Oftentimes, we’re doing for them instead of teaching them how to do for themselves.”

Additionally, she adds, “I think sometimes we’re doing the students disservice by
providing so many accommodations . . . they may not need.” Molly eluded to the fact
that sometimes she sees the accommodations and modifications build up over the years
instead of tapering off as the student gets older. She explains this is probably problematic
in higher education because “they get into higher ed and there’s no one advocating for
them except themselves.”

Transition. To Molly, a success transition is when “the students understood their
disability, understood how their disability impacts them, and understands what they need
to be successful.” The transition planning would “start early so that the steps can be
made to get them to where their end-goal is” and “would take place earlier than their senior year, where they would be planning what they need to get to their post-secondary goal.” When asked to specify how early the planning should be started, Molly considers eighth grade is when the conversation needs to begin. She wants the eighth graders and their families to think about what their postsecondary goal is, what kind of classes the student is going to need to take to meet their postsecondary goal, and what the supports are on the IEP. Furthermore, Molly wants the eighth graders to understand the importance of recognizing over-accommodation.

She said many students would say a successful transition would be, “that they’re in the place that they wanted to be when it was all over, that they had everything in place to be in college, and they’re ready for the next step in life.” Molly noted that her district plans transition meetings in May with parents and students; additionally, they provide handouts for families and students that explain the difference between high school and college. The handouts also explain the legal differences and what accommodations are allowed in higher education. The transition meetings also stress that the student understands the need to advocate for themselves. Upon further pondering Molly concluded:

I think another important piece is to work with the high school and middle school teachers to help them understand how important it is to help the student understand the steps they need to take. I think sometimes we take it for granted, not even students with disabilities, typical high school students really have no
idea, for the most part, unless they have a parent who is really helping guide their path.

**Transition plan ideas.** Molly was asked about ideas to help bridge the transition for students, and she abruptly said, “I think what would help is more communication or information provided from the university about what students need.” She said families with whom she works would be welcoming to any information provided by the university; for example, a short handout about the services explaining what Student Disability Services provides and what that means the student. Then, it should also explain how to go about meeting with someone to determine eligibility. She further elaborated that the handout should provide a step by step guide on how to apply to the university then to register with SAS. She said it needs to “really lay it out of what [the students] need to have on hand when [they] walk in [the SAS office].”

Molly also suggested that SAS could make a connection with the guidance department at the high school, and provide information for the guidance newsletter because, “that’s an idea of a way that they have to inform parents twice a year.” It could be “something short and sweet, ‘Here’s what we are, here’s what we do, here’s how to reach us,’ something that they would read.”

**Kathy.** Kathy is the special education administrator for Midwest City School. She is completing her eighth year in the position. Midwest City Schools has 4,450 students, with 669 students with disabilities, or 15% of the student body. This percentage is mirrored in the high school with 254 of the 1,608 students receiving special education services. Midwest High School is one of the highest ranked in the state by *US News and
World Report and Newsweek magazine. In the class of 2014, 217 graduates earned the state Honors Diploma with 94% of the student body attending an institution of higher learning. Furthermore, 27 seniors in the class of 2014 were recognized as National Merit Scholars and 110 students received AP Scholar with Distinction honors.

While I was waiting for the interview, Kathy’s secretary informed me that she was in a meeting with a parent. It obviously ran past the allotted time, because by the second time she came to see me in the waiting area, the secretary seemed visibly nervous. When I finally was able to go into her office, Kathy was present, but obviously still reflecting on the previous meeting. As the interview progressed, she became visibly relaxed, but when she glanced at the time, I could tell she had an appointment approaching. I was able to get through all of my questions, but did not prolong my time to be respectful of hers.

Leadership. Kathy’s leadership style is predominantly relationship based as, “we may not always agree, but if we have a good relationship, then we can try to work through it together as opposed to sort of against one another.” In addition to her collegial relationships, Kathy also tries to establish a really good relationship with the families so “I can hear them and we can try to come to some different agreement together versus it has to be my way.” Kathy stated she wants people to feel as if the decisions are being made based on all of the information collected from them and ultimately what is best for the students.

The district prides itself on a collaborative culture. “People don’t work in silos. We have lots of teacher-leaders and a really high performing staff and students, and so I
feel like the culture is always wanting to learn, highly valuing education, very collaborative.” Professional growth is encouraged, as administration feels it instills leadership in the teachers and helps them grow professionally. Kathy quickly reminded me, however, that student needs come first:

I think I’m constantly thinking about what the needs of the students are, and then determining how best to use the resources we have, whether it’s people resources, the talent around us, the opportunities that we have available to us, and then trying to make sure we’re meeting their needs. And then also, again, trying to use the talents, and experiences, gifts, of the staff around us to that end.

_Laws._ When asked if there are any legal protection differences between PreK–12 and higher education, Kathy responded, “Definitely.” She explained PreK–12 is required to provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) by developing goals specific to identified students and providing those students with specialized services. She noted that higher education does not have the same responsibilities.

In order to help students understand the differences between PreK–12 and higher education protections for students with disabilities, Kathy states at the high school, there are conversations between the teachers and the students regarding self-advocating and understanding the resources available in higher education. They want the students to understand how to get accommodations, how to access the SAS office, and what the students’ own personal needs are for a successful transition.

Kathy also added an interesting parental prospective of students with disabilities in regards to entering higher education:
I think some families would say, “We need more services.” The fact that some families are shocked that there are higher ed institutions that don’t have to provide anything if they don’t want to and that’s really difficult for some families, I’m not saying it wasn’t the right thing to do, but the laws pretty clear. You have to provide. And then, suddenly, others don’t.

Most SAS offices require current assessments, including an IQ test, to document a student’s disability. The responsibility of who is completing the testing to qualify for SAS services has been an issue in the district. She explains some colleges have told families to have the school district complete a current three-year evaluation. Kathy argues that if the student has had the disability for a long time, the district does not necessarily need to complete an IQ test as part of the evaluation because the IQ is already stabilized. That is not part of the information the district needs to gather to determine if the student is still eligible for special education services. The reason that parents get upset at the district is because they do not need to put resources toward that assessment, which “pits the district against the family.” She explains, “We’ve had that happen, and that was really upsetting to the family.” Moreover, Kathy said, “It’s not our responsibility to make sure that they have a current IQ for example to get into college, but the colleges require it.”

Transition. A successful transition for students with disabilities for Kathy is “that ultimately students have a job or a career that they’re happy in, and that they’re productive citizens whatever that looks like.” She continued, “It’s very individualized, but ultimately, productive citizens that are working, contributing, volunteering; they’re
social, they’re healthy, they’re doing leisure things . . . that would be, to me, a sign that they’re successful.” To help ensure a successful transition from high school to higher education, many staff are involved including two special education coordinators, staff at the high school, and all of the intervention specialists.

Kathy believes students with disabilities in her district are involved in their transition. She said, “I think they would probably be able to say that their teachers were involved; the intervention specialist, work-study coordinator. They’d probably name some of the other, like speech or OT.” Students are aware because of “lots of dialog at IEP meetings.” At the high school specifically, one of the guidance counselors, in addition to regular duties, works with students with disabilities who plan to attend higher education. Additionally, “we have individual small group instructors . . . And they will work directly with students and parents to, ‘Okay, where are you in the college process? Do you have everything you need?’”

Kathy describes her role in the transition process as “trying to make sure we have the resources whether that’s enough time, enough staff to make sure it happens.” Lack of resources is a surprising issue because it is a high wealth district. However, once the state funding formula is applied, the district gets very little funding. Despite the funding issues, the community values education which translates into making sure that their students with disabilities have the same opportunities and have the same excellent education that other students are afforded.

*Transition plan ideas.* Like the previous participants, Kathy was excited to learn that a transition plan was being considered with Midwestern State University and offered
her ideas she believed would contribute to a successful plan. First, she offered the idea of a college case manager for student transitioning into higher education. This person would not necessarily work on goals and objectives like K–12 case managers; rather, “A trusted adult that would be sort of watching that you’re not falling behind.” She would love to see universities better support first year students with disabilities, so the students could have a constant “touch base person” who would provide support. Kathy then agreed with the other participants about collaboration with the SAS office:

We need to do a better job being on the same page because they need to understand what our responsibilities are versus sort of we’re on the same team. We’re trying to get them to college, but that is one of the areas I feel like we could do a better job and the [SAS] officers could do a better job collaborating.

She also brought up an idea of a required summer bridge program for the SAS office to host for incoming first year students. The purpose of this program would be to allow students, who are not familiar with the university, to know exactly where to go and how to get there by the time they started the fall semester. Kathy acknowledged, “I know that’s an investment on their part in staff and summer programming of some sort, but that, I think, would be really valuable for students.” Additionally, Kathy invited the SAS into her district, “having them sit at the table, even second semester of senior year . . . then there’s some relationships already built. And then we feel like we’re passing them on to higher ed to take over.”

Susan. Susan is an administrator at Northeast City Schools, currently in her fourth year. Her position is exceptional to this study as her position as special education
administrator is specific to the high school rather than the district. Susan’s position also encompasses specific grade level administration duties in addition to her special education administration ones. Northeast City High School, an “Excellent” school district rated by the state, is home to 1,854 students as compared to 5,210 in the district. It is also recognized by *US News & World Report*, College Board AP Honor Roll, and *Newsweek* magazine. Ten percent of the student body at Northeast High School receives special education services.

*Leadership.* Susan believes, “I think one of the most important things about leadership is thinking of other people and making sure that you always listen to them and that they’re heard, even if you can’t necessarily help them.” She adds, “I think a lot of the time people just want to be heard. I think part of being a leader is being a good listener and making sure people know that they’re heard.” Like Kathy, Susan’s leadership is also student-centered as she is always trying to think about what is the best decision for the students. She is constantly asking herself, “Does this positively impact the students?” Susan is not afraid to challenge her team to stay student-centered:

When it comes to leadership in the team and affecting everyone else, I, a lot of times challenge the team purposely just to get good dialogue going and to really get us thinking and making sure we’re making the best decisions, whether it’s a building-wide issue or a specific issue.

*Laws.* Unlike the other participants being able to specifically state “yes” there are differences between the legal protections for students with disabilities in PreK–12 and higher education, Susan’s perspective was unique:
I think the laws concerning K–12 are very specific, and they’re a lot of accountability and they’re there. The public knows they’re there, and the public is very aware of the laws that pertain to K–12. I think the public is not aware of many laws that applied to higher ed. And they’re not as much in the forefront. Sometimes politics runs K–12 education, where I don’t feel like that’s the case in college.

She also added that when students go to college, SAS is looking at the test scores and going to decide what supports the student needs. Her point was that maybe the students had many supports in high school but they will not necessarily receive the same supports in college. To combat this, Susan explains,

We talk a lot here to our students about [their own] case managing. Your teachers are always on you, and they are on top of you, and it sometimes feels like you’re surrounded by them. Where like in college, it’s not like that at all.

Transition. Susan believes a successful transition for a student with a disability is the ability to obtain an Associate degree or a Bachelor’s degree regardless of the supports and services they received in high school. To help students transition out of high school, she explained, “From tenth grade on, all of our teachers are having that dialogue with the students about ‘this is what it’s like in college.’ Especially their junior and senior year.”

Susan also credits the high school intervention team that oversees transition. She said they have a great team of 14 intervention specialists. Although they do not have one person that oversees transition, she continued to praise them. “They’re fantastic at what they do and very student-focused.”
Northeast City High School has also invited universities to talk to the staff about the process. “We have brought in [Midwestern State University] to talk to an intervention specialist about the process. That’s where they have gained some of their knowledge.” She says her role, along with the intervention specialists is connecting the students to the Student Accessibility Services offices of their perspective college. Furthermore, Susan explains, “When we know we have a student that is looking for college, then we make sure we either take them on a visit or we give the parent the information of who to contact at the college.” The district helps to be the liaison at first until the student is enrolled and the SAS office takes over.

Transition plan ideas. Susan expressed concern over the process of transition students with disabilities from high school to higher education. She stated, “Sometimes I wish our intervention specialists could meet the people [from SAS] each year, face-to-face, of who we would put our families in contact with.” She suggested the staff from the SAS office at MSU could come to the high school for a day so the students with disabilities who are planning to attend college could be introduced to them and make a connection with someone on campus.

Susan also suggests a special day where intervention specialists can take students to campus so the students can meet the SAS staff and student peers. The students could have a tour of campus and be shown the SAS office. In addition, the SAS office could present their services and explain the processes to the interested students. She added, “I think a lot of times just making that connection for a student is big.”
To maintain the connection with the students, Susan proposed that a case manager from student accessibility services be assigned to each student that was accepted into MSU. The case manager would contact them periodically throughout the student’s senior year and summer. She also suggested the SAS case manager be in contact with the high school case manager over the summer, and even into the first semester of the student’s first year of higher education, to provide a better understanding of the student.

**Negative instance.** The seventh person interviewed is considered a negative instance in this study, or in quantitative terms, an outlier. Samantha’s perspective was not necessarily a negative one, but was different enough from the other participants for me to spend a great deal of time coding and analyzing her responses. She questioned the status quo, from the local systems to the political systems, and took on a humanistic approach to her work. Below is her story.

*Samantha.* I met Samantha outside of her office, specifically in the education building on Midwestern State University’s campus. She was apologetic for having to cancel two times before and was eager to get started. Samantha explained she has been in her position for two years but has been in her field for 10 years. Her passion for the students she serves was evident in her body language and voice inflection. I am withholding the name of her position within the office to protect her, but she does meet the qualifications of a SAS professional participant in this study.

**Leadership.** Caring is one of Samantha’s passions in life. “I think I lead the way I lead because I’ve always been very passionate about humanity, people in general. I care about all people.” Leading in the workplace, however, is a challenge for her and
says it is one of the most challenging pieces of her job. Curious, I asked her why that is and she responded, “It’s hard to drive that creative culture shift. How things are done, is hard for me.” She explained:

I try to just stay true to my values and not—I try not to give up, so if there are things I know or things I learn, I try to speak up about them and influence things that way. Again it’s not always easy to do. I try to model leadership. . . . if you can just get one person, just one person to follow, but really you don’t need everyone to agree with you. In fact, it’s good when people don’t agree with you, or it’s good when there’s confrontation, or it’s good when there’s argument that . . . So trying to be courageous and stand up [for what I believe in].

When she is helping someone who is struggling, she tries to engage with the person by asking questions and sharing how she feels about the situation. She wants the person to know she genuinely cares about them and how they are feeling. Samantha strives to “put a human face to the emotions.”

