A Case Study: Exploring African American Parental Involvement of Students with Disabilities in Transition Planning in an Urban School District

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Abstract

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A Case Study: Exploring African American Parental Involvement of Students with Disabilities in Transition Planning

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The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore African American parental involvement of students with disabilities during transition planning in urban high schools. Through an explanatory case study the author seeks to gain a better understanding of parental involvement during the transition process in preparation for employment or college. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis and analyzed through Joyce Epstein’s (1995) parental involvement framework to explain the central phenomenon of how African American parental involvement occurs in urban city schools. Themes identified were: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs of the student; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights. Implications are relative to students with disabilities, parents, teachers, administration, and the field of counseling.
I dedicate this dissertation to young African American girls who have a dream! Continue to believe and strive and when it gets tough, rely on God for your help and strength! You can, too!
Acknowledgments

To God be the Glory! “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. “Jeremiah 29:11.

Special thanks to my parents Shirl Hicks and Christopher Hicks who supported and believed in me throughout my schooling. This journey would have not been possible without their unwavering support. In times of doubt, my parents taught me that I can do anything I want in life. I love you both for your constant support. To my brother Christian Hicks, thank you for supporting me from the beginning and your constant encouragement. I love you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement of African Americans with disabilities in transition planning and strengthen services for those individuals, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study of six African American parents of students with learning disabilities attending a single urban and charter school district in Ohio. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of parental guides issued by the school district. There is a lack of clarity defining parental involvement; therefore, the researcher analyzed data through the lens of Epstein’s (1995) parental involvement framework: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. African American students comprise 56.5% of the student body and 56.2% of students with disabilities in Ohio (Kids Ohio, 2014).

The Ohio Department of Education reported that 35% of students with disabilities received high school diplomas by standard requirements, implying that 65% graduated by other means. Further, the 2015-2016 data reported that one percent of students with disabilities graduated with meeting their Individualized Education Program in the state of Ohio (Graduation for Students with Disabilities, n.d., slide 10). These data suggest that less than 45% of students with disabilities under an IEP statewide are completing high school which indicates that the IEP process needs improvement towards supporting students while in school. This study’s goals is to understand the parents’ experiences so as to provide better support mechanisms, using the experiences as a learning tool for counselors.
The author of this case study seeks to examine African American parents in an urban school district in the Midwest. According to Council of Zillow City Schools (2015), the achievement gap has decreased for African Americans in the school district. The tremendous growth of student success has been recognized over the past few years, in particular the growing numbers of African American males who are graduating and completing college. This chapter will review the background of the study, statement of problem, research purpose, significance, selected methodology, and common terms used throughout the paper.

Background of the Study

**Historical legislation.** Historically, the United States has excluded people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities have been known to be one of the disadvantaged groups in the United States. In support of inclusion in society, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is to promote individuals with disabilities by increasing programs that support employment opportunities. The federal government served an integral role by developing independent living centers to serve individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). Once the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 passed, it increased conversations among policy makers regarding the support for people with disabilities. As the dialogue increased, greater attention was focused towards the education system. The uniqueness of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is that it does not require students to attend a public school (Discrimination Section 504, n. d). This is a great benefit to parents who home school their children for various reasons. Legislation rarely addressed support for students with the transition planning process and as such specific
transition planning legislation was imperative. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, enacted in 2004 (IDEIA; 2004), defines transition service as:

A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that: a) Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school-to-post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; b) Is based upon the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests; and c) Includes instruction, related services, special education, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(3)]).

**History of African Americans as marginalized groups.** There are documented experiences of African Americans with disabilities relating to existing prejudices, biases, and dis appropriations in the education sphere (Blanchett, 2006; Patton, 1998; Skiba, Staudinger, Simmons, & Azziz, 2006). Howard (2008) examined the experiences of African American males and the role of race in their schooling. Through storytelling, the participants shared their school experiences. The results suggest that the students were appreciative of this opportunity because it created a safe space for them to discuss race. Rowley and Wright (2011) recognized several factors that contribute towards the gap of academic achievement between White and Black students, such as: school environment,
role of teachers, and family and peer relationships. Rowley and Wright conducted a study examining the relationship between race and reading scores. The researchers found that Caucasians scored higher than African Americans on exams, attributed to African Americans being more likely to lack resources essential for children success in the home environment; however, the researchers did not identify what resources (p. 97). While there are known gaps of achievement in African Americans, Ford and Moore (2013) noted the need for educators to be more culturally responsive, particularly in urban districts.

Over many decades, the dialogue of overrepresentation of minority students in special education has been recognized as a looming problem in the education system (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Ford & Russo, 2016; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014). This remains a timely issue, evidenced by the work of Ford and Russo (2016) contending that African American children are the only group that is over identified in the special education system (Ford & Russo, 2016). There are few cases reported on the overrepresentation of African Americans. Ford and Russo (2016) noted that there has been only one case of African American parents being concerned as it relates to overrepresentation and IDEA. According to The United States Department of Education (2015) in the 2011-2012 school year, Black students were 14.4% of the total population, yet 19% of the students who were served under IDEA (United States, 2015, p. 3).

Overrepresentation among African American students remains an ongoing topic in the education sphere (Ford & Russo, 2016), yet there remains a need to explore the underlying issue. For example, overrepresentation can imply that African American
students are assessed from a deficient viewpoint from teachers or other professionals who serve children with disabilities. Deficient thinking suggest that African American students are “problematic” (Kim, 2009); therefore, one can assume that behaviors are associated with a mental health disorder. Hence, the discussion of misdiagnosis versus over diagnosis among African American children (Burkett, Morris, Courtney, Anthony, Shambley-Ebron, 2015). There is a possibility that teachers are projecting diagnosis on African American children whether they are aware exhibiting implicit biases, due to the ongoing narrative overrepresentation.

Lott-Daley (2013) conducted a study exploring reasons of ongoing overrepresentation in the special education system. Lott- Daley (2013) explored an urban school district by interviewing parents, teachers and administrators. Based on parents’ narratives, the researcher identified several reasons for overrepresentation: as labels for students; lack of communication from school; and lack of mainstreaming opportunities (p.31). On the other hand, the teachers in the study believe it is due to socioeconomic status and lack of parental involvement. One of the teachers in the study expressed that often teachers have existing biases of students who come from a lower social economic status.

Transition planning. The IDEIA act is integral for providing inclusive transition planning for students with disabilities in high schools (Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003). The transition process typically involves administration, special education teachers, students, and parents. Transition planning for this review is described as transitioning from high school to work or college. The Individual Education Plan is
designed to ensure that students are receiving the appropriate services in school for success and that will lead to successful post-graduation plans. While the plan is implemented, there are factors that contribute to the success of students with disabilities. Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer and Clark (2006) explored career goals of 72 African American students in an urban district and found that African American students face many challenges when they are planning for the next steps after high school such as: lack of resources, lack of career-oriented role models, and institutional racial discrimination (p. 20).

Kosine (2007) gathered information assessing the gaps of post-secondary education for student with learning disabilities and found that degree attainment in high school is less likely for students with disabilities than students without disabilities. The lack of degree attainment among students with disabilities may be an indicator of poor transition planning. Identifying and understanding the needs of students with severe disabilities reflects a high-quality transition process (Carter, Brock, Trainor, & 2014). Moreover, there is a push to offer social support for students throughout high school in urban district (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). This speaks to the significance of parental involvement and increased community partnerships particularly in urban school communities. For example, implementing partnerships between school and community agencies creates stronger supports for families. Further, outreach will allow services to be more accessible for parents.

**Parental involvement.** Transition services have evolved over the years, yet there is still a lack of parental involvement amongst African American parents in the transition
planning process (Brandon & Brown, 2009 Brandon, 2007; Griffin, 2012; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007). Koonce and Harper (2005) provided a conceptual review identifying and discussing the barriers of African American families regarding parental involvement in the school system. Common barriers were identified as negative school experiences, intimidation by school personnel, and inconvenient meeting times (p. 55). Moreover, parental involvement has proved to have a direct association with the outcome of children (Jeynes, 2007; Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011; Koonce & Harper, 2005). This is increasingly important for children of a minority group. (Jeynes, 2007; Robinson, & Volpe, 2015). They are more likely to have higher chances of being marginalized in the education system. Koonce and Harper (2005) found it pertinent to mention that some African American parents could potentially be modeling behavior in society that has defined and further suggested that their participation looks different.

With common conceptions of parental involvement described, there is a lack of literature clearly defining parent participation for minority groups in high schools. Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, and Fonseca (2015) urged for stronger transition programs to engage families in high poverty areas (p. 40). Parental involvement is determined by an individual’s perception and is often skewed by attitudes of society towards minority groups. Oppressed groups are often faced with negative stigma and attitudes which affect the way minorities are treated. The next section will describe a parental involvement framework that explains how parents can support their children both at school and at home.
Theoretical Rationale

Epstein (1995) designed a model exploring parental involvement of families in the education system. Epstein (2004) described involvement in six categories: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. This model was viewed for acknowledging areas of involvement outside the school setting. While this model has been criticized for the lack of cultural competence (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013), it empowers parents at school and home and it still places the responsibility on the teachers to contact parents. Moreover, Bower, and Griffin (2011) assert that this model does not reflect advocacy efforts in a way that African American parents build community; for example, in the churches. It is known that that African Americans often fellowship in church settings. While the researcher recognizes the argument that this model neglects the viewpoints of minority groups, this model still applied to discussion on minority families’ ways of parental participation because the parents in this study discussed their involvement outside the classroom.

Epstein (1995) presents a model that described several ways in which families can be involved. This model explained the nature of involvement outside the classroom. Successful transition planning is critical for students with disabilities, yet the transition team is often lacking weighty decision makers in the process. Students with disabilities require unique individualization of service plan development relating to their disability. Hence, having a counselor’s input in the process of developing individualized service plans could be productive, as counselors are familiar with the resources that support
students with disabilities. Yet surprisingly, counselors are often underutilized in the planning process, and their role and contribution are lacking in the literature. This dissertation seeks to study and to explain African American parents’ perceptions of parental involvement, in the hope that such an understanding will provide evidence for entry for the inclusion of culturally competent counselors. Such a culturally informed study will contribute to bridging the communication between African American parents and school systems in the practice of serving students with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, approximately 6.4 million children and youth are receiving services through the special education system (United States Department of Education, 2016). Parental involvement is significantly lower among African American parents as opposed to their Caucasian counterparts during the transition process (Brandon, 2007; Griffin, 2012; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007). Common barriers noted were related to lower socioeconomic status, lack of communication with school professionals, preconceived notions on behalf of teachers, and the lack of resources. Studies have quantitatively described experiences of students (Williams & Portman, 2014), educators (Landmark et al., 2013), and parent perspectives (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2015), yet there is a lack of recent literature sharing narratives from the parents of how they describe their parental process.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA; 2004) supported parental involvement in the education system. Historically, students of African descent from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced inequities compared to their Caucasian
counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005, p. 196). Brownstein (2016) claims that African American students are gaining opportunities; however, it remains that African Americans students are falling behind Caucasian counterparts. Brownstein asserts that about 87% of Caucasian students are graduating on time and about 73% of African American students (p.7). There is a need for better advocacy for African American transition-aged youths as well as parental involvement. Burke and Sandman (2015) proclaimed that parents serve as experts on behalf of their children with disabilities; consequently, they have a right to be involved in the transition process.