Laws. Samantha acknowledged her interpretations of the differences between PreK–12 and higher education. “K–12 setting there’s that team of folks, and the parent’s involvement and the student involvement and a lot of different experts, like the OTs and PTs, that make these decisions.” Furthermore, “IEP goals are driving that, the educational process, is just so much different than what we do in the higher ed.” Samantha added she feels as if K–12 has many more options, creativity, accommodations, and modifications. For example, if an accommodation does not work, then the team can opt for a different one or a modification.
Samantha then visibly became irritated when she began talking about higher education legal protections:

Like who came up with the extended time, and what research said that-- I understand the testing accommodations like for someone that has anxiety, okay, take them out. But then you’re putting them in another environment. Higher ed there’s these lists. There’s a list of accommodations.

As she was talking, she became tense and her voice became stronger. She concluded with, “It’s not a one-size-fits-all, so how do we know that this works? And that’s always bothered me. I’m not convinced that it’s leveling the playing field. I’m not convinced.”

_Transition_. I asked Samantha what she believes is a successful transition for the students she works with:

I think a successful transition would be intervention—meaning resources, access, conversations already have happening. I know that there’s the law when you’re 16 that you have to have a transition goal. But from here, this is a little hearsay but I feel like that is not—it’s just kind of like, “Oh, we better make a one-line goal. Here you go.” And I don’t have the research to back that up, but that’s what the feeling that I’ve always gotten, just from conversations.

She continued to describe how parents must feel in transitioning because they have been used to being able to be a part of the team that made the educational decisions of their child. When the students enter higher education, due to FERPA regulations, the parents are now cut out from the team unless the student gives permission. She argues that
transition programming should include a parental component to help alleviate any confusion.

Samantha was asked if anyone in the SAS office is in charge of transition. She states that no one from the SAS office is currently assigned to transition. She attends transition fairs when she is invited, and when a high school calls the office and asks for people to man a table for a transition fair, someone from SAS tries to attend. Staffing was, once again, brought to the forefront. “And right now, I couldn’t see how we could [have someone assigned to transition], with our staffing limitations.”

Then, Samantha described her role in the transition process. First she completes the student’s intake interview. She relies on her emotional intelligence skills and her background to see where they are developmentally. By gauging where the student is, she tries to avoid overloading the student with information or questions. When she feels the student has reached his or her limit, she stops the interview by saying, “Okay, well try this accommodation out. Give it a couple of weeks . . . email me anytime, keep in contact with me.” She encourages the student to keep in contact with her to ask questions. She was honest in saying if she does not know the answer to a question, she connects the student with someone on campus who does know the answer.

She explained the biggest challenge in the transition process. “I think that there’s an overall lack of awareness. That people don’t realize, not only are they transitioning from high school to college, but then you add that other layer of a disability.” To aid the students in the transition process, “I don’t ever say, ‘How does your disability impact your education?’ I just don’t. That’s my choice and I can do that, and I think the
students appreciate that.” Finally, she hypothesized that if the people at the top do not see a need or care about transition as the reason higher education professionals are not more actively involved in the transition process. She adds, “It’s really hard to influence that change.”

Transition plan ideas. Samantha immediately had ideas for a transition plan. First she said that SAS staff can collaborate with high schools, the school districts, universities, and transition specialists. She would like to work with people who are experts in the field to help guide the transition process. She also would like to see mentoring programs for students and mentoring programs for families. These programs would include helping with the transition process, providing resources online, and utilizing technology to disseminate information. Samantha would also like to establish a relationship with the admissions office to see where they are missing students with disabilities. The SAS office could work hand in hand with admissions to be sure each student who seeks services would be informed of the process.

In addition to staffing and mentoring, she believes there needs to be “an experiential learning component” for students with disabilities orientation to Midwestern State University. Her reasoning was to be sure students had hands on experience before they started their first semester so “you can prepare someone how that feels. See it, touch it, feel it.”

She also firmly suggested, “SAS offices—10% of your time budget needs to be transition.” Samantha acknowledged that in order for 10% to be approved, a change would need to occur in philosophy and mentality. The office would have to first establish
why it is an important change and valuable to students. Second they would have to establish the cost benefit of the change; for example, “How will this benefit all of us in the long run? Does it improve retention? Does it improve their experience? Do they manage better with their disability?”

**Axial Coding**

The first step in axial coding was to uncover the emerging themes across each of the categories for each participant. The results are displayed in Table 8.

The last step in the axial coding process was creating a tally chart to aggregate the themes that were discovered across individual categories. Initially, 10 themes were aggregated: resources, motivation, service, relationships, self-awareness/self-advocacy, collaboration, communication, disparity, responsibility, and context. I further refined it to seven themes by combining service and relationships, collaboration and communication, and disparity and responsibility (See Figure 4). Though it does not seem that the definitions are similar, my naming of disparity and responsibility was due to the realization of disparity in my participants’ perceptions of responsibility. After analyzing the tallies, I found collaboration, disparity, resources and service received the most tallies.
Table 8

_Emerging Themes Across Participant Categories_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Emerging Themes Across Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>collaboration, disparity, self-advocacy, service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>resources, motivation, service, self-awareness/self-advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>context, relationships, resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>resources, collaboration, responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>collaboration, self-advocacy, relationships, service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>resources, collaboration, responsibility, communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>collaboration, responsibilities, service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selective Coding

Unlike open coding and axial coding that disaggregate the data, selective coding re-aggregates the data in a different way by categorizing the data into the themes discovered in axial coding. Selective coding relies on the frequency and intensity of the themes discovered in open and axial coding. It assembles the themes to piece together the story that emerged from the data. The results of selective coding are labeled and described below as: collaboration, disparity, resources and service.

Collaboration. In each of the code categories including leadership, laws, transition, and transition plan ideas, participants expect a level of collaboration. They model and expect collaboration with their colleagues and in their leadership. Their examples indicate the organizations that took part in the study foster an environment of collaboration, along with encouraging open lines of communication, all to better serve students. For instance, Molly believes, “I believe in collaborative leadership. I lead this way because I believe that working together is in the best interest of the students and the district, being able to guide through leadership but provide ownership to the teaching staff.” Additionally, Susan explained, “It takes a village to run a school. It takes a
village to help a child. I’m very collaborative in my leadership style and that comes from the way that we work here as a team.”

Collaboration also emerged from when the participants were asked what they thought students and parents would consider a successful transition to higher education. The participants strive for collaboration and communication to help families understand the differences between higher education and PreK–12 education. John stated, “Through the IEP process that you get, you know you educate students and parents on what’s coming up next.” Additionally, to help plan the student’s transition into higher education, collaboration and communication with students and families are extremely important to help ensure a successful transition as Kathy explains, “When students [are in high school] there’s a lot of conversation between the teachers and the students about self-advocating, understanding where resources are available in higher ed.”

Lastly, all of PreK–12 participants wanted to establish lines of communication with the Student Accessibility Services office and establish a collaborative environment, as Susan explained, “I think we need to have ideas and reach out. I think it’s allowing universities into our buildings to be a connection.” Kathy further elaborated:

We could have people involved earlier on at the university level before the students are actually gone . . . and we’re basically passing the baton and for part of it we’re both hands-on doing it to try to get them to have it be a smooth transition.

John agreed, “I wish that was more of a collaborative approach, and that everybody took ownership or took the opportunity to work together in the best interest of the student.”
The SAS participants reciprocated and welcomed forming relationships with the PreK–12 participants. Kate stated she would like the SAS office to host transition fairs at local high schools and ideally, “we would have these transition fairs numerous times throughout the year to catch everybody.” After the special education administrator is identified at each district, Person A sees the office “connecting with that person either on a regular basis and whether that’s—we just go to lunch and, like, so tell me about how our office—we get a lot of your students, so how can we be helpful?”

**Disparity.** Although all of the participants wanted to open lines of communication and form relationships, there are questions of responsibility and disparity between the services of higher education and PreK–12 education. For example, the special education administrators questioned the specific documentation requirements the SAS office requires of incoming students. Both Molly and Kathy questioned who is responsible for the testing data needed to register with the SAS office. However, as previously stated, Person A explained, “On K–12’s side it’s the student’s responsibility, not ours so we don’t go looking for students, and any kind of assessments that need to be done or are done . . . we don’t have the ability or capability to do those.” The SAS professionals had an understanding of IDEA and were able to articulate the differences between both of the educational environments. The special education administrators, on the other hand, were able to acknowledge there is a difference between IDEA and Section 504/ADA but were not as confident in their interpretations. They were able to articulate IDEA’s mandates, but unable to do so with Section 504/ADA when applied to higher education. Kathy described the differences as, “we’re required to provide them the
support services, specialized instruction-related services . . . Whereas higher education doesn’t have that same responsibility.”

The SAS professionals indicated the responsibility of informing students and families of the differences between the legal protections of higher education and PreK–12 education was not theirs, but was the PreK–12 staff’s responsibility, as Samantha opined, “I think a successful transition would be intervention—meaning resources, access, conversations already have been happening [in PreK–12].” Kate added, “I think that if schools did more trainings [for] their students . . . I think that it wouldn’t be such an eye-opener when they came to a post-secondary environment.” The PreK–12 special education administrators do not have the knowledge of Section 504/ADA to train their staff about the differences, let alone be able to teach their students how to obtain SAS services after graduation.

**Resources.** Both special education administrators and SAS professionals indicated they would have the ability to plan for successful student transitions if more resources were available. Resources included time, staff, money, and professional development. For example, the SAS has lost two staff members, with no replacements. The staff has taken on the responsibilities of the former staff members, all while trying to still serve their current caseload of 1,200 students. One participant indicated she can barely keep up now without focusing on the needs of future students. “Sometimes we’re so inundated with the students that we have here currently. We don’t get to focus on the students who will be here next year, who will be here in two years.”
PreK–12 is bound within the confines of state funding and the taxpayer’s money. With the increasing mandates and minimal state funding, the special education administrators can only provide professional development within the confines of stringent parameters. The fight for equitable funding for PreK–12 and a larger budget for the SAS office is obvious for successful transitions, but is beyond the scope of this study.

**Service.** Despite limited resources and questions of responsibility, participants were clearly in their position to serve students with disabilities. Each of them has always had a career committed to students with disabilities in some capacity. Administration was the next natural step to provide leadership and guidance to continue that commitment. Although every participant’s job description did not include transition as a duty, it is clear each of them wants students with disabilities going to higher education to have a successful transition evidenced by their yearning for collaboration between higher education and PreK–12. Susan pointedly stated, “I think the ultimate success is a student that’s able to have either an Associate degree or a Bachelor’s degree at the end, regardless of the supports that they needed.”

The participants continually declared the importance of relationships with parents and students as well as with their colleagues. They continue to build and foster relationships to help empower those they lead as well as those they serve. They see relationships with students and parents as a way to ensure successful student transitions. “Our intervention specialists . . . are continually talking with the parents,” stated Susan. Molly’s district provides, “training [to] the teachers and providing the information to the teachers on what they need to be doing with the families.” Many also indicated
relationships will be critical in the creation of a transition plan between districts and the university.

**Conclusion**

Based on data from interviews, documents, and archival records, this chapter presented the findings to the research question: How can the perspectives of PreK–12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK–12 schools to higher education? Through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, four overarching themes were found: collaboration, disparity, resources, and service. The next chapter discusses how the implications of the findings are related to the conceptual framework of the study, and recommendations for the creation of a plan to assist in the students’ transition from PreK–12 to higher education are explored.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapter described the findings of this qualitative study of how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education Student Accessibility Services (SAS) professionals can contribute to the successful transitions of students with special needs from PreK–12 to higher education. Participants included three SAS professionals at Midwestern State University and four special education administrators of public school districts geographically surrounding the university whose students attend the university. Data were collected through interviews, documents, and archival records. Analysis was completed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The findings have contributed to recommendations that might assist special education administrators and SAS professionals in the transition of students with special needs to higher education. Additionally, these recommendations place priority on the needs of the students in transition.

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings through the unique perspective of a student with special needs and his mother, implications for PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professional practices for successful transition, and recommendations for further research.

Discussion of the Findings

This study was conducted hearing only adults’ perspectives. I asked the participants, “How would families respond to this question?” after asking the participants how their institutions help students and their families transition to higher education. The
responses varied; however, the data revealed the lack of institutional ownership of ensuring that students and families were informed and prepared. One school district special education administrator participant placed the responsibility of informing the parents of the transition on higher education whereas one of the SAS participants placed the responsibility on the students and parents. High school staff members assume that higher education SAS professionals would inform parents. Higher education SAS professionals assumed that high school staff would inform students and parents. These assumptions contributed to the difficult transition for students with disabilities as the information regarding the differences between higher education and PreK–12 was not being distributed to students and families uniformly before graduation.

The design of this study did not include voices of students experiencing the transition to higher education. I have chosen to write the discussion of the findings through the eyes of a student with a disability to demonstrate how a student may interpret the data. Based on my personal experience and professional experience as a special education teacher, I have included the perspective of a mother whose child has a disability. Both perspectives are an effort to depict the frustration, confusion, and emotions families may face as the student approaches graduation. The student being portrayed is my 5 year old son, Lucas, as a 17-year-old preparing to transition to college. Lucas has qualified for special education services since he was 3 years old and we foresee his needing services until graduation. As his mother, I am deeply concerned with what the findings of this study showed as the PreK–12 understanding of Section 504/ADA as it applies to higher education. In my professional experience, PreK–12
prepares students for transitions they face while in school, such as moving to the next grade or transitioning to another building. For example, in my son’s district, the kindergarten building is adjacent to the primary school. The kindergarteners visit the primary building more than once before the year is over to ensure the students are ready for first grade in a new building. But, why does this activity not apply to higher education? Why is it assumed that once students reach high school they no longer need the same guided transition?

**Lucas’ Perspective**

I’m not sure why I’m here again. It’s only the adults who talk anyway but every year since middle school I’ve had to come to this meeting. Every time, it’s the same thing: Lucas, you are on an IEP. I know I am! I stare at the adults around the table—mom, dad, my intervention specialist, my speech therapist, and the special education coordinator. They are talking about my goal—which I don’t understand—and what supports they think I am going to need for the next year.

I’m a senior this year. I’ve already expressed my interest in going to college; something my parents support and encourage. I supposedly have had a transition plan to help me with my preparations to go to college. What is that? I have no idea. My mom has tried to explain it to me but I’m not really interested. I just want to get out of here. I feel smothered. My intervention specialist is always making sure all of my homework is done. If it isn’t done then she asks the teachers if I can turn it in late with no penalty. Why do I even do my homework?
She is always asking how I’m doing or if I need anything. The teachers have essentially held my hand since I was a freshman.