**Counselors’ entry.** Moreover, the usefulness of counselors during the transition planning process is lacking. Hence, the researchers’ advocacy for counselor inclusion. Mental health, school and rehabilitation counselors serve an intricate role in transition planning. According to the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2013), more than 60% of students with disabilities are unlikely to complete school. This creates an imperative opportunity to support the needs of students in the transition planning process. While school counselors exist in the planning process, increased collaboration with mental health and rehabilitation counselors can increase the efficacy of transition planning. Students with disabilities have unique needs which rehabilitation counselors are trained to provide (Plotner & Dymond, 2017).

The counseling profession plays a unique role towards serving students with various disabilities. School counselors are commonly a fixture in the education system, while clinical mental health counselors are trained to work with clients with diagnoses of various disabilities. Rehabilitation counselors provide another unique lens as they offer
students with disability vocational training and practical life skills (Middleton, Robinson, & Mumin, 2010). Transition services are implemented to support students’ goals as they prepare for the next steps whether employment or post-secondary education. Transition planning requires a collaborative process involving professionals; such as special education teachers, administrators, parents, transition counselors. Mental health, school, and rehabilitation counselors each have unique training which can strengthen the efficacy of the process.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore African American parental involvement during transition planning in Midwestern urban high schools for their children with disabilities and inform educators and policy makers where gaps exist. For example, the lack of African American parents describing their involvement as opposed to others description of perceived barriers. The urban school district setting, and the population of African Americans bind the case. This research will examine the transition system experienced by the participants in an urban setting and provide an understanding of their roles presented through their personal stories. Joyce Epstein’s theory (1995) which describes parental involvement in six common ways in the education system will be used as the theoretical guide for this study. Epstein’s model includes activities such as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher will provide implications for and create effective strategies to work with parents during the transition process.
Research Questions

The research questions explored involvement of African American parents of high school students with disabilities during the transition planning process. The central research question is, how do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools? The study focused on one urban school district in the Midwest. The district is composed of 56.05% of African American students. In Ohio, urban is described by large population and enrollment, high number of minority students, average parental educational attainment, and high population density (Typology of Ohio, 2013). To examine the central research question, the researcher proposed two sub research questions.

Sub Researcher’s Questions

1) What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning?

2) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program?

Significance

Over the past 25 years, research indicated African American parents are less involved in their child’s transition planning (Brandon, 2007; Brandon & Brown, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Harry, 1992). There is a lack of narratives from African American parents to describe their experience from their perspectives during the transition planning. For example, most studies come from the perspective of overall education, yet lack addressing procedures and policies. The current study will inform the field of African American parental involvement of their own perspectives. In a review of the research
literature this chapter presented several assumptions, such as African Americans display lower involvement, and this study hopes to explore: to explain how parents support their children outside of the school; cultural mismatch in the school system; and the relationship between teacher, parent, and child. This case study research, however, is inductive and emergent and hopes to uncover new findings from the individuals at the heart of this study: African American parents of students with disabilities in an urban school district. While many studies (Brandon, 2007; Brandon & Brown, 2009; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007) noted barriers for African American parental participation, such as, lower socioeconomic status, lack of communication with school professionals, preconceived notions on behalf of teachers, and the lack of resources, this study is different from existing studies as it focuses on the depth and breadth of parents’ narratives.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. This research study explored only one urban school district. Also, while not anticipated, this study only shared reflections from mothers of students with disabilities.

Delimitations

The researcher identified delimitations in this study. This study did not reflect direct experiences from students with disabilities; it focused particularly on parents’ perceptions. The researcher chose to focus on an urban city school district. Therefore, this study will not describe varying experiences in suburban and rural areas.
Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore African American parental involvement of students with disabilities in transition planning. Through a qualitative case study method, the researcher sought to answer these questions:

1) How do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools?

2) How do African American parents perceive their roles in transition planning?

3) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program?

Qualitative research enables researchers to gain depth and breadth of lived experiences. Data can be collected through interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus groups. This methodology solicited responses from individuals to share lived experience through their narratives. The researcher entered the environment seeking an emergent experience. While the literature asserted that African American parents lack involvement, as a researcher it is important to enter the environment with limited expectations and allow the data to emerge from a natural setting.

Case study. This study sought to understand a system within the education system in a Midwestern urban district. Pseudonyms will be used for the district. Based on the research questions, the researcher determined the appropriateness for a case study. A case study shows the complexity of a single case and identifies important activities within the case (Stake, 1995). A case study starts from a constructivist paradigm, which recognizes the subjective understanding (Baxter & Jack, 2008). People often construct
their reality in a setting as constructivism (Patton, 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore African American parental involvement in transition planning. Case studies are bound by place, space and / or time. This case is bounded by African American parents and Midwest urban school district. The participants of this study were six African American parents of high school students with disabilities in an urban school district in Ohio. Additionally, Patton (2015) noted that a bounded system is an entity between person, organization, event, or a social phenomenon. This case particularly focused on transition planning of students with disabilities in the 9th-12th grade.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are offered for operating definitions throughout the paper:

**Transition planning** – “is a process mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA 2004) for all students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in K-12 education. The purpose is to “facilitate the student’s move from school to post-school activities” (Transition Planning Requirements of IDEA, 2013, para. 1).

**Parental Involvement** - theory describes parental involvement in six common ways in the education system as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995).

**Individualized Education Program** - “is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services” (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology, 2015, para.1).
Disability – “an individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment” (ADA, 2009).

Parental Involvement – behaviors of parents or someone who serves in a parental role as it relates to child’s schooling or activities. This also includes outside activities.

Physical Disability - a limitation that restricts physical function such as limited upper and lower mobility or impacts activities of daily living.

Specific Learning Disability – “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (IDEA Components, n.d. para. 3).

Developmental Disability - “A severe, chronic, disability that is attributable to a mental or physical impairment other than a mental or physical impairment solely caused by mental illness. It is manifested before 21, likely to continue indefinitely… In the case a person is six years of age and older, a substantial functional limitation in at least two of the following areas of major life activity: self-care, receptive, and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living, and if over 16 years of age capacity of economic self-sufficiency” (Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, 2016).

Rehabilitation Counseling – “a systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the
application of the counseling process” (The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 2018).

Mental Health Counselor – “highly-skilled professional who provides flexible, consumer-oriented therapy. They provide psychotherapy with a practical, problem-solving approach that creates a dynamic and efficient path for change and problem resolution” (American Mental Health Counselor Association, 2017, para.1).

School Counselor – professionals who assist students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development and career development and housed in each school (American Counselor School Association, 2018, p. 4).

Qualified Mental Health Professional- “means an individual who has received training for or education in mental health competencies and who has demonstrated, prior to or within ninety days of hire, competencies in basic mental health skills along with competencies established by the agency…” (Certification Definitions, 2011).

Charter Schools – “publicly funded, tuition free schools that provide unique educational opportunities for students. In Ohio, charter schools include special focus schools for drop-out recovery, STEM education, experiential learning, arts immersion, college preparatory and special education needs such as autism “(Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2018, para.1).

**Summary**

The chapter provided an introduction of the significance of African American parental involvement in the transition planning process. In efforts for parents to describe their involvement, the researcher proposed a qualitative case study. This study examines
parental involvement in transition planning in a Midwestern school district. Following, the researcher will discuss existing literature as it relates to parental involvement of African American parents.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over several decades, substantial research shows a lack of involvement of African American parents of students with disabilities in their education (Brandon & Brandon, 2009; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). However, there are a lack of studies addressing the narratives from the parents’ point of view. This chapter examines common assumptions about African American parents’ involvement in the education system. Additionally, this chapter will explicate the expectations of the Individualized Education Program process in students’ transition planning and legislation mandates for students receiving special education services. This research will inform special education professionals (teachers, administration, parents, and counselors) to provide a positive impact during transition planning with minority students. This review seeks to understand the current practices of parental involvement in transition planning for Afro-American students with disabilities.

Legislation Mandates

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) is a favorable act for students with disabilities. Section 504 “makes it illegal for federal agencies, or programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance or are conducted by a federal agency, to discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities” (Section 504, n.d.). Section 504 requires the education system to provide students with disabilities appropriate educational services to meet their needs to be successful in their educational endeavors (The United States Department of Education, 2015). For example, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must capture the needs of a student with disability. This lends
towards the responsibility of the education system to assess students individually and provide necessary accommodations based on needs. Critically examining the role of African American parents in this process is crucial, as this information helps teachers and parents understand how knowledge of the rights and responsibilities is critical in the special education system.

Moreover, policy makers evaluated the system and developed the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA) which “ensures that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education… and to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected” (IDEA, 1997). However, Ford and Russo (2016) noted that for the majority of African American students this law is virtually nonexistent due to the persistent overrepresentation of African Americans in the special education system (p. 54). As disabilities among children became more prominent, and the notion that minority groups were not reflected, the Individual Disabilities Education Improvement Act was reauthorized in 2004. Ford and Russo (2016) argued that there is still need for specific enhancements and made several suggestions including, that policymakers and education professionals make clear goals; that analyses of data by race, gender and income to develop culturally responsive policies be developed; and that staff be properly trained (p. 55).

Special education teachers have a responsibility to educate the students and parents on their rights and responsibilities. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy
Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) grants parents access in clearly defined ways:

Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies. Parents or eligible students have the right to request that school correct records, which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.

The parents or eligible students have the right to a formal hearing if they see any amendments to be made. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information. FERPA is a major resource for getting parents involved in the student’s progress.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is momentous in the disability movement, evidenced by the positive impact it has for people with disabilities. Section 504 protects the rights of students with disabilities. The ADA is particularly important during the transition process for students with disabilities. As students are transitioning to work or post-secondary education, it is critical for students to advocate for themselves
and understand their rights; however, it starts with the educators and parental involvement in the transition process. The IDEIA and ADA are both important; however, the National Association of Special Education Teachers (2006) contended that section 504 is the only legal mandate requiring education agencies to provide special education to students with disabilities.

**Historical Context – African Americans**

Historically, African American students are overrepresented in the special education system (Artiles & Trent, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Ford & Russo, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2015), African American students aged 6 through 21 were 2.26 times more likely to be served under IDEA, Part B, for emotional disturbance and intellectual disabilities (p. 28). Throughout the special education system, the overrepresentation of African American students persists. Because of this situation, Ford and Russo (2016) note the need for culturally responsive interventions as related to minority groups, to revamp policies and procedures for reducing the overrepresentation. Researchers urge the need to educate families of their role and responsibilities in making efforts to identify strategies to reduce the overrepresentation. Burnette (1998) urged staff to create a shared vision, reporting responsibility for all students, however the parents were not part of this discussion. Confusion over parental responsibilities and roles, such as who is responsible for the students’ transition goals, resulted in common assumptions of African American families’ parental involvement.
Common Assumptions of African American Parental Involvement

While this review will focus on high school students with disabilities, the concern of parental involvement begins when children enter the school system. Over twenty years ago, Harry et al. (1995) conducted a longitudinal study over a 3-year span investigating African American parent participation of 24 preschoolers in special education programs in an urban school district. The researchers collected data through individual interviews and reviewed student documentation. The researchers identified eight themes throughout data collection. The results suggested that inaccessibility of meetings and the power structure between parents, teachers, and administrators were barriers that inhibited parent participation (p. 370). For instance, the meetings were held during times parents were unable to attend. The study found that even when parents could attend meetings, there was a knowledge gap that created an imbalanced power structure between parents and educators.

Despite the power dynamic, Harry et al. (1995) asserts that African American parents, as opposed to the special education professionals, should make the initial efforts to support their children. However, recently Landmark et al. (2013) notes there is a responsibility for educators to put forth more efforts in contacting parents. In their study, Landmark et al. demonstrate the lack of role clarification between parents and teachers begins as early as the preschool years. This disturbing lack of role clarification inhibits the parents’ relationship with the special education system throughout the students’ educational years. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2014) noted that 66 %
of educators believe parents contribute to the lack of support their children need to help overcome their disability.

Parents who build a positive relationship with the school system in their child’s earlier years, impact their child’s success throughout their high school years. However, a space must be fostered for parents to do so. Griffin, Taylor, Urbano, and Hodapp (2014) observed the lack of parental involvement of African Americans continued throughout high school. Griffin et al. (2014) examined high school students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regard to self-advocacy in their transition planning and further identified the role parents serve in students’ advocacy plan. By conducting a longitudinal study with data collection through surveys, parent interviews, school program survey, and teacher survey, Griffin et al. found younger parents and Caucasian parents were more likely to attend school meetings and be more actively involved at school.

Many studies find that African American parents of children with disabilities are uninvolved in the children’s education although many studies limit their definition of involvement at school to attendance at meetings (Brandon, 2007; Griffin, 2012; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007). Though this is one indicator of involvement, due to lack of transportation to get to school meetings, it excludes families that support their children at home. For efforts to reach culturally diverse families, the definition for parental involvement needs to be expanded. One way is fostering a space at school where families feel supported in various ways.

Literature supports that professionals believe parents should initiate more relationships with the school (Lawson, 2003; Lopez, Alexander & Hernandez; 2013);
there is a lack of consideration of potential barriers that may impede families’ involvement. Since parental involvement is traditionally perceived as parents being visible at school, school professionals with narrow lens of what involvement looks like miss critical factors. With the need for parents’ perspective on how they describe their involvement, Epstein and Salinas (2004) present a model that reviews parental involvement holistically.

**Theoretical Framework- Epstein’s Parental Involvement Theory**

Epstein’s (1995) original work expanded the definition of parental involvement into six categories: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. This holistic framework identifies the multiple context of parental involvement and could help capture parental involvement for African Americans.

Epstein (1995) describes *parenting* as focusing on the family environment which provides support for children. While criticized for the neglect of cultural competence, this emphasis on family environment is important in understanding African American’s parental practices. Educators must be culturally competent to understand diverse family structures. Culture is a considerable influence in terms of how a parent supports their children. Being able to understand diverse cultures enables educators to think beyond their own views.

Epstein and Salinas (2004) describe *communication* as creating an effective partnership between schools and home, requiring constant communication. The challenge is to explore how teachers and parents are communicating with each other in
effective ways (p. 2). As communication technology continues to advance, electronic communication is at a peak. Schools and educators assuming that parents have access to internet services or a computer, could result in the breakdown of communication. Effective communication can be established initially during the school orientation by simply asking parents their preferred method of communication.

In Epstein and Salinas’s model (2004), volunteering is described as educators recruiting parents to support the classroom and the school. Volunteering requires increased outreach, involving going beyond the classroom to reach some families (p. 3). Challenges are scheduling, organizing volunteers, and meeting the needs of parents and students. Overcoming conflicting schedules is critical in the school system as parents are working and sometimes balancing multiple jobs. Volunteering also requires commitment from both parents and students.

The fourth form of parental involvement according to Epstein and Salina (2004) is learning at home. This type of involvement is characterized as providing students and parents with curriculum-related activities to work on at home (p. 4). This type of involvement helps bridge the gap of communication by encouraging family participation with tools such as calendars with activities, information about homework policies, newsletters, etc. Each of these four forms hope to create positive relationships between parents and professionals in the special education system.

Epstein and Salinas (2004) describe decision-making as developing parent leaders and representatives committed to children’s progress (p. 5). Parental involvement is particularly important when involving decisions for children, these decisions relating to
the next steps in the education system. Parents provide unique insights to the process in terms of child’s needs at home and at school. Lastly, Epstein describes collaboration as utilizing community resources to strengthen school partnerships. Building community relationship for students with disabilities creates an additional layer of support during the transition planning process.

With presented theory on how parental involvement can bridge the gap between the education system and parents, understanding potential barriers that impede the process is important. In essence, the model described above will serve as one of the theoretical frameworks to explain parental involvement and the varying support systems in this paper. The transition planning process includes multiple support systems with the goal leading to successful planning from post-high school graduation to work or school. In this model, parents and teachers are subject to navigating existing barriers which impede the process. Identifying common barriers seek to explain assumptions and describe parental attitudes.

**Transition Planning—Barriers**

Transition services have evolved over the years and yet still lacks parental involvement amongst African American parents in the transition planning process (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Research has determined perceived barriers are lack of cultural diversity, economics, family composition, and lack of communication between parent and school, and personal constraints of the families (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Parental involvement is critical in the planning process, particularly for students with
disabilities. An examination of the barriers to participation show that African American parents do not lack a desire to participate but are often unable to do so.

Urban school districts, composed of mostly minority groups, experience the unique challenges of higher poverty rates than rural and suburban school districts (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). William and Sanchez (2011) explored barriers that impede African American families’ involvement specifically in the urban school district education system. The researchers conducted 25 interviews that included African American parents and school personnel in an urban school district in the Midwestern United States. Through emergent themes, the barriers identified were poverty, lack of access, socioeconomic status, and lack of awareness regarding the laws (William & Sanchez, 2011). The researchers found that teachers often had inaccurate contact information for parents and used email as the main means of communication (p. 63), however families with lower socioeconomic status may not have the income to obtain internet access or smart phones (Landmark et al., 2013; William & Sanchez, 2011).

Lynch (1991) conducted a study to gain parents’ perception of their involvement in transition planning which included a diverse group of participants. Fifty parents of students with disabilities across eight school districts responded to recruitment surveys and letters. These districts were identified as having exemplary transition programs. Though the researchers did not note the characteristics of the schools, the participants were 32 Caucasians, seven African Americans, seven Hispanic, and four Asian parents. Their children ranged from ages 5-21. Eighty percent of the children ranged from age 16-18, a critical period for transition services. The survey’s purpose was to gain the parents’
perspectives of school contacts, transition meetings, and IEP meetings. The results suggested that parents lacked detailed knowledge of their child’s transition from school to work (Lynch, 1991). As of 2017, who is responsible for successful transition planning remains a debate between parents and teachers. Some research indicates that parents drive the process while some research suggests the teacher’s responsibility to initiate plans for transition planning (Landmark et al., 2013).

While there is a substantial amount of literature addressing barriers, the literature lacks solutions, focusing more on identifying barriers (Foley, 2015; Hayes, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele; 2011; LaRocque, Kleiman, Darling, 2011). The barriers listed above: cultural diversity, economics, family composition, lack of communication between parent and school, and personal constraints of the families (Brandon & Brown, 2009), encompass many concerns within the design of the transition system, relating to unsuccessful transition planning. African American students in urban districts are subjected to the challenging issues of lower socioeconomic status and existing racial biases in the education system. Addressing such barriers at the systematic level can create dialogue with school administration and special education professional stakeholders.

Applequist (2009) conducted a study seeking to describe the experiences of rural and urban families in the special education system, with attention to the parents’ perceptions of educators through a qualitative study. The 32 participants were parents of children with disabilities who received services under the special education system, 34% in rural areas and 66% in urban communities. Through a semi-structured interview, questions asked focused on preschool interventions and secondary education experiences.
Researchers analyzed the data by organizing the narratives on content and description of events. Several themes which emerged were feelings of isolation, lack of awareness of IDEIA, impact of educational approaches with families, and experiences with professionals. Families in both the urban and rural districts noted the lack of resources and a desire for more child advocating support groups (Applequist, 2009). An increased desire for the special education systems to enhance communication with parents, particularly in transition planning, is needed (Applequist, 2009; Miller-Warren, 2016; William & Sanchez, 2011).

Stanley (2015) examined the advocacy experiences of African American mothers of children with disabilities in a rural school district. A question of how African American parents with low-income advocate for the needs of their children with disabilities, particularly in rural areas was asked by researchers (p. 3). Twelve African American parents, in the rural school district, participated in the research. Data was conducted by two semi-structured interviews per participant. The first interview was to gain the narratives of mothers’ advocacy, while the second interview gained understanding of how the mothers viewed their participation. The researchers analyzed data by transcendental phenomenological reduction by identifying which statements answered the research questions. The results suggested parents were more likely to be involved when there was: open communication with teachers, validation of feelings, and with mutual respect with the special education professionals. This research suggests that lack of involvement is not significantly different in urban and rural districts (Stanley, 2015; William & Sanchez, 2011). Similarly, Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001)
assessed the levels of successful transition planning according to parent participation in the school system. The participants included 308 African American, Hispanic American, Native American, and European Americans families. The researchers collected data through a survey examining involvement during transition activities. The group analyzed data by comparing culturally diverse groups to the majority group of European Americans. Challenging the existing narrative, Geenen et al. (2001) found that culturally diverse families placed more importance in transition-related activities.

In contrast, professionals contended that European Americans were more involved. There was a gap of parental perception based on cultural backgrounds. These findings reflect unclear roles of educators and perceptions of parents. This study reviewed cultural considerations for parents from diverse cultures, with a particular focus on African American families in the special education system.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the experiences of all districts, Kannapel and Flory (2017) offered initiatives as they explored postsecondary transitions of students in the Appalachian regions. The review did not focus on individuals with disabilities however the strategies appear universal related to improving transition planning. One initiative offered, the Rural Community College Initiative, seeks to expand economic and college preparation programs. This initiative introduced the responsibility of government funding transition programs for enhancement of resources.