Back to the meeting, I hear them talking about college and I’m finally interested in the conversation. They explain to me that the laws are different from what I’m used to and I need to prepare for a whole different environment. First of all, what laws are they talking about? Second, why is this the first time I’m hearing about these different laws? They said I have to go and “self-identify.” My mom can just call, right? No, they said. My parents are not allowed. I have to tell the college people that my mom is allowed to come into the meeting if I want her to. I have to give permission for my mom to come with me? My mom has been to every meeting, every year, and now she isn’t allowed? Well, I can just give them my IEP to show I need services, right? Again, they said no. It is a different process.

They ask what college I’m interested in and I said I have already applied to Midwestern State University and am accepted. They seemed pleased, as if I am ahead of schedule. After some encouragement, I agreed to email some office there and meet with them to discuss my needs.

The Transition

It’s the summer, I’ve graduated and signed up for my first semester of college. My mom insists that I meet with the Student Accessibility Services people during the summer. She has all of the paperwork ready for me to take. I make the
appointment and grudgingly make my way to campus with my folder containing my final IEP and evaluation.

I meet with a lady who is nice but matter of fact. She is definitely not like my intervention specialist from high school. She gives me a chart that says, “IDEA vs. ADA.” What is this? She explains there are many differences between high school and college. I am no longer guaranteed services under the law that protects school age students as it stopped protections when I graduated. I am now responsible for any testing or evaluations that I may need. All of my accommodations are only to help me access the same curriculum as the other students; there are no modifications like there were in high school. My parents are not involved! I have to make all of the decisions with the SAS office. My parents are only allowed to be consulted if I make the decision for them to be involved.

We talk about what worked for me in high school and what I think would work for me in college. How am I supposed to know? I’ve never had to decide these things. I was given the accommodations that the IEP said I needed. She then explains that every semester I have to pick up letters to give to my professors so they know my accommodations. This is so much different than high school. Am I going to be able to do this?

During his IEP meeting, Lucas was presented with several changes regarding his academic services in higher education. In high school, Lucas was protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as it protects students in the PreK–12
setting. Upon graduation, he no longer qualified under IDEA. When Lucas met with Midwestern State University’s Student Accessibility Services, it was determined he qualified for reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) given the SAS professional instructed him to collect his letters at the beginning of every semester. The differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA applied to higher education are recognizable but may cause confusion with students and parents. This could include the need for self-identification, lack of Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), and the lack of an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) in higher education.

The protections given to PreK–12 students with disabilities are specific to the IDEA mandates. Higher education, on the other hand, does not have a specific law to protect students with disabilities, rather the protections are under the umbrella of Section 504/ADA. Because their job depends on their knowledge of IDEA, the PreK–12 special education administrators were well informed regarding the protections of their students. Although transition is a mandated section of the IEP, their knowledge of the specific changes with which students are faced upon enrollment in higher education was lacking.

Relevant to the fact that students are no longer covered by IDEA’s Child Find mandate and are required to self-identify with the university, all of the PreK–12 administrators’ interviews mentioned self-advocacy skills. The SAS professionals stressed the importance of self-advocacy skills understandably because of their positions. If the student with a disability does not choose to self-identify, then the SAS office has no obligation to serve the student. When the student chooses to self-identify, the SAS
professional describes the differences between IDEA and the protections in higher education during the intake interview.

The findings suggest the SAS professionals were able to articulate the differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA as related to higher education with more confidence than were the PreK–12 special education administrators. More interestingly, there was a lack of transition responsibilities in all of the participants’ job descriptions. However, the SAS professionals were more willing to seek out professional development to expand their knowledge of the differences between IDEA and Section 504/ADA in order to help their students with a successful transition. This seems to indicate the SAS professionals assume students are not aware of the differences in legal protections when they leave PreK–12; therefore, they are seeking out resources to stay abreast of the legal changes occurring in PreK–12. The special education administrators should reciprocate by pursuing professional development to understand legal protections in higher education and to adequately prepare their students transitioning to higher education.

**Reflection of the transition.** *It isn’t until a couple of years later that I finally understand what everyone was talking about. College is not like high school. I’m disappointed my teachers didn’t warn me ahead of time and prepare me for the tough transition. In college, my SAS contact does not check in on me, she does not remind me to come in to the office for my letters, and she certainly does not make me meet with her every week. At first, I couldn’t understand why. Did I do something wrong? No, I did nothing wrong. I learned how much I relied on my intervention specialists to hold my hand and help me when I was frustrated. In*
college, I learned to self-advocate, something my teenage mind did not want to think about. I learned I have to schedule meetings, ask for help, and learn time management.

College is such a different environment. It’s a place to grow and transform, but the transition to that realization is tough. Not only was I entering a new phase in life, I also had to learn what it meant to have a disability in that environment. Had I known the frustrations of receiving too much support to my parents as the only constant support, I would have asked more questions. Although, I admit, I wasn’t ready to hear about the differences, I wish I could tell my teachers how much it would have helped had I been more informed of the process and prepared for the transition.

Schlossberg’s transition theory. A transition is defined as “an event or nonevent that alters the individual’s perception of self and of the world, that demands a change in assumptions or behavior, and that may lead either to growth or to deterioration” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 14). An event can be an anticipated event that is expected to occur, an unanticipated event that occurs unexpectedly, or nonevents that are expected but that fail to occur (Schlossberg, 2011). In Lucas’ case, the event, the transition to college, was an anticipated event that altered his perspective, changed his behaviors, and led to positive self-growth.

Although transitions provide opportunities for growth and development, various variables may cause a negative outcome. One student’s experience may be different from the other student’s though the same supports were given. The PreK–12 special education
administrators in this study did not indicate any local, state, or national policy that guarantees that students and their advocates are given the time needed to create an inclusive, individualized transition plan. The law requires a transition plan, but as one participant pointed out, recycled statements may be, and often are, used instead of co-creating a comprehensive, uniquely tailored plan to transition into higher education. Because of the individuality of transitions, the probability of success after given a uniform transition statement on the IEP is minimal. Students require a team approach to develop and cultivate plans that are unique to their goals and aspirations.

The findings indicate most of the participants in both PreK–12 and higher education agree early planning and relationship building are important to the process, but question whose responsibility it is to develop of the transition plan. Both sets of participants had criticisms of the other set regarding the involvement in the transition. In particular, John would like to see SAS professionals go above and beyond what the law requires. On the other hand, Kate believes that K–12 uses too much “hand-holding” and hinders the student’s ability to transition into a new educational environment.

Each student’s transition plan, in development with the student, should take into consideration the type, context, and impact of the transition. The findings show special education professionals in PreK–12 are taking the time to talk about the transition to higher education in IEP meetings and throughout the student’s high school years. PreK–12 special education professionals and SAS personnel encourage the student’s development of self-advocacy skills and allow the student to utilize the support and guidance of the IEP team while navigating higher education processes. The actions of
the PreK–12 professionals and the SAS personnel demonstrate Schlossberg’s 4Ss of situation, self, support, and strategies. The findings suggest consideration of the Schlossberg’s 4Ss can be used as a guide to co-create a plan with the student, the family, and the IEP team to facilitate a successful transition.

Each participant was asked to explain his or her definition of a successful transition. It should be noted that I did not give any boundaries or context when I asked for the participants’ definition. I did not specifically ask for the definition of a successful transition for student with disabilities attending higher education. I asked for the definition of a successful transition for all students with disabilities leaving high school.

Table 9 displays the participants’ definitions of a successful transition. The SAS participants discussed the importance of having contact with the university while still in high school and knowledge of their disability. Understandably, the SAS participants’ definitions were focused on the transition to higher education. The PreK-12 special education administrators’ definitions varied, as Susan’s answer was strictly focused on students attending higher education upon graduation. John, Molly, and Kathy offered definitions that could be applied to all students with disabilities and encompassed a holistic, broad perspective. Their definitions are focused on the acquisition of skills for students to participate in life activities and ensure supports are put into place before the student leaves high school.

The differing definitions indicate a successful transition is impacted by personal experiences, context, and the degree of the disability. The definition, in this study, is not quantifiable. It is fluid and based on particular life circumstances. A successful
transition for one student will not be the same for another student. Every student has a different life goal and how he or she move towards that goal involves an individualized, personal journey.

Table 9

Participant’s Definition of Successful Transition (Paraphrased)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>SAS or PreK-12 SPED Admin</th>
<th>Definition of Successful Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>- Students at the high school level are talking with their counselor and special education teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Have an awareness of the new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>- Starting the process before college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Student is aware of his or her disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Meeting with SAS early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>- Students have resources and access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Contact with university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>- Leave school age services with the skills and abilities to be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>- Student understands his or her disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Supports are in place when her or she graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Start early (in 8th grade) to ensure deadlines do not pass for services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>- Students have a job upon leaving Pre-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Students are productive citizens, contributing to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Students are social and participate in leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>PreK-12 SPED Admin</td>
<td>- Earn an associate or bachelor degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mom’s Perspective

*I look across the table to see my son, a teenage boy preparing to embark on a new journey. His life is about to change, a change that I can only guide him*
through. I cannot make decisions for him. He is going to be in charge of his educational decisions for the first time in his young life and I am terrified. I have been advocating for him since he was a baby and now, I will be “kicked out” of the loop. Am I prepared for this?

The special education coordinator, along with the rest of the special education administration, has been flexible and willing to answer our questions throughout the years. And, they may feel that I have not been the easiest to get along with as I have fought hard for what I believed was best for my son. As the years progressed, I began to form relationships with the administrators and they became more willing to collaborate with his teachers and me. I have appreciated growth in their actions when faced with a dilemma. Instead of a top down approach, imposing directives on their teachers and parents, these administrators have demonstrated collaboration, openness, and dedication to my son’s success. As demanding as I could be, I always felt my son was safe and receiving services not only in accordance with the law, but over and above his IEP specifications.

Through my eyes and my experiences with the administrators, I believe there has been a conscious effort to keep the parents and teachers abreast of the rapidly changing landscape of special education. Although, there is an obvious gap in the information shared between higher education and PreK–12 regarding transitioning students to higher education. This could be the result of many factors, such as availability of time and financial resources, or it could be that the PreK–12 administrators are relying on the higher education professionals to
provide the student and family with information. The elimination of that gap, though, could have better prepared my son for the challenges he will face in just a few short months.

The reflection through my eyes, a mother of a student with disabilities, primarily describes the leadership exemplified by the school district’s administration, specifically the special education administration staff. I was appreciative of the administration’s efforts and service despite the flaws in their communication with higher education. By developing a relationship with me and encouraging collaboration, the district administration described exhibited qualities of processual leadership.

Person A, Samantha, John, and Susan all alluded to how the context of their workplace, based on their organization’s structure and expectations, influenced their leadership. Molly and Kathy stressed the importance of collaboration and relationships in their daily work which was influenced by their school district’s expectations of collaboration with staff, students, and families. Although context was not specifically mentioned by Molly and Kathy, the level of collaboration and the quality of relationships can greatly depend on the context of the situation. For example, the relationships in one building or department can greatly differ depending on the people, situations, or differing communication methods.

Processual leadership theory is based on the existing contingency model by examining the effect of context in the workplace and emphasizes the process of leadership over time (Kezar et al., 2006). Using the processual leadership theory as a lens to interpret the participants’ actions, the data revealed the following qualities of
processual leadership theory: (a) the development of relationships with students and families, (b) collaboration between teachers and parents, and (c) promoting social change by providing opportunities staff members to evolve their perspectives and assumptions regarding special education.

Creation of Transition Plan and Implications for Practice

The fourth category, “transition plan ideas” which emerged from inductive coding, implied the need for a creation of a plan to help bridge students with disabilities from the PreK–12 school setting to higher education. This category confirmed my research question: How can the perspectives of PreK–12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK–12 schools to higher education?

How the Bridge Breaks

The bridge students with disabilities cross as they transition to higher education is riddled with miscommunication, discrepancy, and differing expectations. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are concerns of documentation requirements in higher education as well as the differing perspectives regarding the responsibility of information students and families of the differences between the legal protections of higher education and PreK–12 education. Section 504/ADA as applied to higher education does not require PreK–12 professionals to have a working knowledge of the legal challenges and protections that cover qualified students with disabilities upon graduation. Additionally, Section 504/ADA does not mandate higher education SAS professionals to understand IDEA.
The lack of understanding and knowledge of the legal protections in both educational environments leads to a breakdown in communication and uncertainty of each professional’s responsibilities.

For example, in PreK–12, there is a mandate that requires high school students with disabilities to have a transition plan on their IEPs. However, the transition plan does not include a uniquely tailored plan to assist in the transition to higher education. SAS professionals expect students to be able to self-advocate for their needs, understand their disability, and be able to explain how their disability has impact on their learning. For a student with a disability going to higher education, the IEP team should create a customized IDEA mandated transition plan and implement it to ensure a successful transition. If the student has been accepted into a higher education institution, a SAS professional should be invited to the meetings to help formulate the transition plan and suggest transitive activities that would benefit the student’s transition into higher education. The invitation should not strictly imply a face to face meeting. Attendance can also include conference calling or video conferencing during the meeting. Flexibility is key to involving all parties.

Moreover, SAS professional’s expectations of recently graduated high school students are unrealistic. The students are also experiencing numerous life events in addition to requiring them to self-disclose their disability to obtain services in higher education. The SAS professionals are expecting the student to have an understanding of the legal protections of Section 504/ADA as applied to higher education after one intake interview. Many students with disabilities experience difficulties in comprehension and
processing, making the amount of information obtained in a short amount of time difficult to understand. In order to combat frustration, SAS professionals should create a multi-faceted approach. This can include online learning modules specific to the differences between high school and higher education, open access (no appointment needed) to the SAS office, and providing a designated resource professional for first-year students with disabilities. The multi-faceted approach ensures the student has the opportunity to be exposed to the information numerous times for a better understanding of the laws.

Resources

   Mandatory versus optional participation. The implications for this study, as described later in the chapter, call for a transition plan for special education administrators and SAS professionals involved in the case. This would be an optional transition plan to supplement the IDEA mandated transition plans for students with disabilities. Due to the elective participation from both parties, and the additional time needed to implement and maintain the plan, it is imperative the professionals involved from both higher education and PreK–12 have a vested interest in the success of transitioning students to higher education. The professionals also should be willing to frequently communicate and continue to revise and develop the plan to best suit the needs of the students.