**Transition Planning--Individualized Educational Program**

According to Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking (2017), the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is “a plan or program developed to ensure that a
child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services” (para. 2). The literature indicates that the parents are the key decision makers in the IEP meeting (Guide to Individualized Education Program, 2007). The IEP is designed to meet the individual needs of each student who receives special education services (United States Department of Education, 2004). Developing the IEP is the initial step in the student plan for success and provides a to-do list: (1) Determine eligibility, (2) evaluate student, (3) decide eligibility, (4) determine student eligibility, (5) schedule IEP meeting, (6) IEP meeting, (7) write IEP, (8) provide services, (9) measure progress, (10) review IEP, (11) assess and reassess student.

While all the steps are important, some steps highlight family involvement in the IEP. The IEP meeting is scheduled in step 5, involving the family in gaining more information about the process and the purpose of IEP support. During step 6, the IEP is written and parents may be involved in this process when necessary (United States Department of Education, 2004). For example, if there is a problem with the student, the IEP team will determine if the parent(s) should be involved in process, creating the potential to cause controversy among parents. Some parents may argue that it is always appropriate to be involved in their child’s progress in school. Defur, Allen, and Getzel (2001) suggest that a key component in student’s achievement is parent involvement. Removing the parents from the IEP meetings when the team feels it is not appropriate, might inhibit the student’s achievement.
Fish (2008) conducted a study investigating the perceptions of parents during the Individualized Education Program meeting. While the IDEA (2004) mandates participation, there remain some ongoing concerns of participation. The participants, 51 parents with middle school age children in the special education system, identified as in middle and upper class socioeconomic status. The researcher surveyed parents on their support during IEP meeting. Questions were designed through Likert scale using open-ended questions. The overall results suggested parents reported favorable experiences during the IEP meetings and were knowledgeable of the law. A limitation is with the study presents with the majority of participants being Caucasian participants, thus lacking diversity of social class in terms of socioeconomic status.

**Transition Assessment Process**

Transition assessments require knowledgeable rehabilitation professionals (Rehabilitation Counselors, Transition Coordinators, and Special Education professionals) to ensure quality of services delivered to students with disabilities (Tidwell, Kraska, Fleming & Alderman, 2016). The definition of transition assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information on the student’s strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future living, learning, and working environments. This process should begin in middle school and continue until the student graduates or exits high school. Information from this process should be used to drive the Individualized Education Program and transition planning process and to develop the Summary of Performance document detailing the student’s academic and functional performance and
postsecondary goals” (Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007, pp. 2–3).

The Rehabilitation Service Administration and the Department of Education are central supporters for students with disabilities. While mandates are in place for rehabilitation professionals, there is increased attention towards the roles of families in transition assessments. There is sparse research regarding the process for teachers and parents in transition assessments (Carter, Brock, Trainor, 2014; Tidwell et al., 2016). Recognizing how roles affect the transition process can add guidance to the transition process. The ultimate goal for educators is to improve the effectiveness of transition services. There is a need to improve the collaboration among special education and rehabilitation professionals (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016; Kellems, Springer, Wilkins & Anderson, 2016).

**IEP Team Responsibility**

The IDEIA (2004) has designed a formal transition assessment process. To assess the transition process, Sitlington & Clark (2007) identify seven questions to ask:

(1) Is what we do now a useful framework for individual planning? (2) Are we satisfied with the extent of involvement of students and families in the transition assessment process? (3) Are we satisfied that all school-based personnel who might appropriately be involved are asked to be involved in the transition assessment process? (4) Does the school have the appropriate tools to provide options for individual assessment in transition planning? (5) What works in selecting and using age-appropriate assessment
for transition planning? (6) What will users accept? (7) What is it that should be assessed for the transition planning process the first consideration? (p. 134)

The aforementioned questions are pertinent to this research, providing a guide towards creating a framework of collaboration. This process requires voices from parents, special education teachers, staff, counselors, and students. The questions provide an assessment to determine if the process is effective and if there are areas for improvement. The transition assessment process assists in identifying gaps in the transition planning process.

Newman, Wagner, Cameto, and Knokey (2009) believe that the responsibility shifts from the school professionals to the student after high school graduation (p. 44). Special education professionals can help prepare these older students and their parents to take ownership of the transition planning by ensuring that they are knowledgeable of their rights and laws regarding accommodations. Adequately preparing professionals to provide students with the essential skills necessary for post-secondary endeavors lends to students taking command of their own transitional planning.

Demonstrated by the aforementioned amendments to the IDEA (1997), legislation has improved though there is need to enforce legislation throughout transition planning. As special education teachers assess students individually to meet their needs, factors to consider are multicultural considérations and the significance of family involvement in transition planning. For example, a teacher’s understanding of the student’s culture will help will provide a more effective teaching plan. Without the teacher’s cultural
understanding of the student, there is more potential for ineffective communication, potential behavior problems, and decline in students’ academic performance.

**Role Clarification**

Role clarification in transition planning is an emerging issue in special education. Reynolds et al. (2015) examined the role construction, self-efficacy, and context influences of a parent’s decision to be involved in their child’s processes, particularly in urban high schools through a mixed-method approach. The researchers conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys with parents and teachers from an urban high school. The researchers distributed a parent-teacher involvement survey with 119 parents responding and 13 teachers completing semi-structured interviews. Additional focus groups with other 25 participants provided additional perspectives.

Reynolds et al. (2015) adopted a three-stage model by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) to explain a parent’s behavior and motivation to be involved as psychological motivators, as contextual motivators, and in life context. The Hoover-Dempsey model addresses these three major questions: why families become involved; what families do when they are involved; and how family involvement makes a difference in student outcome. The results from Reynolds et al. (2015) assert that teachers perceive they were more closely associated with increasing parental involvement as opposed to the parents identifying lack of involvement.

The conflicting reviews persist throughout the education system. Reynolds et al. (2015) study results contrast with Geenen et al. (2001) study results in which parents demonstrated active participation in early childhood. This demonstrated that parents are
more hands on with children while they are younger, thus decreasing involvement when
they are older. School district could play a substantial role in parental involvement; such
as, creating more accessible school-community partnerships for families. Further,
Reynolds et al. (2015) asserts that teachers focusing on creating school parent
partnerships have parents who are more involved outside the classrooms. This result
suggests there is a lack of defining parental involvement. While both teachers and parents
serve intricate roles, there is a need to clarify roles and expectations. Advocating is
essential for creating partnership among special education professionals and parents
(Reynolds et al., 2015; Stanley, 2015; Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009; Zionts, Zionts,
Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003).

Landmark, Roberts, and Zhang (2013) explored perceptions of transition
specialist and how they viewed parental involvement in the special education system. The
researchers assessed parental involvement by reviewing the Individualized Education
Program local education agencies through a mixed-method approach. To gain breadth of
experiences, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. Eighteen transition
specialist and administrators were recruited through local education agencies.
Researchers used an inductive approach to analyze data and identify themes. According
to Landmark et al. (2013) common patterns impede involvement such as defining
parental involvement, barriers, and advocacy. Their results suggest a need for educators
to provide adequate resources and information regarding the laws to support their
children during transition planning (Landmark et al., 2013). The patterns identified by
Landmark et al. (2013) related to this research study as it created a space for parents to
share their narratives through describing their experience. Note that the participants in this study were African American, Asian American, Hispanic, with a larger portion being European American. Mainstream educators demonstrate negative attitudes toward the African American cultures (Harry 1992), potentially creating the inability for educators to understand how transition planning can look different with culturally diverse families.

Similarly, Barnyk and McNelly (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine the beliefs of teachers and the administration related to parental involvement in an urban school district in Pennsylvania as a follow up to an implemented action-based plan. Researchers hypothesized that the participants, 92 teachers and 7 administrators, practices would be influenced by various beliefs. Participants completed a parent involvement inventory to assess their beliefs of involvement. Results suggested conflicting views between teachers and administrators on parental involvement.

Promoting collaboration between teachers, parents, and counselors will lead to more successful transition planning of students with disabilities (Epstein, 1995; Fish, 2008; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016; Kellems, Springer, Wilkins & Anderson, 2016).

**Counseling Interventions**

Hirano and Rowe (2016) study supports that home and school activities correlate to successful transition planning by their findings which explored parental involvement in secondary special education and transition planning. While the authors promote collaboration, Lareau (1987) identified similar concerns while exploring family and school relationships. Evidence shows an ongoing need to enhance the efficacy of post-secondary success. The IEP process is designed to support students throughout school
and further prepare students for success. In this research study it was found that African American parents lacked the support from counselors during the transition process. Counselors serve an intricate role working with individuals with disabilities and their families. In fact, counselors have an obligation to adhere to existing standards in support of multicultural competencies.

Multicultural competencies are integral in shaping the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014). Additional competencies have been revised for specific populations, particularly marginalized groups (Ratts et al., 2015). As the counseling profession serves a diverse body of clients, multicultural competencies are continuously revamping so professionals can remain abreast in the field. Ratts et al. (2015) addresses the process of reviewing current competencies and revision of competencies. A committee has been developed to address the complexities of diversity in the counseling profession; recognizing the influence of oppression on mental health; taking into account the context of their social environment; and integrating social justice advocacy in counseling (Ratts et al., 2015).

Rehabilitation counselors receive adequate training to serve people with disabilities. Agran, Cain, and Cavin (2002) contend that rehabilitation counselors’ participation in the transition process remains relatively low considering transition planning is an essential function. Agran et al. (2002) conducted a survey of 54 special education teachers and 62 rehabilitation counselors to assess involvement in the transition process. The study demonstrates that special education teachers and rehabilitation counselors recognize role conflict during the transition process. Agran et al. (2002) found
a lack of communication was reported by 48% of rehabilitation counselors. This study shows a need to increase collaboration among school system and community resources. Rehabilitation counselors serve as a separate entity outside of the school system. This study would advocate for rehabilitation counselors point of entry to be included in the school setting.

According to the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), rehabilitation counselors utilize career counseling to provide services for people with disabilities, linking clients toward gainful employment (CRCC, n.d.). As high school students with disabilities are transitioning to post-secondary work or employment, rehabilitation counselors have the opportunity to enter the system and enhance post-secondary outcomes. Assisting youth with transition from school to work and school to post-secondary school requires partnership among many people and agencies (Benz, Lindstrom, & Latta, 1999; Cain & Calvin, 2002; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Benz et al. (1999) asserts that vocational rehabilitation is a fundamental part of the collaborative process assisting with transition.

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, Improving Postsecondary Outcome (2016) encourages the support for students with disabilities by building mental health partnerships in the school setting, creating opportunities for students to have additional supports readily available at school. This furthers allows another discipline to weigh in on the transition planning process. Mental health counselors, equipped with the training and skills in the planning process for students with disabilities, are an invaluable asset to all.
Advocacy

Advocacy begins with bridging the gap of communication between parents and special education professionals. Counseling literature has failed to address the need of supporting students with disabilities during their transition planning. Williams and Portman (2014) conducted a qualitative study interviewing African American high school students attending an urban school district examining their resilience, finding a lack of hearing their voices. Koonce and Harper (2005) present a model that focuses on African American families and strategies to advocate for their children in the school system. The consultation model included a dyad of parent, child, and consultants with staff members. The model designed to stress that African American families want to build a solid relationship with the school system, breaks down the negative attitudes and cultural mismatch between parents and the school. The authors suggest conducting training modules for parents towards navigating the school system for transition-aged youth ranging from 16-24 years old. This is a critical time for youth with disabilities to begin planning for transitions.

Transition planning is designed to focus on the individual needs of students with disabilities; however, the support for the families is often lacking, particularly in counseling literature. The counseling profession is founded on many core principles, advocacy being a fundamental aspect (Ratts, Singh, McMillion, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). Advocacy is viewed from multiple perspectives. For example, counselors can view advocacy as advocating on behalf of families or serving as a liaison between families and policymakers to implement change. For example, some parents lack
knowledge of their rights and responsibilities; therefore, a need for counselors to support the families and fill the gap where they lack knowledge in specific areas. Counselors may also see their role as educating families and promoting self-advocacy (Middleton, Robinson, & Mumin, 2010). Self-advocacy is critical, in particular during the times where parents feel alone and the desire to speak up. It is important to consider the reasons why some parents advocate for their children as opposed to others. In efforts to assess this, the question remains, is the silence of advocacy because the parents have not been informed on their rights of what advocacy looks like. Pros and cons may be identified based on different perspectives, yet it remains the need for counselors to adhere to promoting and increasing advocacy efforts in support of families with students with disabilities.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of African American parental involvement in schools and barriers which might be encountered with a child with disabilities as they begin the transition process from high school to post-secondary goals. Existing narratives in literature suggest a persistent lack of parental involvement in this process. This leads to the research question of how African American parents of students with disabilities describe their involvement during transition planning. The parents own descriptions lend to further insights into the true level of involvement. This chapter details the transition planning process with possible expectations and responsibilities for parents, teacher, and counselors.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Rationale for Methodology

Qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level through experiences (Atieno, 2009; Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2015). While parental involvement of African American parents has been discussed for many years; there are a lack of studies that have included the voices of parents describing their experience during transition planning. Atieno (2009) described that qualitative methodology occurred in a natural setting and allowed participants to share their perspectives in the context of their experience (p. 16). Salle and Flood (2012) recognized that descriptive language is one strength of qualitative research. Qualitative research introduces depth and breadth, which provides stakeholders with deeper understandings of organizations, procedures, and overall policies.

Research Design

Case study is relatively contemporary; however, it is informed by other designs. Case study shows the complexity of a single case and identifies important activities within the case (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). There are a few common types of case studies: explanatory, instrumental, exploratory, descriptive, multi-case study, and intrinsic. Zainal (2007) defined an explanatory case study as when the researcher sought to examine the data at both a surface and deeper level. This study implemented an explanatory single case design which included multi-sites (Yin, 2014). This study sought to explain the surface level narrative of how parents describe their involvement, and what has been their experience with transition planning.
**Binding case.** A bounded system is an entity between person, organization, event, or a social phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Transition planning is a system that involves several parties: stakeholders, special education teachers, parents, and students. A case could be bounded by time and place, time and activity, and definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Above all, creating boundaries allowed the researcher to create a focused area to provide an explanation to a case. The parents’ children attended different schools, however, there remains one unit of analysis. In this study, parental involvement is bounded by the African American parents within an urban school district in the Ohio. Exploring the distinct aspects within a case demonstrates an understanding of specific activities and the significant roles within the bounded system. Identifying roles in a bounded system allows eclecticism and flexibility in a case study design (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

**Context of Study**

The researcher will utilize the pseudonym “Zillow school district” when referencing the school district for protection of districts identity. Common descriptions of urban school districts include population, minorities, lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, student behavior and coursework challenges (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shuan, 1990; Williams & Sanchez, 2011). This study focused on the transition planning which hopes to support the needs of students with disabilities transitioning from high school or employment. There is a dedicated section on the Individualized Education Plan to describe and implement the needs of the students. The transition planning team is composed of the teachers, administrator, transition counselor,
parents, and students when appropriate. According to the Implementation Report (2015) in the Zillow school district approximately 60% of the district is African American, 29% White, and 7% Hispanic. Further, 83.3% of the students are recognized as economically disadvantaged (p. 2) According to the Ohio Department of Education School District Overview (2013), districts that fell within the definition of an urban district typically have high student poverty. Robinson (2017) posits that education leaders should be knowledgeable of how contextual factors in an urban district impact the functions inside the school (p. 5).

Charter School Similarities

There were three of six participants in this study who were parents of high school students with disabilities in the Midwestern urban school district and three participants who were parents of high school students in an urban charter school. While there may be an assumed difference between city and charter schools, they are charter schools are in fact more similar than different. According to Caffee (2017) charter schools have more freedom to make decisions, yet they are contracted through school districts and both receive state funding.

It is important to note that the children in charter schools were previously enrolled in public schools. The parents believed that their children would receive more attention in an environment with a smaller teacher to student ratio. Phillips (2011) notes the development of more collaborative approaches between charter and public schools. With collaboration of superintendents in major cities, Phillips described similarities between public and charter schools:” students belong to all of us; charter schools must support the
success of district schools; all students deserve equitable resources; performance matters; and commitment to replicate what works” (p. 12).

**Site Selection**

The researcher recruited participants through local churches identified in the Midwest to gain access to the African American community. The researcher selected this site because African American parents commonly build community and fellowship within the church (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The researcher also recruited through snowballing in the general urban community.

**Gaining entrée.** This research was approved through the Ohio University Institutional Review Board. The researcher contacted the research director of Midwestern urban school district through email. The email description included the purpose and benefits to potential participants, and an attached flyer. Additionally, the researcher contacted pastors of churches based on internet searches. At the point of contact, the researcher provided the pastors and church staff with necessary information to advertise at their church. The researcher ran across unique challenges with recruiting African American parents. There was a lack of parent groups for African American parents with students with disabilities; therefore, it was difficult accessing the population through any parental organization. There was also a very low response rate to the recruitment flyers.

**Sample and Population**

The researcher recruited parents of children with disabilities from urban school district and charter school in the Midwest. This urban school district was chosen for several reasons, such as, the makeup of the population, access, socioeconomic status, and
resources. Purposeful sampling, convenience sampling, and snowballing were all used to identify participants for this study. Patton (2015) defined purposeful sampling as “cases of those which one can learn a great deal about issues of the central importance of purpose of the research,” (p. 53). Zillow school district has more than 56,000 students, and approximately 62% African Americans. According to Kids Ohio (2014), more than half of the students in Zillow school district have a learning disability.

This study sought to gain information from a group in a specific setting. However, as the study was underway, convenience sampling was implemented due to low response rate from other sampling strategies. Convenience sampling is a type of sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are convenient sources of data for researchers (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 49). Consequently, there was not a diverse pool of disabilities and parents all had children with learning disabilities. The sampling strategy was to target a group of parents through organizations, school system, churches and snowballing method. Patton (2015) defined snowballing sampling as starting with a few information enriched interviewees and asking for additional relevant contacts. Finally, the researcher applied snowball sampling techniques and identified participants using recommendations from some participants.

Selection of Participants

Criteria. The researcher provided a list of criteria to schools by email for the participants in the hope to inform the existing dialogue. The criteria were purposeful as they intended to explicate the experiences of African American parents of high school
students with disabilities. The researcher interviewed six African American parents of high school students with disabilities.

The criteria list is as follows:

- African American parent / legal guardians of student with disabilities
- Parents (child) must have active IEP
- Child must be in grades 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th
- Urban school district
- Willingness to share experience

The researcher drafted a letter to provide information for agencies to review upon approval (see appendix A). As aforementioned, participants were recruited through various means that serve individuals with disabilities.

**Data Collection Methods**

The study was approved by the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This case study employed qualitative research methods to address the research questions through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and member checking.

**Semi-structured interviews.** The researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews of African American parents of students with disabilities in urban school districts (see Appendix A). The central research question is how African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools.
This research study sought to learn of the experiences of parents’ involvement in their child’s transition planning during high school, particularly focusing on students in urban school districts. The research questions are: 1) How do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools, and the sub research questions were: 2) What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning? 3) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program? Patton (2015) says “[o]pen-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and objects” (p. 14). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain depth and breadth of parental involvement process in transition planning, and to create a space for participants to have a voice to share their individual experiences.

Glesne (2016) described interviewing as getting words to fly (p. 96). This idea reflected the researcher as a blank sheet of paper without preconceived notions and allowed the participant to create and to share their stories. Dixon (1977) emphasized that African Americans rely on story telling as a method to communicate, which is a strength for qualitative research. This study provided a platform for parents to be expressive and not conforming to the existing narratives constructed by policymakers. For example, interviewing allowed African American parents to describe their specific involvement in their children’s transition planning. Semi-structured interviews created more of a conversation between the researcher and the participants. The strength of conducting interviews was that it led participants on a journey and often stimulated verbal flights
(Glesne, 2016, p. 96). The power behind words is the person sharing their experience. Tellis (1997) suggested that semi-structured interviews are insightful, provide in depth narratives, and keeps the interview focused.

Fourteen semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study, as it created a space for African Americans to describe their involvement in transition planning. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. The researcher transcribed the interview immediately, analyzed the data, and continued the process throughout this research.

**Document analysis.** According to Patton (2015), documents are written material and documents from organizational, clinical, or program record (p. 14). The counseling profession and special education system relies heavily on documentation. Towards the effort of informing the research questions, the researcher reviewed existing documents as related to the responsibility of teachers, counselors, and parents. Bowen (2009) asserted that a document analysis is particularly useful in case studies. The document will be used to triangulate the parent rights in support or contrast of parents’ description of their involvement. The purpose of a document analysis is to review and evaluate the document, which often compliments other forms of data collection (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003). More importantly, Bowen noted that documents can help identify changes in developing programs. The researcher developed a template to assess the document: type of document; policy makers responsible for document; intended audience; purpose; basic assumptions; accessibility; updates and legislation addressed. The researcher also recorded field notes throughout the analysis.
For the purposes of this study, the parental guides from the Ohio Department of Education for an urban school district were analyzed. Yin (1994) asserted that documents add value to case studies, because they provide exact details of parents’ rights and responsibilities. Tellis (1997) noted the strengths of documents are their existence prior to case study, exactness of data, and the stability of the material (p. 10). The documents were analyzed through iterative processes, which included a thematic analysis that is a form of pattern recognition in data (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The researcher arrived at manageable themes by compare and contrast based on template designed for each document. The researcher recognized a few themes across the documents relating to parents understanding: lack of parents’ familiarity with documents, the use of terminology that may not be translatable if not in the field of special education; and lack of accessibility of documents.