   Finances. According to the data, lack of financial resources contributes to the communication breakdown between PreK–12 and higher education. The funding system of Ohio’s PreK–12 schools is the most complex in the country (Stabile, 2011).
Additionally, the Ohio Supreme Court has ruled the funding for schools unconstitutional (Sweetland, 2014). Ohio’s funding model relies on both state and local contributions, placing almost half of the responsibility on local taxpayers (Stabile, 2011; Sweetland, 2014). Due to the fluctuating local variables such as property value and average income, Ohio schools are not funded adequately, the reason why Ohio’s Supreme Court deemed the system unconstitutional. The data from this study reveals funding as a major deterrent to go over and above any state and federal mandates, including collaborating with institutions of higher education.

Additionally, Ohio’s higher education funding formula has moved to a performance completion model, rewarding student success and degree completion (Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission, 2012). Funding is not a new issue for Ohio’s higher education institutions. In 2006 the Higher Education Funding Study Council reported:

Due to the constraints on the state budget for constitutionally-mandated services, Ohio’s resources have become limited. Consequently, state leaders . . . and post-secondary education officials must look for creative ways to increase and optimize the use of the state’s resources . . . Educational institutions must be as efficient and cost-effective as possible in the operations and management of their facilities. (Ohio General Assembly, 2006, p. 4)

Parallel to the PreK–12 special education administrator data, the SAS professionals’ data revealed difficulties with funding and providing services beyond the scope of the law.
Changes in Practice

In order for the transition to higher education to become a successful event in the life of a student with a disability, adjustments of professional practice in both PreK–12 and higher education are needed. The success depends upon the professionals looking beyond the time and financial constraints and focusing on what is best for the student to succeed. This can include the shifting of responsibilities or dedicating a certain percentage of time to transition services. The transition plan explained through the implications for practice outlines suggested tasks, practices, and recommendations for PreK–12 special education administrators, SAS professionals, students, and families. Ohio’s funding for both PreK–12 and higher education is expected to remain the same in the foreseeable future, so creative management of current resources is required to implement the plan.

Implications for PreK–12 Special Education Administrators

Communication is an important piece of educational processes, and the SAS professionals in higher education yearn for communication with the PreK–12 special education administrators. SAS professionals want to be aware of PreK–12 special education administrators’ roles and responsibilities in hopes of alleviating frustration and to build better bridges to serve students in an efficient and effective way. PreK–12 special education administrators can reach out to local SAS offices to make contacts, network, and develop awareness of how the SAS office processes are alike and different from the PreK–12 processes. Although it is doubtful every student’s university’s SAS office will be reached due to time constraints, by contacting local SAS offices, the
PreK–12 special education administrators can develop an understanding of the minimum requirements necessary for students to complete in order to qualify for services and develop contacts in case legal questions arise during transition meetings.

PreK–12 special education administrators should be encouraging their staff to have conversations with students with disabilities regarding the expectations in higher education, more specifically, explaining that the students’ accommodations may be different in higher education from those in high school. Students with disabilities need to be aware that modifications to degree programs are not permitted in higher education. Accommodations are used to gain equal access but modifying the program standards is not acceptable. Furthermore, modifications to tests, assignments, and projects are not required in higher education and not available when qualifying for SAS services.

Before the students with disabilities complete their initial intake interviews at their higher education institution’s SAS office, the students should be able to explain the nature of their disability and its impact on their educational programming. Ideally, the students should be aware of Section 504/ADA as they relate to higher education and the legal protections they guarantee and do not guarantee. Furthermore, the students should be aware of the potential differences in their accommodations and educational experiences in higher education.

When students enter high school, a review of necessary accommodations should be completed to ensure the students are not “over accommodated.” The students should have only the necessary accommodations, as indicated on their ETRs, but also have an understanding of what accommodations are needed and why those accommodations are
needed. Practicing self-advocacy is an integral piece of the process. The student should also regularly practice self-advocacy skills, including advocating for needed accommodations until the student is able to generalize the skills into different settings. Additionally, the students should have input on their IEPs and be able to self-advocate for the supports they need.

Parents of students with disabilities should be encouraged to become actively involved in their child’s transition process by attending IEP/ETR and transitions meetings, by asking questions regarding their child’s educational program, how the educational program will change at the post-secondary level, and become informed of admission processes at higher education institutions. In participant interviews, SAS professionals explained parents are frequently not aware of the changes in services that occur once their child enters higher education. Often parents are unaware that Section 504 plans/IEP are not required in higher education nor does higher education use the processes associated with developing those plans. Moreover, parents are often unaware of FERPA regulations and do not understand they are no longer in charge of their child’s education. Under FERPA regulations, the student has to approve the parent to be a part of the conversations and decisions made in higher education.

All of the aforementioned suggestions for the PreK–12 special education administrator’s part of the plan being created as a result of the study are contingent on the dedication of resources, both time and money, and professional development for administrators and teachers. The high school administrators and staff need to have an understanding of, and be able to communicate, the differences between the two
educational environments before they relay the information to the students and parents. The staff also need the tools to teach self-advocacy skills to students with disabilities as well as dedicated time to teach those skills. Furthermore, intervention specialists should be provided additional time in high school IEP/ETR meetings. For example, if the district schedules all IEP meetings for 30 minutes, the high school meeting times should extend beyond those 30 minutes. This time should be used to engage in discussions with students and parents regarding the laws, the transition process, and supports needed for a successful transition to higher education.

**Implications for Student Accessibility Services Professionals**

The SAS participants’ data revealed the desire for the SAS office to complete additional outreach efforts to local high schools. The SAS office’s outreach activities could include: attending transition fairs, coupling with the admissions office for recruitment, and contacting guidance counselors to provide information to perspective students with disabilities. Person A suggested contacting local PreK–12 special education administrators on a regular basis, meeting for lunch, and discussing how the SAS office can assist the district’s students with disabilities in their transition to higher education. It was also suggested by Person A to bring in a group of constituents to create a formulized plan of action between the SAS office and local school districts to ensure students with disabilities’ successful transitions to higher education.

In addition to the outreach activities previously described, Samantha described an experiential learning component the SAS office could provide to new students transitioning from high school. New students with disabilities would be able to see,
touch, and feel their new educational environment. The experiential learning component would create a hands-on experience for students with disabilities and guide them through the process of transitioning to higher education. During the experiential learning component, students would be invited to campus prior to the first week of classes to become familiar with the SAS office, the campus, and their new surroundings.

The PreK–12 special education administrators’ data uncovered the need for better communication from the SAS office to the district, the students, and their families. More specifically, John would like SAS offices to go above and beyond what the law requires and work together with districts to service the best interest of the students. The PreK–12 special education administrators believe some families are put in awkward situations when the SAS office and districts do not communicate the same information. Kathy explained these situations convey the message of “us versus them” when both the district and the SAS office are striving to successfully meet the needs of their students. In order to alleviate any confusion, the PreK–12 special education administrators suggested literature be developed and directed to the high school guidance counselors, high school intervention specials, and special education administrators. The literature would be distributed to students with disabilities planning to enter higher education and their families. The PreK–12 special education administrators also suggested the literature explain the qualification process in great detail including the required documentation needed for qualification. Ideally, the literature would also include the SAS phone numbers, websites, and office staff. It is important to note the PreK–12 special education administrators would prefer the literature be in physical form to distribute to the students.
and parents at IEP meetings to eliminate the need for the students and parents to look up the information.

In agreement with Samantha, the PreK–12 special education administrators envisioned a hands-on component to the transition to higher education. Susan suggested her intervention specialists take interested students with disabilities to campus and meet the SAS staff. Rather than SAS professionals meeting with students at the high school, the field trip would allow students to witness the college environment first-hand. Students might be more apt to comprehend the differences if they were able to see and experience the campus.

Upon graduation, students with disabilities no longer have a case manager, an intervention specialist, or small group instructor in charge of executing the students’ IEP. This staff member provided a safe space, support, and monitoring of the students’ academic progress. After graduation, this safety net is gone. The students have no contact person and are expected to self-identify if they desire accommodations in higher education. The PreK–12 special education administrators noted their concerns regarding this part of the transition. They recommended each traditionally-aged, first-year student enrolled with SAS be assigned a case manager. If the student knows he or she is admitted for the fall semester, the SAS case manager would meet with the student’s current case manager and the student at the high school. According to the PreK–12 special education administrators, this meeting would help ease the anxieties associated with (a) the high school case manager “letting the student go” and (b) providing the student with a point person for their first semester of college. Susan also stated her
special education staff would be willing to continue the relationship with the student and the SAS case manager throughout the first semester.

Susan further suggested the SAS case manager contact the student during the summer. The purpose of contacting the student would be to provide encouragement, answer questions, and confirm registration of classes. Other PreK–12 special education administrators suggested a summer program, similar to Samantha’s idea, but as a mandatory requirement for students registered with SAS. The PreK–12 special education administrators explained the program would help the student: (a) learn where to get help, (b) understand their class schedule, (c) learn the layout of the campus, (d) make friends with other students in the program, and (d) establish a relationship with SAS.

Implications for Students and Families

Implications for students and families emerged as a latent function of this study. Selective coding revealed collaboration, disparity, resources, and service as the main themes of the data. Ultimately, the main themes affect students with disabilities and the transition services they receive. Families should be aware of the lack of communication and collaboration between the PreK–12 special education administrators and the SAS office; however, families need to understand that neither the SAS professionals nor the PreK–12 special education administrators should be faulted. Disparity and resources corroborate the difficulty in establishing the relationship between SAS professionals and PreK–12 special education administrators.

Most importantly, it is imperative for students with disabilities and their families to research and determine which higher education institution best suits their specific
needs. PreK–12 students should utilize their high school guidance counselor, case manager, and intervention specialists to help navigate higher education institutions requirements and applications. Kate suggested students interview SAS professionals at the institutions to ensure the student and parent(s) understand the qualification process and to confirm the office can meet the student’s unique needs. Asking questions at Section 504/IEP meetings and SAS intake meetings to gain a better understanding of the transition to higher education is essential for both students and families.

**Recommendations for Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from high school to higher education. Additionally, this study explored how PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs. As a result of the study, recommendations for further research have emerged.

**Study Design**

A case study research design is specific in its intent. It is suggested that further research change the design to include a larger number of higher education institutions, including two year and technical colleges, and the number of school districts asked to participate. The transition plan created utilizing a different study design, such as basic qualitative design or narrative design, will result in a plan that may be applicable to more higher education institutions and PreK–12 school districts. This is due to the fact the
transition plan would not be specific to the case at hand. Moreover, participants could include students and families to gain their perspectives of the transition process. This also may prove to be beneficial for the families involved as they may gain a better understanding of the differences between PreK–12 and higher education.

**Access to Higher Education**

The study completed assumed students have made the decision to attend Midwestern State University and are anticipating enrollment. To increase the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education, research on successful enrollment practices is suggested. Additionally, research on students who are eligible, but do not attend higher education is recommended. The absence may be due to variables such as rejection from the institution, financial difficulties, family opposition, or an overall lack of understanding on how to apply to institutions. Only further research could determine which variables have impact on the student’s decision.

**Success Beyond the First Year**

A successful transition to higher education for first-year students transitioning from high school was emphasized in the research. Additional research might expand beyond the first year and determine how students can continue to be successful in higher education. How long are the students successful? Is there a certain period of time after the first year the students stop self-advocating or discontinue services with SAS? Conversely, if the students have unsuccessful transitions to college, how do they cope? By interviewing students who have had a successful transition and those who have not could lead to additional changes in professional practices and guidelines.
Definition of a Successful Transition

The definition of a successful transition might be interpreted many different ways depending on the context of the situation. PreK–12 special education administrators, SAS professionals, students, and families’ ideas of a successful transition can be different because of their specific roles and contextual influences. Definitions of successful transitions might include the attendance of higher education, securing work experience, or a combination of both education and work experience. An investigation of the differing definitions may help professionals construct a better understanding of family perspectives and expectations.

Student Voices

Due to the design and intent of this study, the voices of students transitioning from PreK–12 to higher education were not included. Further research should focus on the students’ experiences preparing for the transition and following them through the SAS intake process. A longitudinal research design is recommended to allow for observations throughout high school and into the first year of higher education. Reseaching the students may yield a very different perspective on successful transitions into higher education. These perspectives may strengthen the optional transition plan created and deepen the understanding of services needed for students to have a successful transition.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how PreK–12 special education administrators and higher education Student Accessibility Services (SAS)
professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from their PreK–12 Individualized Education Programs (IEP) or Section 504 plans to higher education. This study also sought to explore how PreK–12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year college students with disabilities. I aspired to comprehend and co-construct the participant’s perspectives as to why students with disabilities struggle to transition to college. More importantly, I questioned and analyzed the relationships between the PreK–12 special education administrators and the SAS professionals.

The outcomes of this study demonstrate favorably the possibilities for bridging the P–20 communication gap regarding students with disabilities transitioning to higher education. Parents, students, PreK–12 special education staff and administrators, and SAS professionals can all have positive results from the plan created through the analysis of the data. As a mother of a student with a disability, I am excited by the possible opportunities revealed in the data. The data show that although there are debates about responsibilities, there is agreement to create an open dialogue. This open dialogue could lead to a better understanding of the responsibilities and, ultimately, the creation of lasting relationships to better serve the needs of students with disabilities transition to higher education.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Exempt From Annual Review Research Application
(LEVEL I projects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of discipline-specific reviewer:</th>
<th>Date Received by Office of Research Compliance:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application meets Exemption from Annual review requirements</td>
<td>Date of Log # notification email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify one or more category:</td>
<td>Date of Final Approval:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ #1 - Educational Settings</td>
<td>Agenda date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ #2 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ #3 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation of PUBLIC OFFICIALS</td>
<td>Signature of reviewer</td>
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<td>☐ #4 - Existing Data, Documents, Specimens</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ #5 - For Public Benefit or Service Programs (Federal)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ #6 - For Taste and Food Quality and Consumer Acceptance Studies</td>
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INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:
1. Complete this form to request an exemption determination for your study.
2. Review the Categories of Research Activities that are Exempt document prior to completing this application. ALL procedures and instruments used in your study must meet the exemption criteria to receive the exemption determination. If your study does not meet the exemption criteria, you will be asked to complete the USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH application.
3. Submit this completed document and any needed Appendices, materials (i.e. copies of survey/interview questions, focus group scripts/protocols, recruitment emails, etc.), and consent forms via email attachment to an IRB discipline specific reviewer. To submit the form with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the Investigator’s @kent.edu email account. Handwritten forms will not be accepted.
4. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the study meets the exemption criteria.