**Member checking.** Upon completion of analysis, the researcher followed-up with each participant via phone call to discuss the researcher’s understanding and analysis of the first interview. The participants were receptive and agreed to the researchers’ analysis. The researcher furthered offered thanks for the opportunity to share their story.

**Theoretical Framework - Epstein’s Parental Involvement**

The researcher analyzed the level of parental involvement through the lens of Epstein’s (1995) framework, which described involvement in six common ways in the education system: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The researcher analyzed data by open, axial, and selective coding for emergent themes/ patterns across transcripts. Each type is
important to supporting students by illustrating ways that parent and schools can collaborate. These ways of participation are important as they relate to students with disabilities during their transition planning.

**Coding**

The coding process functioned to share the participants’ narratives through identifying common themes. The researcher conducted an inductive analysis and allowed themes to naturally emerge. The participant conducted an open code analysis of each transcript. According to McFadzean (2007) open coding is examining the data with a critical lens line by line which extracts meaning. The researcher extracted approximately 600 codes from the participant transcripts. Next, the researcher conducted an axial coding process to identify categories. During axial coding, the researcher places the codes in categories based on likeness of properties (McFadzean, 2007). The researcher identified nine categories: IEP, advocacy, counselors, relationships, communication, legislation, teachers’ role, barriers, and external support. The final stage was selected coding where the researcher identified themes. McFadzean (2007) describes selective coding as the core concept which describes a common theme across transcripts. The researcher identified themes from the nine categories. The themes were identified as: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

There are several ways to ensure credibility of data, such as, triangulation, member check, and providing a thick description of phenomena (Patton, 2015; Shenton,
2004). The researcher implemented triangulation by conducting semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and member checking. The researcher then followed up with the participants and shared the transcript for their review to ensure accuracy. Patton (2015) defined triangulation of data sources as “qualitative methods mean[ing] comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means from interviews, observations, and documents” (p. 662).

Yin (2009) noted that triangulation is recommended using documents to strengthen credibility. This research study design utilized individual semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and member checking. Based on the case study design, the researcher hoped to gain a depth of understanding from all the data sources, thereby increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of this research.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher recognized potential ethical considerations with this study. The researcher minimized personal biases by bracketing subjective experiences and journaling during the interviewing and coding process. The researcher attempted to minimize any ethical concerns by following an informed consent process that explains participant rights and privileges. The researcher reviewed the consent document orally and obtained signatures prior to the interview. As the first potential concern was confidentiality, a signed consent form was obtained from parents in the study due to concerns for the privacy of the children.

The researcher minimized these concerns through providing the participants with a privacy and confidentiality agreement that required signatures from the researcher and
the participants. The researcher explained to the participants that this is a voluntary study and the participant may withdraw at any time. Further, the researcher provided pseudonyms to protect participants’ identities. The researcher does not foresee the study causing harm to participants. The researcher minimized any discomfort the participants may experience by being proactive and providing the participants with resources around the community for further support if experiencing any discomfort. The researcher secured the interviews with a recording device accessible only to the primary investigator. The interviews were protected on password protected devices. The research transcribed all interviews and secured on password protected computer. The researcher provided the participants with a $25 visa gift card for completing participation in the study.

**Researcher as Instrument**

The researcher as instrument emphasized the researcher’s philosophy and intricate role in the process. Qualitative research provided a powerful unique lens by developing words and images to interpret data (Lichtman, 2006). As a qualitative researcher, the researcher pulled from personal experience and identity as a Rehabilitation Counselor serving individuals with disabilities, particularly relating to vocational training and support for finding employment. Having had appropriate training and experience with individuals with disabilities added a layer of credibility towards this research study. This research topic was developed from my experience working with students with disabilities in a college setting. Having the opportunity to observe the various aspects of the agency procedures piqued my interest to delve into a deeper understanding of transition planning for students with disabilities.
While working closely with a population is a benefit, acknowledging potential challenges in the research is important. Being immersed in daily practice related to one’s research, the researcher might not be as sensitive to the procedures. Therefore, challenging the researcher to remove the lens of daily practice and data to allow them to naturally emerge. While the researcher guided the study, the participants led the study with their narratives. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to process thoughts throughout the research. As an African American, the researcher naturally gravitated towards defense mode in support of the parents when reading existing literature. However, the researcher recognized the importance of keeping a reflexive journal and bracketing out prior experiences, thus assisting the researcher to acknowledge existing biases and reduce the impact on the study’s findings.

Litchman (2006) asserts that sharing oneself and ones’ feelings contributes to the construction of narrative (p.207). Self-disclosure allows the researcher to enter the world of the participants. The challenge of self-disclosure is to determine necessity and benefit to the participant. As a researcher, it is critical to recognize the balance of self and the participants’ experiences. The researcher must be thorough in designing the research study. The researchers’ transparency and adherence to the research purpose and design enables the researcher to create an emergent experience with the goal of study that is meaningful to the researcher and the participant.

**Delimitations**

**Limitations.** There are a few limitations of this research study. This research study explored only one urban school district and reflected two charter schools in the
same district; therefore, the researcher recognizes there are some differences of school resources and support available between city and charter schools which can impact parental involvement. Further, this study only shared reflections from mothers of students with disabilities.

**Delimitations.** This study focused on parent’s perceptions rather than on direct experiences of students with disabilities. While some interview questions lend towards the experiences of students, the perceptions were explored through the parents’ viewpoint. Also, the researcher explored only one urban school district due to feasibility and access concerns with other districts. This review did not explore the perceptions of other ethnic / racial groups because the topic devotes increased attention to African American parents.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the methodology that will be applied to the study. The researcher described the site selection, participants, case study approach, data collection, analysis, coding and limitations of study. The research was designed in a way that answered the central research question as well as addressing the sub-questions. The study hoped to address a research gap examining the gap of African American parents’ voices and their experience during transition planning of their children who have learning disabilities.
Chapter 4: Parents’ Stories

The study sought to answer 1) How do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools, and the sub research questions were: 2) What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning? 3) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program? To address the research question, the researcher wanted to hear the voices of parents and create an environment for them to share their story. The participants of this study were comprised of six African American parents of high school students with disabilities in an urban school district in Ohio. In this chapter, the researcher examined three parent guides issued by an urban school district in Ohio to understand the parents’ access to information regarding their rights in the special education system.

This chapter will present each participant’s profile. Next, the chapter will transition to the researcher’s observations of their stories garnered through participants’ narratives. Following the description of the participants’ profile is the researchers’ analysis of interactions with the participants. The researcher’s analysis noted the participants’ background, experience with special education system, and their description of their overall involvement with their children’s schooling. The researcher took the position of openly listening to the participants’ responses as data emerged. The listed names are pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities.
Participant Descriptions

Michelle

“I am a Team Player”

-Michelle

Michelle is a 40-year-old African American mother of a 10th-grade male diagnosed with a specific learning disability. She is married with two children and has an associate degree. She is employed full-time where she serves as a parent mentor in the school system. She is also a small business owner. She reported that her daughter is also receiving special education services. She noted that her son has received special education services throughout his schooling. Her son attends an urban high school in Ohio. She reported that this is his 2nd year in this school at this current school. The school is a college preparatory program with a focus on liberal arts.

The researcher scheduled an interview with the parent to discuss her experience of transition planning with her son who has a disability. The researcher and the participant reviewed the consent form prior to proceeding with the interview. The participant agreed, she and the researcher proceeded with scheduling. Michelle entered the skype interview 10 minutes prior to the scheduled time. Upon entering the session, the researcher was greeted with a smile and soft voice. Michelle was wearing a bright multi-colored turban head wrap. She was in her work office during the interview; consequently, I was unable to see the details of background.

Michelle appeared to be reserved; however, she was open to sharing her experience. Initially, she did not respond with details. As the interview proceeded, she
appeared more relaxed and demonstrated increased comfort as the discussion evolved. She started to talk more and expand on her responses when asked to describe situations. She mentioned that she recently started a position as a parent mentor, where she supports other parents who have questions and concerns regarding their children in the school system.

The interview opened with her description of her son and his experience in school. As a parent with a child with a disability, she described her son’s disability and functional limitations in details. Michelle mentioned that her son has a lack of organizational skills which disrupts his learning, which led to his diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She described her son being discouraged and dissatisfied in the school system because of his limitations with reading. She stated:

[I]n 8th grade because we switched schools, because he’s been in the resource room which is a classroom with other students. So 6th grade he did ok and in 7th grade he had a teacher who really didn’t care and was retiring so he didn’t focus on the students as much as he should, so it was unstructured.

Michelle reported that her son’s outlook on school has improved, yet there is an overall need for improved communication with staff. She stated that “communication kinda sucks.” With efforts to insert herself in a more visible role, Michelle was stepping up to learn more about the special education process with her son, and that led her to the role of a parent mentor. She described herself as wanting to do more in the community and volunteer, but throughout the interview it was evident that she was unaware of many resources. When asked about external supports, she stated, “We just done it on our own
and I haven’t really looked into support groups, but just learning about disabilities and how they affect someone.” She noted that she has not had any interaction with counselors throughout this process. There was a look of inquiry in wanting to know more about what supports are available to her. In fact, she asked the researcher what is available. Michelle stated that she and her husband usually google information to find how they can additionally support their son.

Michelle described herself as a “team player” in the decision-making process during her son’s IEP meetings. However, she noted dissatisfaction during the process. It was evident to the researcher that Michelle did not like the lack of individuality when she referred to “a cookie-cutter formula” of the IEP process. She reports that she finds the IEP process to always be a rush and formality which lacks the individualism. She is now in a role that is informed of the policies and procedures and is proactive in shaping her involvement in her son’s schooling.

Kelly

“I don’t think any child need to be in no special education.”

-Kelly

Kelly is a 53-year-old African American woman who was raised in a small town in West Virginia. She has some college experience and is employed full-time. Kelly described her role as working with children who experience challenges and noted this has shaped how she raises her grandson. She is divorced and raising her 14-year-old grandson who has ADHD, and she is his legal guardian. He is currently a 9th grader in a charter school located in an urban school district.
While scheduling the interview, she demonstrated that she was excited to share her experience. The participant noted that it would be difficult to schedule an in-person interview, due to her being a single parent and a full schedule for her grandson. Prior to the interview, the researcher and participant reviewed and discussed the informed consent. Next the researcher proceeded with the interview protocol. The participant was wearing a black top and sitting behind a desk. The participant had medium length black hair. The interview was conducted through FaceTime for 32 minutes.

The researcher observed Kelly’s eagerness and excitement to share her story. She was very open and immediately vocalized her position on her grandson’s experience and her role as a guardian in the planning process. She immediately expressed her views of the special education system and her opinion that no child should be in special education classes. Throughout the interview, the researcher observed that Kelly disassociated herself and her grandson from having an identity related to special education services. She stated:

I believe all children are equal; they just have a different way of learning and each child needs to be taught. Just because I learn it that way doesn’t mean someone else learns it that way.

It was evident that her position on the system has shaped her views on parenting her grandson. She demonstrated active involvement in her child’s school; however, her involvement looked different because she did not adopt a traditional view of involvement, and there was a distrust of the system. She acknowledged that some children need help; however, she did not want her grandson labeled. Throughout the
interaction with Kelly, it was apparent that she perceived herself as an advocate and protector for her grandson. She shared only limited information regarding transition planning as she noted that he is in the 9th grade and his IEP meeting was scheduled at the end of the year. She did mention that he received support externally through counseling services. Kelly mentioned that she wants her grandson to understand help is available; however, she does not want him to use that as a crutch.

Stella

“I see myself as a partner.”

-Stella

Stella is a 51-year-old African American woman. She is married with one child. Stella works full-time as a parent mentor in a city school district. She has been in this role for over 10 years. She is working towards completing her bachelor’s degree. She has a daughter who is diagnosed with autism with severe behavior problems. Her daughter is 16 years old and in the 9th grade. Stella described her daughter as being on a 1st or 2nd grade level, with behavior limitations. Stella’s daughter attends an urban high school. Stella stated, “We have 10% of our population that’s identified as Special Ed. with autism.” She reported that her daughter has moved around in many schools due to incompatibility with teachers.

Stella was eager and excited to be a part of this research study. The interview was held at a local coffee shop, where Stella arrived on time with folders in her hand. Stella greeted the researcher with a bright smile, while wearing a brightly colored red sweater.
Her hair was short with loose curls. The participant reviewed the consent and agreed to the interview. Next, the researcher proceeded with the interview.

Stella took pride in herself for her advocacy for her child. She is a known advocate for children with autism and does not shy away from her voice being heard. She has served on many task forces to push interventions in support of children with autism. Stella was very prepared for the interview with documentation of her daughter’s records. She was very knowledgeable of her rights and responsibilities as a parent. Stella not only advocates for her daughter, but she supports other parents as well. She was attentive throughout the interview, providing in-depth details of her interaction with special education. It was obvious that she understood her daughter’s process; however, it was more evident that her role as a mentor contributed to her understanding.

Stella brought her daughter’s IEP to the meeting and reviewed it in detail with the researcher, describing how they incorporated her voice and acknowledged her daughter’s needs. There was an in-depth section on transition planning goals. The transition goals in her transition planning were written, and yet to be implemented due to the IEP meeting being scheduled late in the school year. It was clear that Stella desired changes in the planning process. She stated:

This team right now are trying to get a feel for her and trying to get to know her and know what they can and can’t do with her. So last year that came up at her IEP meeting when she was exiting middle school. There was no transition coordinator there; they don’t go in the middle schools, now they should since that law has been passed at the age 14.
Referencing the law was nothing new to Stella. Throughout our time spent, she referenced laws in support of teachers, parents, and her daughter. It was my observation that Stella believed that her concerns with the special education system should be addressed by working with stakeholders such as administration, policy makers, and teachers, and she has done just throughout her daughter’s education by presenting to local stakeholders with ideas to improve the system.

Renae

“I will always be there to support my kids.”

-Renae

Renae is a 37-year old African American single mom with three kids. She was born and raised in central Ohio. She works full-time at a grocery store and manages her own catering company and tea company. She described her savory sweets including sweet potatoes pies, German chocolate cake, and cherry pies, and showed pictures of her soul food dishes. Renae was intentional when mentioning that she loves her family and involves them in her business endeavors. She mentioned that she enjoys tapping into her creative side with wedding décor, reading and writing poetry. Renae stated that she has some college experience.

She noted that her oldest son is 15 years of age and in the 10th grade. She described her son as having a learning disability (ADHD). Her son attends a public charter school in an Ohio urban school district. Renae entered the interview 10 minutes early with a folder in hand. She greeted the researcher with a smile while leading the way to a meeting room at a branch of the public library. Renae was wearing a black hat with
long black hair underneath her hat and reading glasses. She was carrying a big black folder in her left hand. The researcher expressed excitement about the interview and proceeded with a review of the consent form.

Renae is a very hard-working woman balancing several roles as a daughter, sister, mom, and business owner. Her pride and joy are her children noticing her hard work. Initially, Renae was slow to open and share information. The researcher initially thought it was due to her reservation when speaking with a new person. Renae responded in short answers and when asked to describe situations there was a silence. It was apparent that Renae has a lot of trust in the professionals at the school. As a result, she allowed them to take more of a leadership role in her daughter’s process. Her trust did not suggest that she is not involved. Her involvement with her child’s schooling takes place outside the school, as she works multiple jobs, and which can interfere with school meetings at times.

Throughout her story, she noted the sacrifices that she has made for her family and how she has done it so graciously because she wanted to do it. Renae helps her parents and was the caregiver to her grandmother until she passed away. While taking care of her parents, her role as a mother remains a priority. Renae is the backbone of her family and many people trust her and value her contribution as a friend or a family member. She constantly referenced to her close-knit support system at school and at home. Renae followed-up with the researcher post-interview and expressed her gratitude for someone taking the time to hear her story. There was an expression of gratefulness
from her. She stated that she keeps her feelings bottled in and sharing her story was powerful.

**Tasha**

“I’m not a parent that always believes what the teachers say.”

-Tasha

Tasha is a 38-year-old African American widowed mother of two daughters. She noted that she adopted her daughters and she has no biological children of her own. She works full-time as a home health aide and a preschool teacher. She has some college experience. She mentioned that she has been a foster parent for many years. Five years ago, she decided to adopt her oldest daughter who is now an 18-year-old senior in high school. Her daughter has been diagnosed with ADHD, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and reattachment disorders. Her daughter attends a charter school in an urban school district in Ohio.

The interview was held over Facetime. She was at her home and was prompt for the interview. The researcher was greeted with a hello and eagerness to begin the interview. The participant was wearing a black headscarf with a black shirt and silver earrings. She was very engaged and demonstrated so with her hand gestures (noticeably clear and black finger nail polish with glitter). Tasha spoke with assertiveness and passion about raising her daughters. Tasha mentioned that much of her passion comes from her upbringing and activities she engaged in as a teenager. She described past mistakes leading her to foster parenting, then to adopting her two daughters.
Tasha noted that her perspective is largely shaped by her experience as a teenager. Tasha mentioned that growing up, she engaged in many activities that were not pleasing to her mom and those experiences helped form how she raises her daughters. She made it known that she does not have a good perception of the administration in the school system. She stated, “I hated teachers and principal, to this day I don’t like them.” She also reported that her daughter did not have the best experience with public schools, as she stated:

I feel like they don’t focus on these kids and that’s where these kids fall through the crack at and then when they keep pushing them along and keep pushing them along because no child is left behind.

Tasha’s daughter is now in a charter school, which Tasha considers an improvement. While she presented her stance with boldness, she did not shy away from communicating with the administration regarding her daughter’s progress and goals for the post-high school plans. Tasha mentioned that she is intentional in gathering people who will support her and her daughter around themselves. She mentioned that she has a counselor who attends the IEP meetings. As she stated:

She helps her with her [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] and looking for jobs, because she gets overwhelmed with job applications, like it’s hard for her to focus on filling out the job applications and once again she will get frustrated when she didn’t know the answers, so I would find applications hidden.

Tasha has created a support system to address the various needs to ensure her daughter’s needs are met. She has identified her daughter’s needs and is very intentional
with surrounding her with a strong support system. She has created a strong partnership with teachers and administrators at her daughter’s current school. Tasha does not wait until there is a problem at school, but she shows up at various times to check in with her daughter’s progress.

**Carol**

“They are children first.”

- Carol

Carol is a 43-year-old married woman. Her husband works as an engineer. She has five children and one of them has a disability. She reported that she has been a full-time special education teacher for the last 10 years. Carol has a master’s degree in special education and is a certified K-12 teacher. She mentioned that her training in special education services has informed her knowledge as a parent. Carol mentioned that she has a desire to return to school for her PhD but unsure of her trajectory. Her son is 14 years old and in the 9th grade. He has been diagnosed with other health impairments, ADHD, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He attends a city high school in central Ohio. Her son has been in the city school district since 4th grade. He was previously at a charter school, but Carol believed the environment was unstructured and desired more structure for her son. As a special education teacher in an urban district, she mentioned that she rarely has trouble communicating with parents; and noted that from her experience the African American parents are highly involved.

The researcher met Carol at a coffee shop. The participant approached the researcher with a soft smile, soft voice, and wearing eye glasses. Carol has short natural
hair with defined curls. She was wearing a gray and black sweater, denim jeans, and lack Ugg boots. During the interview, Carol was attentive while also eating a breakfast sandwich and drinking water.

Carol has a dual role as a parent of a child with disability and a special education teacher. While she acknowledged the benefits of knowing the system, she also noted challenges. When she noticed her son was experiencing challenges when he was younger, she wanted him to get evaluated. She stated that, “I had someone tell me I was projecting because of my line of work on to him.” She continued to seek out professional help and spoke with his doctor. As she stated, “It took for his pediatrician to say let’s do some evaluations, because there is an epidemic of testing children too early and labeling Black males with ADHD.” Carol mentioned that she recognized the strengths and challenges both as a parent and an educator, and she used them to her advantage to support her son. She stated that her roles intermesh and are often hard to separate.

Carol was an advocate for special education teachers and rarely did she identify areas of improvement; however, she noted there could be additional training for the teachers who serve students in special education. Carol believes she gets special treatment with her son’s teacher because they know she is affiliated with the system. She does not agree with this because she believes every parent deserves the proper attention for their child’s services.

**Summary**

This chapter captured the profiles of the six participants in this research study. All mothers of high school students with disabilities. Each participant described their
experience with having a high school child with a disability. The participants shared
commonalities as well as differences. All parents were African American, and their
children have learning disabilities. The parents also identified themselves as being a part
of an urban school district. Three parents had children in charter schools and the other
parents’ children attended a public school. The chapter described each participant and
their shared contextual factors that have shaped their experience.
Document Analysis

The researcher examined the parental guide document issued by the Ohio Department of Education, titled “Parents Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA).” The two most recent guides were analyzed for the purposes of this study. The versions analyzed were the guide released on April 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2012 and the most recent version released April 2017. The researcher will provide a description and analysis of the portion of the document that highlights transition services and the IEP meetings.

The researcher also examined the document, “Section 504 Manual for Identifying and Serving Eligible Students: Policies and Guidelines.” These documents were designed to provide information to parents about their rights and responsibilities in the special education system. The documents were analyzed by examining the following areas: type of document, who wrote the document, intended audience, identifying the purpose of document, identifying basic assumptions, accessibility of document, what legislation was referenced, and the latest updates. The researcher identified a few themes across documents and parents description: lack of parents’ familiarity with documents, the use of terminology that may not be translatable if not in the field of special education; and lack of accessibility of documents. Four of six parents were not familiar with the documents, yet, there is a responsibility and obligation for the parents to have this document. The documents are accessible online; however, that assumes the parents can assess the document and understand the concepts in the document.
General Details

This section highlights details of the Individualized Education Program process and the explanation provided by the Parents’ Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). The general background will share the school district’s vision for the IEP process and the responsibility of parents, administration, and teachers. There are laws and regulations that the state must abide by when providing services to students with disabilities. The IEP process allows the teachers, parents, counselors, and students to capture individual needs to be successful with transition from high school to employment or post-secondary education.