DEFINITIONS
Minimal risk:
The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.
Prisoner:
An individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution (e.g., prison, jail, or juvenile offender facility), with restricted ability to leave the institution. The term is intended to encompass individuals sentenced to such an institution under a criminal or civil statute, individuals detained in other facilities by virtue of statutes or commitment procedures that provide alternatives to criminal prosecution or incarceration in a penal institution, and individuals detained pending arraignment, trial, or sentencing.

**To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click "checked". Click OK.**

Section 1 – TITLE & PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI) INFORMATION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title of Study: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education</th>
<th>Estimated begin and end dates for the project: 11/2015 to 5/2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name: Dr. Catherine Hackney</td>
<td>Status: ☒ Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (330) - 672 - 0552 or extension</td>
<td>Department: K-12 EDAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Research</td>
<td>PI Email: Hackney @kent.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Faculty Research</td>
<td>Complete Appendix A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Student Thesis/Dissertation</td>
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</table>

Page 1 of 10  Revision 5.5
Email address(es) for others that should be notified regarding the status of this application (i.e., student(s) conducting research, program administrators, etc.): mcenker@kent.edu

Only faculty members and professional staff who are full-time university employees are eligible for PI status. Students conducting research for their dissertation or master's thesis research can still have primary responsibility for the intellectual content, conduct of the research, or primary authorship in publications by serving as co-investigators or key personnel on IRB applications. If you are a KSU employee conducting research involving human subjects as part of your graduate or undergraduate program, your faculty advisor must serve as the PI of record for IRB protocols. Please review IRB policy for PI eligibility and responsibilities.

| a. Are there any Kent State University affiliated co-investigators or key personnel on this protocol? | Yes → Complete Appendix A | No |

"Key personnel" are defined as individuals who participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of human subjects research. At a minimum, include individuals, who recruit participants, obtain consent or, who collect study data. Students conducting research for their dissertation or master's thesis research can still have primary responsibility for the intellectual content, conduct of the research, or primary authorship in publications by serving as co-investigators or key personnel on IRB applications.

| b. Are there any external (non-Kent State University affiliated) co-investigators or key personnel engaged in the research? | Yes → Complete Appendix B | No |

"Engaged" individuals are those who intervene or interact with participants in the context of the research or who will obtain individually identifiable private information for research funded, supervised, or coordinated by Kent State University. See OHRP Engagement Guidance or contact ORC for more information.

| c. Has the Principal Investigator (PI) completed/updated the required web-based courses (CITI training) in the protection of human research subjects? | Yes → Attach Copy of completion certificate | No |

Initial educational requirements and continuing (per KSU policy CITI training needs refreshed every 3 years) should be satisfied prior to submitting the application for IRB review. See Human Subjects Protection Training policy for more information. Final approval from the IRB will not be obtained until all requirements are fulfilled.

Section 2 – FUNDING INFORMATION

| a. Does this research have external funding or have you requested external funding for this research? | Yes | No |

If Yes → Specify sponsor: 

Protocol/Proposal #: 
Institution (if not KSU): 
Have all Kent State University investigators and key personnel completed the required COI disclosure for externally funded research for the purposes of this research project? Yes | No |

| b. Is any support other than monetary (e.g., drugs, equipment, supplies, etc.) being provided for the study? | Yes | No |

If Yes → Specify support and provider: 

Attach a copy of the grant application or funding proposal.
c. Does the PI for this research or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse, domestic partner, or dependent children) have a financial interest that would reasonably be affected by the research, or a financial interest in any entity whose financial interest would reasonably appear to be affected by the research?

Financial interests include (but are not limited to) salary or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees or honoraria), equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options, or other ownership interests), and intellectual property rights (e.g., patents, copyrights, and royalties from such rights).

☐ Yes ☑ Complete Appendix Z  ☐ No

d. Does the PI for this research or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse, domestic partner, or dependent children) have a non-financial Conflict of interest that would reasonably be affected by the research?

A non-financial conflict of interest is an interest, other than monetary, of an individual (or his/her immediate family) in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research or other interest that competes with the obligation to protect research participants and potentially compromises the objectivity and credibility of the research process.

☐ Yes ☐ Complete Appendix Z  ☑ No

Section 3 – QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

You must indicate an answer to each of the following (5) statements

1. The research will not expose participants to discomfort or distress beyond that normally encountered in daily life.

☐ True ☐ Not True

2. The research will not include collection of sensitive data (i.e., sexual behavior, alcohol or drug use) where the responses, if disclosed outside of the research, would place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

☐ True ☐ Not True

3. The research will not involve individuals that are prisoners (involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution), with restricted ability to leave the institution.

☐ True ☐ Not True

4. If there is interaction with subjects there will be a verbal consent process or a document that is given to participants to disclose the information:
   • That the activity involves research
   • Subject rights
   • The procedures/what they are being asked to do
   • Duration of subject’s participation
   • That participation is voluntary
   • Confidentiality statement
   • Incentives or payments (if applicable)
   • Name and contact information for the investigator
   • Contact information for the KSU IRB (330-672-2704)

☐ True ☐ Not True

5. The research is not subject to FDA regulations.

☐ True ☑ Not True

Section 4 – PURPOSE AND CATEGORY OF RESEARCH

a) Briefly summarize the purpose of the proposed research using non-technical language that can be readily understood by someone outside of your discipline. Use complete sentences (limit 300 words).

The purpose of this qualitative, comparative case study will be to understand how PreK-12 special education administrators and higher education Student Accessibility Services (SAS) professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from their prior Individual Education Programs or PreK-12 504 plans. This study will explore how PreK-12 special education administrators and higher education SAS
professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year college students with special needs.

b) Does data collection involve disclosure or use of Protected Health Information (PHI) from a covered entity?  

Researchers must obtain individual authorization for use or disclosure of PHI unless a regulatory permission applies. Contact the ORC for more information.  

| Yes → Complete Appendix N | No |

1. Check one or more categories of exemption for which you are applying. You do not have to choose more than one category if it does not apply to your research. 

2. Answer all of the questions for each category that you choose. 

To be considered for the exemption your research can involve only procedures listed in one or more of these categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1 - Educational Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The research will only be conducted in established or commonly-accepted educational settings including, but not limited to, schools and colleges. (Commonly accepted educational settings include but are not limited to K-12 schools and college classrooms. They may also include after-school programs, preschools, vocational schools, alternative education programs, and other sites where educational activities regularly occur.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>True</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The research will involve only normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods. Normal educational practices include established or innovative teaching methods (not considered to be experimental) or curriculum, and commonly accepted classroom management techniques that are planned and implemented by the classroom teacher. Normal educational practices are activities that could occur regardless of whether the research is conducted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provide an overview of the population being studied (e.g. high school students, college students) and the procedures that apply to this category. Explain how your research is considered to take place in a commonly accepted education setting, and involves normal educational practices. (Include copies of any tests and questionnaires, recruitment scripts, etc. via email attachment when submitting the application.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category 2 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation

1. The subject population includes ADULTS (>18 years old) and the research will involve only the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior (if your research does not involve adults, check N/A).

   a. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research WOULD NOT reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

   b. The information will be recorded in such a manner that human subjects CANNOT be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

   Videotapes and photographs are typically considered to be identifiable. Therefore, any data collection that involves video recordings or photographs of subjects would not be considered anonymous.

2. The subject population includes CHILDREN (<18 years old) and the research procedures will be limited to the observation of public behavior where the investigator will NOT participate in the activities being observed (if your research does not involve children, check N/A).

   a. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research WOULD NOT reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

   b. The information will be recorded in such a manner that human subjects CANNOT be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

   Research involving surveys or interviews with children, or observation of public behavior when investigators interact with children, does not qualify for exempt status under this category. Videotapes and photographs are typically considered to be identifiable. Therefore any data collection that involves video recordings or photographs of subjects would not be considered anonymous.

3. Provide a brief overview of the procedures that apply to this category. Include where/how the research will be administered (e.g. internet anonymous survey, telephone interviews, mail, etc.). Describe how the proposed research methodology meets the criteria of involving either 1) education tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement); 2) survey procedures; 3) interview procedures; or 4) observation of public behavior.

   (Attach copy of tests, surveys questions, verbal scripts/protocols, recruitment scripts, etc. when submitting the application for review. Typically, attach a copy of letter of support from person at the school.)

   Data will be obtained by using face to face semi-structured interviews in a mutually agreed upon location such as the participant's office. The interview will be audio recorded and scheduled to last up to sixty minutes. Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview technique will be used to allow the participant and researcher flexibility in the direction of the interview. No interviewer will be identified on the audio recording nor will the questions put the participant in any time of risk beyond those in everyday life.
**Category 3 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation of PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

1. The research will involve only the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
</tr>
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</table>

2. AND (one of the following is true) .............................................
   a) The human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office. (Applies to senior officials such as mayor or school superintendent rather than a police officer or teacher.) .................................................................

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
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</table>
   b) Federal statute(s) require without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Provide a brief overview of the procedures that apply to this category. Include where/how the research will be administered (e.g. Internet anonymous survey, telephone interviews, mail, in person focus groups, etc.).

   (Include copies of any survey/interview questions, focus group scripts/protocols, recruitment scripts, etc. via email attachment when submitting the application.)

**Category 4 - Existing Data, Documents, Specimens**

1. The research will involve only the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens. ("Existing" means existing before the research is proposed to the IRB to determine whether the research is exempt. All materials to be reviewed currently exist at the time of this exemption request.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. The sources of the existing data, documents, records or specimens are publicly available OR the information will be recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be readily identified either directly or through identifiers (such as a code) linked to them.

   Information should be recorded in the research records in such a way that the information obtained from an individual cannot be linked to the identity of that individual. If a link will be created by the investigator for research purposes, even temporarily, the research does not qualify as exempt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Provide an overview of the data/records that will be accessed that apply to this category. Include the source and purpose for which they were originally collected. If personal identifiers are associated with the data, please describe the de-identification procedures.

   (Include any relevant supporting documents (e.g. previous IRB approval) via email attachment.)

   Documents and archival records will be collected in additional to participant interviews. These include public records from Ohio Department of Education, SAS office records (not student specific), job descriptions, and other data already generated by the SAS office and school districts for progress monitoring. No documents will have any identifiers linked to them.
### Category 5 – For Public Benefit or Service Programs (Federal)

1. The project is a research or demonstration project conducted by or subject to the approval of a (federal) Department or Agency head and which is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:
   - (i) public benefit (e.g., financial or medical benefits as provided under the Social Security Act) or service programs (e.g., social, supportive, or nutrition services as provided under the Older Americans Act);
   - (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;
   - (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or
   - (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those public benefit or service programs.

2. Provide a brief overview of the procedures that apply to this category. Include where/how the research will be administered (e.g., Internet anonymous survey, telephone interviews, mail, in person focus groups, etc.).
   (Include copies of any survey/interview questions, focus group scripts/protocols, recruitment scripts, etc. via email attachment when submitting the application.)

### Category 6 – For Taste and Food Quality and Consumer Acceptance Studies

1. The research involves only a taste and food quality evaluation or a food consumer acceptance study in which
   - i. wholesome foods without additives will be consumed OR
   - ii. food will be consumed that contains a food ingredient, agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant that is at or below the level found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration or is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

2. Provide a brief overview of the procedures that apply to this category. Explain how the research will not pose a risk to subjects. Identify the types and quantity of foods to be consumed.
   (Include copies of any survey/interview questions, focus group scripts/protocols, recruitment scripts, etc. via email attachment when submitting the application.)

---

If you have checked Not True to ANY of the questions in the category you have chosen above, your research is NOT EXEMPT FROM ANNUAL REVIEW. Do not finish completing this application. You must submit a Use of Human Subjects in Research Application - (Level II/III).

### Section 5 – RESEARCH DESIGN

a. Will research activities be conducted at a site where approval from an additional IRB (other than KSU IRB), or authority (i.e., school principal or superintendent) is needed?
   - Yes → Complete
   - No → Appendix O

b. Is any of this research being conducted outside of the U.S.A?
   - Yes → Complete
c. What do you perceive as the foreseeable risks for subjects that participate in this research?

There are no risks for the participants beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Section 6 – PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION, RECRUITMENT, & SELECTION

a. Specify the recruitment methods for this study and attach copies of any of the below (written documents and/or scripts) to this application.

- Personal contact
- Contact or approach letters
- Telephone calls (attach copy of script)
- Brochures
- Printed advertisements
- Student research pools (e.g., psychology, sociology, communication) → Complete Appendix Y

Who will approach or recruit potential participants?
- Principal Investigator
- Research Staff
- Other → please describe: [ ]

b. When/how often will participants be recruited? (e.g., via email with 3 reminders sent at specific intervals)

This case study will only require one round of recruitment by the researcher contacting Kent State University’s Student Accessibility Services Office and asking which staff members would be willing to participate. Contact will be made by Mandy Miller with the Director of Student Accessibility Services upon approval of IRB to recruit the participants. Recruitment, by email, for special education administrators will also be made to up to five surrounding school districts. Beyond the initial contact, two reminder emails will be sent at one week intervals to the special education administrators.

c. Where will participants be recruited? (e.g., doctor’s office, classroom, online)

The graduate student researcher will contact Kent State University’s Student Accessibility Services Office to recruit participants. The researcher will also contact up to five local school districts’ special education administrators based on the amount of students represented from each district in KSU’s student body and guidance from the Director of Student Accessibility Services.

d. What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence in the recruitment of research participants? (e.g., will the potential participants be afforded the opportunity to take material home and discuss the study with family members and/or primary care providers?)

The participants will be volunteers. Upon request, the volunteers will be given a copy of the interview questions and be able to ask the researcher questions for clarification. The researcher will describe her purposes and aims for the study. At any point, the volunteer will be able to withdraw from the study with no repercussion.
Section 7 – PARTICIPANT POPULATION

a. What is the total number of participants (or number of participant records, specimens, etc.):

The number of participants is defined as the number of individuals who agree to participate (i.e., those who provide consent or whose records are accessed, etc.) even if all do not complete the study. The total number of research participants may be increased only with prior IRB approval.

Between 10 and 12 (up to five special education administrators and up to seven SAS personnel members)

b. Describe the individuals who may participate in the research:

Kent State employees assigned to the Student Accessibility Services office and regularly interacts with students transitioning from high school into KSU. Additionally, the special education administrators must be employed by a local school district and directly oversee special education services in the district.

Age(s): 22+

Section 8 – CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

a. What format will be used to store participant information? Check all that apply.

- [x] Hardcopy paper documentation
- [ ] Database system
- [x] Disk (CD ROM, flash drive, floppy disk)
- [ ] Other
  Specify:

b. How will the information obtained be identified? (Choose one)

- [ ] There will be no identifiers associated with the information obtained.
- [x] Names and other identifying information (e.g., email addresses, photographs) are obtained but not shared with anyone except the study staff.
- [ ] Names and other identifying information are obtained and potentially used in publications.

c. How will the participant information be kept secure and confidential?

No names will be attached to any folders, or to the transcripts, in order to protect confidentiality rather they will be labeled with pseudonyms. Each location will also have a folder to collect documents and archival records associated with the location. These folders will be kept in a locked office and accessed only by the researcher. Any data collected electronically through email will be stored in a university issued, password protected Google account. The study will have its own folder on the Google drive and will be deleted, by the researcher, upon completion of the study.

d. Will you be retaining identifying information for purposes of another research project (e.g. keeping participants’ contact information to recruit them for future research)?

- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

If Yes → Describe what information will be retained. The information must also be described in the consent form.

Section 9 – ASSURANCE: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Perform the research as approved by the IRB under the direction of the Principal Investigator by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources;
- Understand that the parameters of the research cannot be modified without approval by the KSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants);
• Agree to maintain research-related records (and source documents) in a manner that documents the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality of the data and privacy of participants;
• Will retain research-related records for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements) even if I leave the University;
• Will contact the Office of Research Compliance for assistance in amending (to request a change in Principal Investigator) or terminating the research if I leave the University or am unavailable to conduct or supervise the research personally (e.g., sabbatical or extended leave);
• Agree to inform all Co-Investigators, research staff, employees, and students assisting in the conduct of the research of their obligations in meeting the above commitments.

I verify that the information provided in this Use of Human Subjects in Research application is accurate and complete.

Signature of Principal Investigator  Date

Typing your name on the signature line will serve as your signature when submitting from your @kent.edu email account.
b. How will the information obtained be identified? (Choose one)

☐ There will be no identifiers associated with the information obtained.
☒ Names and other identifying information (e.g., email addresses, photographs) are obtained but not shared with anyone except the study staff.

☐ Names and other identifying information are obtained and potentially used in publications.

c. How will the participant information be kept secure and confidential?

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d. Will you be retaining identifying information for purposes of another research project (e.g. keeping participants’ contact information to recruit them for future research)?

☐ Yes
☒ No

If Yes ➔ Describe what information will be retained. The information must also be described in the consent form.

Section 9 - ASSURANCE: PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:

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I verify that the information provided in this Use of Human Subjects in Research application is accurate and complete.

[Signature]
Signature of Principal Investigator

[Date]

Typing your name on the signature line will serve as your signature when submitting from your @kent.edu email account.

Page 9 of 9
COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI)
SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH - BASIC/REFRESHER CURRICULUM COMPLETION REPORT
Printed on 09/17/2013

Catherine Hackney (ID: 3731763) 38
Aurora St.
Hudson
OH 44236
USA

DEPARTMENT
EHHS Administrative Affairs and Graduate Education

PHONE
330 620 4700

EMAIL
chadine1@kent.edu

INSTITUTION
Kent State University

EXPIRATION DATE
09/16/2016

SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH - BASIC/REFRESHER: Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff

COURSE/STAGE
Basic Course 1

PASSED ON
09/17/2013

REFERENCE ID
11220015

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<tr>
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For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI Program participating institution or be a paid Independent Learner. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course site is unethical, and may be considered research misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami

Forced primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Director Office of Research Education
CITI Program Course Coordinator
# Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic Refresher Curriculum Completion Report**

Reported on: 05/04/2014

**LEARNER**

Mandy Miller (ID: 4140687)
910 Kipta Drive
Clinton
Ohio 44735
US

**DEPARTMENT**

K-12 Educational Administration

**PHONE**

330-417-7015

**EMAIL**

mkyler@k12hat.org

**INSTITUTION**

Kirtland University

**EXPIRATION DATE**

05/03/2017

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic Refresher**

This report is submitted to satisfy CITI training requirements for investigators and staff involved in social behavioral research with human subjects.

**COURTSHIP**

Back to Course

**RAISED ON**

05/04/2014

**REFERENCE ID**

12318559

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For the completion report to be valid, the learner must show success in all required CITI Program participating institutions or be a self-independent learner. Related information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course is unlawful, and may be considered a form of misconduct by your institution.

**R. J. Brown, Ph.D.**

President, University of Miami

Director, Office of Research and Safety

CITI Program Course Coordinator
INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form to add KSU-affiliated Co-Investigator's or Key Personnel to research that involves human subjects.

2. Submit this completed document with your application via email attachment. To submit the form with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the Investigator's @kent.edu email account. If completed form is signed and then scanned as a PDF attachment, the @kent.edu email requirement does not apply.

3. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the study/ modification has been fully approved.

DEFINITIONS

Key personnel:
Individuals who participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of human subjects research. At a minimum, include individuals who recruit participants, obtain consent, or who collect study data.

Conflict of Interest is a financial interest or other opportunity for tangible personal benefit of an individual or his/her immediate family that may exert a substantial and improper influence on the individual's professional judgment in exercising any institutional duty or responsibility, including the conduct or design of research.

Financial Conflict of Interest:
An interest of an individual (or his/her immediate family) of monetary value that would reasonably appear to be affected by the research or an individual's interest in any entity whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research. Financial interests include (but are not limited to) salary or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees or honoraria), equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options, or other ownership interests), and intellectual property rights (e.g., patents, copyrights, and royalties from such rights).

Non-Financial Conflict of Interest:
An interest other than monetary of an individual (or his/her immediate family) in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research or other interest that competes with the obligation to protect research participants and potentially compromises the objectivity and credibility of the research process.

Immediate Family:
An investigator's or Key personnel's spouse or domestic partner and dependent children.

To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click "checked". Click OK.

Section I - KSU PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Last Name: Hackney  First Name: Catherine

Title or, IRB log number of Research (should match Human Subjects Research Application)

Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education
**KSU CO-INVESTIGATOR(S) and/or KEY PERSONNEL (#1)**

- Co-Investigator  | Status:  
- Key Personnel    | Faculty ☑️ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Staff

**Name (Last, First, MI):** Miller, Mandy A.

**E-mail:** mcenker@kent.edu  
**Phone:** 330-289-6590

a. Have Co-Investigator(s)/Key personnel completed the CITI online (or equivalent) training?  
   - Yes ☑️ attach copy of completion certificate.  
   - No ☐

b. Describe the role/activities that this Co-investigator or Key Personnel will perform for this study (e.g., subject recruitment, informed consent):  
   Mandy Miller will be conducting this research for her dissertation. Her role will be to recruit subjects, obtain informed consent, conduct interviews, gather documents and archival records, and complete data analysis.

c. Where will the Co-investigator or Key Personnel perform the research activities?  
   - ☑️ at KSU  
   - ☐ at external research site ☑️ complete Appendix O ☑️

d. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a Conflict of Interest related to the research?  
   - Yes ☑️ provide explanation below  
   - No ☐

Explaination:

e. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a patent or, pending patent, or current patent idea that could be conceivably related to this research project?  
   - Yes ☑️ provide explanation below.  
   - No ☐

Explaination:

f. Has/will Co-Investigator or Key personnel receive funds or, other resources (including equipment, devices, etc…) from a Sponsor or funding agency/entity for purposes of this research project?  
   - Yes ☐ provide explanation below.  
   - No ☑️

Explaination:

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance.
regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Perform the research as approved by the IRB under the direction of the Principal Investigator (or Advisor) by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources;
- Initiate the research after written notification of IRB approval has been received;
- Obtain and document (unless waived) informed consent and HIPAA research authorization from human subjects (or their legally authorized representatives) prior to their involvement in the research using the currently IRB-approved consent form(s) and process;
- Promptly report to the IRB events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others;
- Provide significant new findings that may relate to the subjects willingness to continue to participate;
- Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in the research or informed consent process before changes are implemented, and agree that no changes will be made until approved by the KSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants);
- If applicable, complete and submit a Continuing Review of Human Subjects Research application before the deadline for review at intervals determined by the IRB to be appropriate to the degree of risk (but not less than once per year) to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities;
- Maintain research-related records (and source documents) in a manner that documents the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality of the data and privacy of participants;
- Retain research-related records for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements) even if I leave the University;

I verify that the information provided in this form is accurate and complete.

Signature: Mandy A. Miller       Date __10/22/2015
INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form when you are requesting approval to collect and store participants' data or specimens for future, as yet unspecified, research or for future sharing. Do not complete this form for short-term, study-specific data collection and analysis (limited to the current research study). The consent process should address possible future uses.

2. Submit all documents via email attachment with your application. To submit the form with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the Investigator's @kent.edu email account. If completed form is signed and then scanned as a PDF attachment, the @kent.edu email requirement does not apply.

3. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the research has been fully approved.

DEFINITIONS

Coded - Direct personal identifiers have been removed (e.g., from data or specimens) and replaced with words, letters, figures, symbols, or a combination of these for purposes of protecting the identity of the source, but the original identifiers are retained in such a way that they can still be traced back to the source. Note: Sometimes also referred to as a “key,” “link,” or “map.”

Protected Health Information (PHI) - Is any individually identifiable health information that is explicitly linked to a particular individual or data items which reasonably could be expected to allow individual Name, all geographic subdivisions smaller than a state (street address, city, county, precinct) Note: zip code or equivalents must be removed, but can retain first 3 digits of the geographic unit to which the zip code applies if the zip code area contains more than 20,000 people, dates directly related to the individual, all elements of dates, except year (date of birth, admission date, discharge date, date of death), all ages over 89 or dates indicating such an age, telephone number, fax number, email address, social security number, medical record number, health plan number, account numbers, certificate or license numbers, vehicle identification/serial numbers, including license plate numbers, device identification/serial numbers, Universal Resource Locators (URLs), internet protocol (IP) addresses, biometric identifiers, including finger and voice prints, full face photographs and comparable images, any other unique identifying number, characteristic, or code.

To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click “checked”. Click OK.

Section I - KSU Investigator Information

Last Name: Hackney
First Name: Catherine

Title of Study (should match Human Subjects Research Application)

Bridging the Gap: The Transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education
### APPENDIX C – Data/Specimen Repositories

#### Section II. Data Collection and Storage

1. Describe the purpose for the data collection and the type(s) of data to be collected. **Be sure to include a copy of the data collection form(s)**

   The purpose of collecting data is to conduct research on the perspectives of special education leaders and Student Accessibility Service personnel to create a transition plan for students with disabilities entering higher education. Data collection will consist of interviews, documents, and archival records.

2. Will there be limits on the specimen’s intended future use (e.g., for PTSD research only)?

   - Yes
   - No

   Explain why or why not:

   The data collection will only be used in research regarding professional perspectives of successful transitions for students with disabilities.

3. Describe the sources of the data/specimens or medical records. Explain whether the data will be obtained directly from the participants, or received from a secondary source.

   The data will be obtained directly from the participants through interviews.

4. Indicate the format of the data (check all that apply):

   - Electronic (including video, digital, etc.)
   - Hard copy

5. How will the data be stored?

   - Coded
   - De-identified
   - Other (Provide details in space below)

   Details: Data will be coded by using pseudonyms for both names or participants and names of the organizations of their employment. Documents and archival records will be gathered after identifying marks have been removed.

6. Who will manage the stored data?

   Mandy Miller, Doctoral candidate

7. If the data are coded, will the information include individually identifiable protected health information (PHI)? **Note that a HIPAA Authorization is required for storage of data that includes PHI.**

   - Yes
   - No

8. Describe the physical location/equipment where data will be stored. (Including name of building, office number, etc.)

   Most data will be stored electronically on Kent State issued, password protected Google drive. Any hard copies or physical documents will be stored in 408 White Hall.

9. Describe the procedures for securing data (e.g., locked file cabinet, secure network, password access, and encryption) including devices for temporary transport of data.

   Physical data will be stored in a locked office filing cabinet. Electronic data gathered through email or web
access will be stored in a university issued, password protected Google account. The study will have its
own folder on the Google drive and will be deleted, by the researcher, upon completion of the study.

9. How long will data be stored?  
   □ Indefinitely  
   [ ] Other, include details below:

10. Will data be released to investigator’s other than those listed on the
    original application?  
    □ Yes  
    [ ] No

   If Yes → indicate how data/samples will be released to other Investigators:
    □ Coded  
    □ De-identified  
    □ Aggregate data (no individual data elements)

   a) Describe the process for requesting and releasing data. Include information about the individual(s)
      responsible for verifying IRB approval (or exemption) before data release and his/her qualifications
      or training. Attach copies of all applicable forms/agreements that will be used to request and release data.

      N/A

   b) Describe the process for destruction or de-identification of identified/coded data at the end of the
      retention period (as applicable), or if the PI leaves the University.

      N/A

11. Will you be using a consent form (separate from the consent form that is used for the foundational
    study) that addresses the collection and storage of data/specimens/records for future analysis/use?

   □ Yes → the consent document includes a clear description of:
      ▪ the operation of the repository/database;  
      ▪ the specific types of research to be conducted;  
      ▪ the conditions under which data and specimens will be released to recipient-investigators; and,
      ▪ procedures for protecting the privacy of participants and maintaining the confidentiality of data.

   [ ] No → Please explain:
      The informed consent form already specifies the information.

**Section VI - Signature**

I attest that the information contained herein is a true and accurate representation of this study and the typed name below can serve as my signature.

**IMPORTANT:** To have your typed name serve as your signature, you MUST send the completed form to Research Compliance via your @kent.edu email account.

Name: Dr. Catherine Hackney  
Date: 11/5/2015

Attach copies of the following:

[ ] Applicable forms or Agreement(s)  
[ ] Data collection form(s)  
[ ] Approved Application  
[ ] Measures, Instruments,
APPENDIX C – Data/Specimen Repositories

IRB LOG NUMBER

Surveys, etc...
INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form to include performance sites outside of Kent State University for your research activity (e.g., obtaining consent, conducting research procedures, obtaining or accessing identifiable data for research purposes, etc.)
   OR
   Any component of your research will be conducted by collaborators outside of Kent State University and you are responsible for coordinating the conduct of all or part of this research (e.g., you are running the study at multiple locations; you are conducting or coordinating parts of the research such as follow-up at multiple locations; your data analysis work is being done at an outside institution.)

2. Submit this completed document via email along with the Human Subjects Research application.

3. Retain a copy of the Human Subjects application and applicable attachments.

4. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that your application has been fully approved or determined by the IRB to be exempt from annual review.

DEFINITIONS

Engaged in Research - an institution is considered engaged in research when its employees or agents for the purposes of the research project obtain: (1) data about the subjects of the research through intervention or interaction with them; (2) identifiable private information about the subjects of the research; or (3) the informed consent of human subjects for the research.

Performance Site – a site whose staff, facilities or private records of individuals are engaged in the conduct of research; or a site that receives HHS funds. The performance site is the actual place where the research activity (e.g., site where staff are consenting subjects).

IRB of Record – The IRB responsible for review of research and for determining that the research meets the regulatory requirements for approval.

To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click “checked”. Click OK.

Section I - KSU Investigator Information

Last Name: Hackney  First Name: Catherine

Title of Study (should match Human Subjects Research Application)

Bridging the gap: Transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education
### Performance site #1

1. **Name of Performance Site** (e.g. Oriana House, Akron Children's Hospital, Summa, School)

   Participants’ offices or mutually agreed upon location. All offices or locations agreed upon will be within 30 miles of Kent State University.

2. **Who is conducting research activities at this Performance Site?**
   - KSU PI, CO-PI or key personnel
   - Collaborator → Local PI Name:

3. **Performance Site contact name & phone number for IRB matters**
   - Mandy Miller; 330-289-6590

4. **Who will be the IRB of Record for research conducted at this Performance Site?**
   - KSU IRB → **answer question #5**
   - Performance Site’s IRB → **provide FWA #** and expiration
   - Other IRB → Name:

5. **If KSU is the IRB of Record, what is the method of documenting the Performance site’s reliance on our IRB?**
   - Master IRB Collaboration Agreement (currently only applicable for Summa)
   - IRB Authorization Agreement (applicable for a location with an FWA) → [Complete and Authorization request form](#)
   - Individual Investigator Agreement/Letter of Support (applicable for researchers at locations with no FWA)

6. **If KSU is not the IRB of record, has the site’s local IRB granted approval?**
   - No → Explain:
   - Yes → **provide dates of site IRB Approval: _____ to: _____** (attach copy of the Performance Site’s IRB Approval letter).
     - Performance Site’s IRB file number:

7. **What are the study procedures that will take place at this Performance Site (e.g., conduct research interviews; obtain informed consent, accessing records).**

   Study procedures include conducting face to face interviews, obtaining informed consent, and accessing documents and archival records.
IRB Participant Interview Protocol

Study Title: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Mandy A. Miller, Doctoral Candidate

1. Tell me how long you have been in your position and your experiences, professional and/or personal, that brought you to this position.
2. Describe your leadership and why you lead this way.
   a. Tell me about any specific instances that helped shape the disposition of leader you are today.
   b. How is the context of your current workplace shaping the way you lead?
   c. How are you shaping the context of your workplace?

3. Are there differences between the laws governing PreK-12 versus higher education for students with disabilities?
   a. If yes- Please expand upon the difference.
      How do you help to ensure students understand the differences?
   b. If no- What resources would be beneficial to you, as a professional, to help you understand the differences in the laws?

4. What does a successful transition of students with disabilities look like?
   a. Who is involved in the transition at your organization? What roles do they play in transition?
   b. How would students respond to this question?

5. How does your institution help students and their families transition to higher education?
   a. What is your specific role in the process?
   b. What obstacles are there?
   c. What helps, or would help, the process flow smoothly?
   d. How do you envision the ideal process of transitioning from high school to higher education?
   e. How would families respond to the question?

6. Explain how you determine what supports (academically, emotionally, etc.) a student will need in order to transition to higher education.
   Probes: students, families
7. How can PreK-12 special education leaders contribute to a successful transition? How can SAS personnel contribute a successful transition?
   a. Where do you perceive the problem in the transition process to higher education?
   b. Are there any current transition plans with districts? If not, what would it look like? If so, please expand.

8. Ask any follow up questions for clarification.

*All questions will be probed to encourage the participant to further expand upon their experiences and perspectives.*
From: Holbrook, Victoria On Behalf Of RAGS Research Compliance  
Sent: Wednesday, December 02, 2015 1:40 PM  
To: Hackney, Catherine  
Cc: 'mcenker@kent.edu'  
Subject: IRB Level I, category 2 approval for Protocol application #15-604 - please retain this email for your records

RE: Protocol #15-604 - entitled “Bridging the Gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education”

We have assigned your application the following IRB number: 15-604. Please reference this number when corresponding with our office regarding your application.

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:

- Exemption 2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation

This application was approved on December 2, 2015.

***Submission of annual review reports is not required for Level 1/Exempt projects. We do NOT stamp Level I protocol consent documents.***

If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or includes activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted. Visit our website for modification forms.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-2704 or 330.672.8058.

Kent State University Office of Research Compliance  
224 Cartwright Hall | Fax 330.672.2658

Victoria Holbrook | Graduate Assistant | 330.672.2384 | vholbroo@kent.edu  
Tricia Sloan | Administrator | 330.672.2181 | psloan1@kent.edu  
Kevin McCreary | Assistant Director | 330.672.8058 | kmccrea1@kent.edu  
Paulette Washko | Director | 330.672.2704 | pwashko@kent.edu

For links to obtain general information, access forms, and complete required training, visit our website at www.kent.edu/research.
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education
Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney
Co-Investigator: Mandy A. Miller, Doctoral Candidate

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative, comparative case study will be to understand how PreK-12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from their prior IEPs or PreK-12 504 plans. This study will explore how PreK-12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year college students with special needs.

Procedures
Study participants will be asked to do the following in order for investigators to have access to the data necessary to comply with the approved study design:
1. Interview: Interviews will completed in a face to face format and be semi-structured and responsive in nature. All interviews will be digitally audio recorded and last up to sixty minutes. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by an online transcription company.
2. Follow up phone interviews: If necessary, the researcher will contact the participant by phone to clarify any themes or other questionable findings. These interviews will also be digitally audio recorded and transcribed by an online transcription company.
3. Documents and archival records- Participants will be encouraged to provide documents and archival records they find would benefit the case study.
4. Verification of data- Participants will be provided with a transcript of their interviews to ensure the data is correct.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography
1. The following data collection activities will be audio recorded: individual face to face interviews and any needed follow up phone interviews.
2. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim.
3. Participants will be given the transcription of their interview(s).
4. The data gathered from these recordings may be used other research regarding professional perspectives of successful transitions for students with disabilities, published articles, books, professional meetings, or presentations.
6. Recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study. Transcripts will be saved in a locked office cabinet with no identifiable information of the participants.
Benefits
The potential benefits of participating in this study may include: understanding PreK-12 special education administrators and SAS personnel’s perspectives on the successful transition of students with disabilities, may provide us with the necessary information to bridge the P-20 communication gap. Your participation may support professionals as they develop a more comprehensive and specific transition plan between school districts and the university to benefit the students. Participation may also support professional development opportunities for PreK-12 special education staff and SAS personnel. Furthermore, your participation will help to extend the understanding of transition of students with disabilities into higher education and help SAS offices understand the difficulties for students as they transition from one educational environment to the next.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

Privacy and Confidentiality
No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you.

Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

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

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

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Mandy Miller, Doctoral Candidate at 330-289-6590 or Dr. Catherine Hackney, Associate Dean Administrative Affairs and Graduate Education at 330-672-0552. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Participant Signature

Date
APPENDIX C

AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM
Appendix C

Audio-Recording Consent Form

AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM

STUDY: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Catherine Hackney

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE/INTERVIEWER: Mandy Miller

I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview about by experiences and perspectives on the transitioning of students with disabilities from high school to higher education as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Mandy Miller may audio-tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

________________________________________  _______________________________
Signature                                    Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to listen to the recording    _____ do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Mandy Miller may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project _____ publication _____ presentation at professional meetings

________________________________________  _______________________________
Signature                                    Date
APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL
Participant Recruitment Email

Study Title: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities to higher education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Mandy A. Miller, Doctoral Candidate

October 20, 2015

Dear ________________,

Based on the amount of students from your school district that attend Kent State University, as the special education administrator, you qualify to serve as a participant in the research study that I am conducting for my dissertation that will begin November 2015.

I am studying the perspectives of PreK-12 special education administrators and higher education Student Accessibility Services personnel by posing the question: How can the perspectives of PreK-12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to an understanding and creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK-12 schools to higher education?

I am conducting a case study using a three to five school districts who have large amounts of students represented at Kent State according to the Institutional Research Office of Kent State University. Not only am I interviewing Student Accessibility Service personnel, but also the special education leaders in identified school districts.

As a participant, you will be asked to provide the following:
1. A face to face interview, up to sixty minutes, at a mutually agreed upon location
2. A follow up phone interview (if necessary)
3. Any documents or archival records you feel would contribute to the study such as your job description, statistics, or progress monitoring reports related to transition
4. Verification of data- you will be provided with the transcript of your interview

Please consider letting your voice be heard through this important study. I’m available for any questions or comments you have. Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Mandy Miller
Doctoral Candidate
K-12 Educational Administration
330-289-6590
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Study Title: Bridging the gap: The transitioning of students with disabilities

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Mandy Miller

Research Question: How can the perspectives of PreK-12 special education leaders and SAS professionals lead to the creation of a plan to assist traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from PreK-12 schools to higher education?

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative case study will be to understand how PreK-12 special education administrators and higher education SAS professionals prepare traditionally-aged, first-year students with disabilities to transition from high school to higher education. This study will explore how PreK-12 special education administrators and SAS professionals can contribute to successful transitions of traditionally-aged, first-year students with special needs.

Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place:</td>
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<td>Date:</td>
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Demographics

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization Pseudonym</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Typology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in position</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial self-identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious self-identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic self-identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Descriptions

Descriptive traits of the participant:

Descriptive traits of the physical setting:
Interview Questions

1. Tell me how long you have been in your position and your experiences, professional and/or personal, that brought you to this position.

2. Describe your leadership and why you lead this way. (Processual Leadership Theory)

   a. Tell me about any specific instances that helped shape the leader you are today.

   b. How is the context of your current workplace shaping the way you lead?

   c. How are you shaping the context of your workplace?

3. Do you perceive any differences between the laws governing PreK-12 versus higher education for students with disabilities? (Law)

   a. If yes- Please expand upon the difference. How do you help to ensure students understand the differences?

   b. If no- What resources would be beneficial to you, as a professional, to help you understand the differences in the laws?

4. What does a successful transition of students with disabilities look like? (Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Law)

   a. Who is involved in the transition at your organization? What roles do they play in transition?

   b. How would students respond to this question?
5. How does your institution help students and their families transition to higher education? (Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Law)

   a. What is your specific role in the process?

   b. What obstacles do you face?

   c. What helps, or would help, the process flow more smoothly?

   d. How do you envision the ideal process of transitioning from high school to higher education?

   e. How would families respond to the question?

6. Explain how you determine what supports (academically, emotionally, etc.) a student will need in order to transition to higher education. (Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Law) Probes: students, families

7. How can PreK-12 special education leaders contribute to a successful transition? How can SAS personnel contribute a successful transition? (Processual Leadership Theory, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Law)

   a. Where do you perceive the problem in the transition process to higher education?

   b. Are there any current transition plans with districts? If not, what would it look like? If so, please expand.

8. Ask any follow up questions for clarification.

*All questions will be probed to encourage the participant to further expand upon their experiences and perspectives.*

Thank you for your time. I will be in contact with you when the transcription of the interview is completed. I appreciate your willingness to participate and look forward to sharing the results with you.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents:</th>
<th>Archival Records:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job descriptions</td>
<td>charts</td>
</tr>
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<td>public records</td>
<td>organizational records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>Others:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflective Notes for Research Journal:**
APPENDIX F

THEMES BY PARTICIPANT
Appendix F

Themes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Laws</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Transition Plan Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's a very small office that we have, so I think that that kind of changes the way any of us would lead and our leadership philosophy versus maybe some of the other larger departments on campus. We're down three staff members, three full-time staff members, and we weren't really big to begin with. Working with the students and the number of students that we serve about 1,200 students. It's just myself, Amy, and a graduate assistantship at 20 hours a week. Amy has a lot of responsibilities that lead her outside of the office. And then I also serve as one of the Deputy Title IX Coordinators, so that pulls me out of the office a little bit too.</td>
<td>I think probably one of the biggest differences in what is a lot of times confusing to students and their parents would be that K-12 disability law idea is all about this student being identified at the school level as a person with a disability. And then when you get to your post-secondary options, it then becomes students have to self-identify, and that's very confusing to a lot of students especially students who are coming from a K-12 education environment and/or parental environment where they didn't have to be very involved in the IEP process or the accommodation process in anything really related to that,</td>
<td>I would say successful transitions are really starting before the student even determines where they're going to go to college, and that's in making sure that they understand that they have a disability, and they have an understanding of how that disability might impact them, and they're able to talk about that. Also, successful transitioning is, to me, interviewing different disabilities services offices at the schools in which they're interested in because certainly not all offices are the same, and we're going to have different services and different resources. And the student needs to make sure that what they're looking for need wise is going to be met by that office, and that might determine which school they go to. And then also meeting with those disability services offices early in prepping for what accommodations they might need.</td>
<td>Through the years that I have been here, it's always been a small office. Unfortunately, we probably haven't had and currently don't have the staff that we need to be able to serve our students exceptionally well, and do above and beyond programming, and things that we wish and hope for our first students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So right now, we're just trying to get through. This semester is a lot different compared to what it would normally be, but I guess my leadership philosophy is more along the lines of kind of getting in there and doing everything with the people that I supervise. I feel like I'm very approachable and hands on in making sure that the staff who don't have as much of experience or who may not be as knowledgeable on the university policies, procedures that we don't have a good foundation or a good understanding of maybe what their disability actually is and how it impacts them in the learning environment. And then when they get to a college or a university, it's just shocking to them that they would have to seek out services on their own and that their teachers didn't know in advance of their disability and how it's going to impact them, and how they were going to change up the | So planning for your accommodations early, I think, is probably the most beneficial step that a student can take in addition to interviewing. | We talk about this differences, and students have quite a lengthy time period where they can ask questions and share thoughts and ideas, and how it's going to be different for them, and we can kind of respond to that. I think that if schools did more almost trainings to their students like that, I think that it wouldn't be such an eye-opener when they came to a post-secondary environment. |
have, have the open door where they can come in and we can help them at any point.

curriculum, and all of that kind of stuff.

nothing is ever black and white here

We do our best to get out to high schools as much as we possibly can with the stuff that we have. We pretty much always say yes to any the invites we get to do college fairs or resource tables or anything for our local high schools.

it's that kind of team approach that we can kind of work with that student to make sure that we're serving them to the best of our ability. So really, everybody has a pretty strong role.

We don't have someone that we could dedicate as a resource person for all of the students that we see.

So I just try to make myself as open as possible to the staff here.

So I think in that environment, it's serving the students really well, and it's serving the objectives of that school district. But when they come to such a different place as post-secondary is, it doesn't always serve those students in the best ways that they could have because they are not as independent as what they might need to be at the college level.

would be covered by one of what we call, counseling staff, just because we've got the most experience in registering the students, and knowing what processes they need to follow, and are probably the most familiar with the broad range of types of disabilities.

We talk about the differences between K-12, higher ed. Here's some of the things that you think about here. Bring in a student panel of the students who are already here, successful. These are the things that they should be thinking about from that student perspective. We did that for a number of years. It was well received for the students who attended, but it was pretty hard to get the students to attend. Maybe because it was two days. Maybe because we asked for it was fee service although it was pretty nil. It was mainly just to cover their meals and housing, if they needed housing.

I have worked with some who were not helpful or supportive, so I'm just trying to emulate what I would like to see from my director.

So it takes a year, three semesters, four semesters for them really to get a grasp of the differences, and sometimes at that point, it's too late and the students might be dismissed or the parents might pull them and say this environment isn't for you.

The really successful students, I would say that they follow what I suggested to a tee. They are familiar with their disability, how it impacts them in an academic environment. They know what works for them and what doesn't work, accommodation-wise, and they have a strong foundation in being able to advocate for themselves. Talking with those instructors, going to tutoring resources, utilizing services that are available to students here on campus and not being afraid to utilize those. Interviewing those disability services offices, finding the best fit for them. I would say probably just resources, mainly just staffing. Sometimes we're so inundated with the students that we have here currently. We don't get to focus on the students who will be here next year, who will be here in two years. So I think if we just have more staff, obviously, we wouldn't feel that rush to just get through the semester and make sure everybody is getting what they need.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>We are just trying to get through and serve our students to the best of our ability this semester. So, there are numerous tasks that I'm taking over right now in service areas that I'm taking over right now that we probably wouldn't have an assistant director focus on maybe, if this was the ideal time, and we're fully staffed, and had all of these extra things. But certainly, it is just all hands on deck at this point.</th>
<th>And then also maybe just the types of accommodations that K-12 can implement within their IEP or 504s versus what the student is required to do here</th>
<th>A lot of students I work with seem to be forced, for lack of a better word, by their parents to register with our office.</th>
<th>When we're fully staffed we still don't have enough, but now that we are not fully staffed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Well, hopefully, [chuckles] I am showing positivity to keep everyone as motivated as possible in light of all of the extra duties, and tasks, and chores that have been added to their already busy schedule. I'm sure that doesn't happen every day with a positive attitude</td>
<td>Maybe in K-12 setting, that curriculum might have been changed up a bit, so that they could probably have been pretty successful.</td>
<td>Other students come in and will say, &quot;Well, I had an IEP or a 504 in high school, so they told me to come here.&quot; Then when I say, &quot;How can I help you?&quot; or, &quot;What are you looking for? What do you need from us?&quot; You get that blink stare.</td>
<td>Obviously more staff in the office. That would just allow us to do a lot more. We could do orientation events specific to our students. We could do outreach to the local high schools a lot more so than just being the ones who are responding to invites. We could do sessions like that.</td>
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<td>I think that that helps to shape the office culture and morale at times just because we are tasked with doing a fairly stressful job, just because of the nature of our students, and the issues that they might face on a daily basis that is also impacting their academics. I think that that has had a positive impact especially for people who are coming outside of higher ed, where you probably don't have to wear so many hats. It's one specific role that you have to do, and you're not required to step out and look at that. I think it also helps to just show commitment to the office, and to the university, and to our students, and I think that that kind of goes a long way in working with our students and them knowing that we're</td>
<td>But obviously, it needs to start much, much earlier, middle school age.</td>
<td>I think students who just never had to advocate for themselves or really just having an understanding of how their IEP process worked high school, I think that those are the students who really have a difficult time and seem to struggle more so than other students.</td>
<td>If there was an ideal situation, I think that the transition process would begin middle school age. For students who had IEPs, 504s, they would have processes in place for a better understanding of one having a disability, and how it impacts them, and knowing what disabilities are.</td>
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here to help them and do whatever it is that we need to do to make sure that they're as successful as possible.

not being super aware with K through 12 terminology, but it's more of the hand-holding, where they would sit down with their resource person and that person would say, "Oh, my gosh, you didn't do homework number two. It's due in 20 minutes. You need to get this done." Or, "Have you planned out your study guide? Have you done this, this, or this?" And I think that that is something that a lot of K through 12 schools are doing, and it's very helpful to the students in that environment, and it helps them to be more successful than probably what they could be doing on their own without such a supportive environment.

they seem to have a decent understanding of how their disability impacts them in an academic environment, and they can at least speak to that. If not, the whole meeting at least, I'd say 75% of that, and then mom and dad kind of fill in where needed. And those students also seeks services, so they're not afraid to go to tutoring services. They're not afraid to seek support from their academic adviser or they come back here if they need help.

So just having that self-awareness and then understanding different learning styles, and different processes for learning, and implementing that learning, and what accommodations work well for them. And then I think also some school districts are better at this than others at least that we've worked with. Having the student when they're at the high school level be more integral to the 504, IEP meeting versus just kind of focusing on parents and resource folks at the school. So Just having the student be more involved.

have to be what ADA reference is otherwise qualified. So there's probably going to be some students who choose majors that are just not going to be for them, regardless however hard they try.

With our limited resources, staff-wise right now, we probably don't do as much as what we should be doing for the level of students who are coming here. We used to, at one point, have an orientation, like a two-day orientation for students and their parents.

And then obviously, at the college level, we need to do more outreach

We also have publications about the differences between IDEA versus ADA.

Participating in the panels that we get invited to talk about transitioning and the intakes that we do.

Probably similar to the transition fair at the Stark campus, but be a little bit more inclusive of the other schools that are here because we all have such different perspective and different resources and things.

in the students' enrollment interview, when they first come here to register with us, I know that we always touch upon some of those differences and we talk about, "These are things that probably happened for you when you were in high school, and these are some of the differences that you might

With the limited that we do, I mean it's mainly the intakes and doing resource tables, and fairs, and some things like that.

us, getting out there more and hosting transition resource fairs specifically for transitioning high schoolers to the college level, I think, would be more helpful. Obviously, if this was like the perfect world, we would have these transition fairs numerous times throughout the year to catch everybody,
experience here. Let's talk about those. Have you thought about how you're going to interact with your instructors? And explain to them that you are a student registered with Student Accessibility services for a documented disability. "This is how my disability might impact me in the learning environment or this is how my disability might impact my learning capabilities.

Especially students who are involved in lots of activities or who are athletes, they'll have more difficulty getting to a certain event than others. And then perfect world probably having resource, what I would just call resource people here in the office that could be as there's a walk-in basis that can help with tutoring and can help with almost like a peer mentor type role, where they can help the students expand on the skills that they've learned in high school and expand them to what they might need to still know here at this level, and not have that a pay for service.

I kind of feel like they're just out there in the wind kind of floundering and wondering why they're not being successful in their courses, and why they're failing their first semester of classes

This really successful students that I work with, their families would be on board with-- my son or daughter, they have an understanding of what a learning disability is and how it impacts them. They know what accommodations work. They've been out there looking at different schools. Once they determine that a school would be great for them, then they start looking at the Disability Services Office. The student is a lot more hands on. Families where students aren't the most successful, the parents aren't really all that either interested in this area or just didn't think about needing services at the college level. We have a number of families who don't have their children registered at their college level because the student may have said something along the lines of, "I'm going to a new place. I just want to start fresh. I don't want to utilize accommodations. I don't want to be different. I don't want to have a
disability.” And the family goes along with that, which is supportive in its own right, but probably not the best idea to do when you're already transitioning from so many different aspects of your life and being independent, and then also you're changing your learning environment too. So it really varies. You can totally tell what the family is like just based off how the student interacts with us, so I think it would be pretty similar to how I answer the student question.

| specific accommodations that are probably really helpful in high school but not the best here would be one that's like a modification in the curriculum | So it starts with that intake, what we call an intake interview, and we sit with the student. Parents are obviously allowed, or guardians, or whatever support people the students want to bring. Sometimes they'll bring someone from high school, if that person is willing to attend. We talk about the student's disability with the student. We require documentation of the student's disability, so we might see an MIV, or an ETR, or something like that. I usually try not to read that before I meet the student because I want to gather all of my information from the student. The student is the one with disability, has different learning styles. They should be the one to best describe to me how it might impact them or what they need and what hasn't worked well for them in the past. We'll sit down with the student. We'll talk about nature of disability, how it impacts them in the academic environment. We'll talk about services that they've used previously, services that they want to continue while they're here and how those work. And then we'll talk about resources that | If we could just have designated resource folks that were kind of like a schedule and then had walk-in hours certain times throughout the week, anybody could just come in for whatever issue they might have. And it might be something where the student gets referred out to other departments because we are such a large campus, we have so many different resources. Obviously, if it was a good counseling type thing, we would resource them out to the correct department for that. Or if that was a concern with they've lost their financial aid, or now they're no longer eligible for a scholarship, we would get them set up with that specific person to best help them. But I think for a lot of things, a resource person like that could be helpful. |
It seems that when they get here in the classes that the students would be requesting that type of accommodation in, that assessment method is integral into the way that the student is being assessed. So the learning objectives and the way that the students are meeting those learning objectives, it probably doesn't make the most sense to cut down four choices to two. Or take an essay-based exam where the student has the opportunity to really expand upon their knowledge, rather than just taking information in and kind of spitting it back out. They'd have to apply it and synthesize that information, and turning that essay-based exam into a multiple choice exam.

After getting a good idea from the student about what their learning style is, how their disability impacts their learning abilities, and what types of accommodations they have used in the past, once I feel like I have a good foundation or knowledge on that, I'd then go back and I read the documentation. I'll say, "Yeah, that's exactly what they said." Or sometimes the students will leave out huge chunks of info. They'd be like, "I have ADD," and then really, they have a learning disability that is in written expression, like it will be super specific, and they just were totally off base. So then, that would involve me meeting with the student again or at least having a follow-up phone conversation to try to get to the root of what is impacting them academic-wise, even if they don't know the name specifically. Let's just try to figure out so that we're both on the same page.

When maybe probably there should have been, and there might have been had it just been a disability specific transition fair, and it was just 10 or 20 different colleges that had tables there, and it was all about-- it was just focused on students with disabilities.

I'm sure you've seen this in higher ed - sometimes things don't get fixed until there's a problem.

I have heard them specifically say the students, "This is your life at the college level. This is your education. You have to have an understanding of how your disability impacts you, and how that's going to look like. It's your responsibility now. So, I think just involving the students more would be helpful to the students themselves when they're transitioning, wherever they're going. Maybe they don't go to a college. Maybe they do a trade school or they just go right into an apprenticeship. I think that having that foundation, and that knowledge of who they are as a student, not just as a we probably would know the disability folks at the high school by name. If not first name, we should at least kind of know their last names, so we can figure out where they're coming from. And we obviously would have a working relationship. So maybe if they had a student who was interested in Kent State, but it was a tiebreaker between Akron, maybe we would go out to the school and meet directly with that student or maybe the high school person would be on a conference call with the student and their parent. Something like that when the student and parent was here. We don't have that.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>person, is really beneficial to them.</th>
<th>relationship with high schools.</th>
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<td>But this semester, we had such a large class of freshmen students. We've been booked anywhere from two weeks out to one week out, and that's been consistent the whole semester. When you're having a problem or there's an issue and you need help, you can't wait two weeks to get in to see someone. Now obviously, those students could have e-mailed us or called us but not everybody works that way. And a lot of times, they want to have that face to face interaction to really explain, this is what's going on, this is what I need, where can I go from here.</td>
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<td>I think that there are issues on both sides. High school or earlier, not preparing the students well enough to be independent, colleges not having the resources or personnel or maybe some schools just don't feel like it's necessary to reach out and do transitioning events more frequently than just when we're invited to go to tables.</td>
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<td>And then they also think that, just parents. I think that right now, we're seeing a lot of parents that are hand holding their child in doing everything for them and that is certainly understandable with their schedule, with student schedules nowadays.</td>
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<td>We don't reach out because we don't have the time or the resources. We cover what we can, and I'm sure it's the same with the high school, you probably don't have the time with the resources</td>
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APPENDIX G
CODES BY PARTICIPANT
## Appendix G

### Codes by Participant

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John evolving IDEA vs. ADA and 504 successful transition outreach resources
impact responsibility parental involvement responsibility collaboration
inclusive early planning resources/staffing confusion responsibility
flexibility accommodations and modifications supportive collaboration
supportive self-advocacy early planning communication
efficiency team approach self-advocacy
openness student centered
visibility responsibility
morality reflective
context
influence

Kathy relationships responsibility early planning resources resources
openness IDEA vs. ADA and 504 self-advocacy communication collaboration
balanced early planning access confusion/responsibilities responsibility
morality/humanistic self-advocacy successful transition outreach communication
influence parental involvement team approach case manager
respect team approach student centered collaboration

collaboration impact of the learning environment resources
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Molly
- collaboration
- IDEA vs. ADA and 504
- successful transition
- communication
- collaboration
- relationships
- self-advocacy
- early planning
- collaboration
- relationships
- impact of the learning environment
- team approach
- navigation
- service
- accommodations and modifications
- resources
- connections
- disparity
- parental involvement
- case manager
- goals
- access
- confusion
- communication
- relationships

Susan
- openness
- IDEA vs. ADA and 504
- early planning
- communication
- collaboration
- successful transitions
- collaboration
- responsibilities
- support
- team approach
- outreach
- service
- collaboration
- self-advocacy
- parental involvement
- connections
- relationships
- confusion
- resources
- case manager
- politics
- communication
- confusion
- accommodations and modifications
- relationships
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