According the Ohio Department of Education (2017), the IEP must be developed within 30 days from when a child is first eligible for services. Next, the parent or administration of the school district has 120 days to request an evaluation as necessary. One of the pertinent details of the IEP is to determine education goals for the child and the goals must be evaluated annually. The IEP team consists of special education teachers, general education teachers, representatives from the administration, parents and students.

When the student reaches the age of 14, the IEP team should begin to address the student’s transition planning from high school to adult life. Parents should be included in these meetings and actively involved in the decision-making process, according to the Parents’ Guide. In the sampling population, while the transitioning planning in the IEP conference meets the state mandates. However, the general concerns are that the IEP meetings are held during the latter part of students’ freshman year, which is a critical time
to prepare students for their transition. For example, Kelly, whose grandson is in the 9th grade was yet to have an IEP meeting at the time of the interview with the researcher. Kelly stated that as the meeting would be at the end of her grandson’s freshman year, entering the high school with the first year without courses or experiences directly related to his career trajectory is not optimal for the student. She noted that her grandson took his own initiatives to enroll in college prep courses and classes that will inform his future. The Parent’s Guide also included a special note to permit students to attend the meeting “whenever it is appropriate.” There is a clause in the document that states that the child must be in the meeting if it relates to their transition services after high school. If a member of the IEP team is not available, they must have a written document regarding their absence.

Description

The Parents Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) released in 2012 was 80 pages. The Individualized Education Program was introduced on page 19 of 80. The document describes the IEP; when the initial meeting must take place; when the IEP must be completed; what the IEP includes; what the team must consider when developing the IEP; who is responsible for arranging meetings; resolution of parental disagreement; who should be a member of the IEP team; how to proceed when a member is not present; how many changes are permitted; whether the parent meets with IEP staff in person; and what is the responsibility of the IEP (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).
Parent’s Guide 2017

The newest document was released in April 2017. There are noticeable differences in this latest version. While the content remains the same, the document is decreased to 33 pages which is substantially different from the 80 pages in the 2012 version. The document addresses: referral, consent, evaluation, reevaluation, and the IEP process. The document appears more user friendly with more pictures and fewer words. The updated document is more concise, and highlights points that parents are directly interested in knowing about supporting their child. The purpose of this document is to provide procedural safeguards for students with disabilities. This document can be accessed online, and the school administration is expected to provide copies as well.

This study addresses African American parental involvement particularly during the transition planning process. According (Whose IDEA) to the parents’ guide, the purpose of the IEP is to prepare students for their future (p. 19). This indicates that this is a critical document in which parental engagement is necessary. Developing goals is a crucial component towards the implement of this document. Because the home and school environment are often hard to separate, it is critical for both parents and educators to share their input in developing goals. The parents in this study described themselves as serving an intricate role in the process. For example, five of the six parents described their child’s limitations of learning and expressed what they desired in the process. The document directly addressed the goals and responsibilities of the IEP team. According to (Whose IDEA), “at the age 14, a vocational course should be implemented” (p. 20). Michelle, a parent of a 9th grader stressed the need for teachers to creating
meaningful plans for the students. For example, when asked about the teachers’ facilitation of transition services, Michelle states,

I would prefer if she listens to him more to like find out what he really like to do versus making it cookie cutter, like ok if you go to the career center you don’t necessarily have to go to college. You know like having more detail or ask more questions and the more you ask it seems like he will be able to answer based on asking more questions.

**Section 504 Manual**

The “Section 504 Manual for Identifying and Serving Eligible Students: Policies and Guidelines” for Midwestern urban school district was revised in 2015. The document is 25 pages total. The purpose is to help ensure parents to understand their rights and their children’s rights. While parents with students with disabilities are the intended recipients of the guide, it was clear in this study that three out of the six parents did not receive the document. From their description, their knowledge of their rights came from communication with other community members through words of mouth, as opposed to official sources like teachers and staff or the guide. The school system is required to adhere to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which protects students from discrimination. The purpose of Section 504 is to ensure that

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability. . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving
Federal financial assistance... 29 USC § 794 (Zillow urban school district
Office of Compliance, 2015, p. 3).

The document is in several sections addressing definitions, parents’ rights, and
detailed information regarding Section 504, the due process hearing, grievance
procedures and the necessary forms for parents. This document is available online from
the Zillow school district home page under “Special Education Documents.” where 10
forms are attached to the manual for parents’ access. Parents’ rights are addressed “on pp.
7-9”. The document addressed the referral process of obtaining services; the evaluation
process; eligibility determination; Section 504; review of the Section 504 plan, and re-
evaluation. The document is concise and clearly written. While the information in the
document is clear, administrators must ensure every parent identified eligible for services
is given this document.

Summary

The document analysis was utilized to gain an understanding of the school
policies and rights of parents of students with disabilities (See Appendix C). In
triangulation of semi-structured interviews and document analysis, these themes were
identified: lack of parents’ familiarity with documents, the use of special education
terminology, and lack of accessibility of documents. The listed themes did not reflect the
core themes of study informed by the larger themes.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Child’s gender</th>
<th>Type of Disability of Child</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Relationship to child</th>
<th>School / district</th>
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Chapter 5: Themes

The overarching research question for this study is: 1) how do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement in transition planning in urban high schools, and the sub research questions were: 2) What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning? 3) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program? There were six African American parents individually interviewed through a semi-structured interview. Four themes emerged from the data collected through the interviews: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs; resistance vs empowerment; and the knowledge gap of parental rights. These themes were identified through a data driven process by open, axial, and selective coding. This chapter will share the participants’ experiences in relation to the research questions.

The researcher adopted Epstein’s (1995) parental involvement theoretical framework. Epstein acknowledged six core areas that shape parental involvement as parenting, communication, learning at home, decision-making, volunteering, and collaborating with communicating. Data analysis demonstrated that each of the six participants interviewed, their past educational experiences with their children, and their career choice shaped their level of involvement. The analysis will be described reflecting Epstein’s (1995) framework. There were participants who were employed with the school system, which increased their involvement, and there were parents who trusted the school professionals to take a lead role in decision making. It was evident that all parents were involved in their child’s transition planning; however, based on the researcher’s perception involvement looked different based on different circumstances of parents.
In the following section, the researcher will address each theme gleaned through the narratives. Next, the researcher placed themes based on theoretical framework. After funnelling down numerous codes, developing categories, and selecting themes, the researcher identified four common themes: parents as experts; emphasis on individual needs; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights.

**Parents as Experts**

The parents in this study were identified as experts as it relates to driving their children’s academic process. This study focused on African American parents of students with disabilities. For five of the six participants, it was apparent that they were knowledgeable of their child’s disability, their child’s limitations, and their child’s experiences in school. One participant who did not acknowledge their child’s limitations expressed her dissatisfaction with labeling children. The researcher will discuss the experiences in the areas of perceptions of child’s schooling, communication, and parental support at home.

**Perceptions of child’s schooling.** Five participants indicated that it was a struggle for their children to navigate the school system, due to their disability. However, the parents were not shy to step in and initiate change to create a supportive environment for their children. Stella is a parent who knows what she wants and what her daughter needs. She states,

> [S]omeone who loves her but let her know that she’s in charge, because if she sees someone that she feels she can take a little of a step over them, she will, and that's when she can get over them. Because of her behavior issues, she will target someone who she feels is less than.
Stella set the tone immediately by expressing what her child needed. Her daughter is now in the 9th grade and she expressed that since the 4th grade her daughter had to consistently change schools, due to lack of finding a good fit and teachers who were trained to work with children with autism. She is a known advocate in the community. Stella was not alone in expressing what her child needs.

Renae’s story is similar when it comes to changing schools and the difficulty with her son. While she is not as expressive, she stepped up and made it clear that consistently changing schools was not good for her son, resulting in her choosing a public charter school where she feels her voice is heard by professional staff.

Kelly states that it has been difficult raising her grandson due to previous family issues. She was very clear in what he needed to be successful. Kelly was clear she communicated his needs with his teacher to reduce behavior problems and increase his chances with being successful. She states,

At first, it was hard mainly when it came to females, because of the issue with his parents, female authority he had nothing to do with. He will try to manipulate you, and when I got him over that it became a problem with males. He had issues.

It was evident that the parents recognize it as their responsibility to know what their child needed to be successful. It was clear that past personal and academic experiences shaped how they support their children. For example, some parents found that the child’s race played a role in how they advocated for their children. Michelle stated, “[E]verybody doesn’t have to be in a resource class forever. They should try to work to get them out. It seems like our children our Black boys, are being placed in there
more than anybody else.” Kelly joined her in that stating that she wanted her son properly evaluated, by stating, “Don’t just pass him because he’s a Black male and want to just pass him to the next grade. I don’t want that.” The parents were clear in expressing their perceptions of their children’s experience and they shared what they believe as existing biases from the school professionals against Black males.

Each participant in this study was a parent of a high school student with one or more disabilities. While some parents were opposed to their child having the label, Carol showed a unique perspective. She is a special education teacher familiar with working with students with disabilities and parents. Carol noted that she noticed something was different with her son at an early age and mentioned it to the teacher. She expressed she received pushback and believes that was due to her role as a special education teacher. She consulted with a physician and stated,

[T]here is an epidemic of testing children too early and labeling Black males with ADHD, you know, or with a disability or having a disability, so she wanted to know, you know, having some concrete evidence.

Communication. The parents noted that effective communication was important, and it was often clear that the parents initiated that process with school professionals. All the parents made it known that they are open to continuous communication about their children’s process beyond the traditional online communications. While some parents found that communication was great, it was evident that some believed it was great only if they the parents initiated it. Michelle believed communication was okay; however, she often drove that process:
For the most part they will call or email me, and that’s more so me emailing them more than them emailing me. I like, I check every couple of weeks to see how he’s doing, if there any updates. The only thing I really get is information for IEP meetings but nothing saying, hey, he’s doing good or doing bad. Communication kind of sucks.

Similarly, Stella was well connected with the school system and found that there was some inconsistency in the communication. Yet, that did not stop her from advocating for her child. She described a time when her daughter started high school and she had to step in and express her dissatisfaction with the communication. She stated:

I was upset because they had orientation for freshmen, but they didn’t have anything for her, it was just drop your kid off and go. So, with her I cannot drop her off. If she wanders around she might leave the building, which is unsafe. She didn’t know anyone, so she could not be dropped off. So, I called and she said, what are we going to do for her? So, at that time the teachers did not have a contract, so if it wasn’t the time they weren’t supposed to be there, they weren’t paid extra. So, those days weren’t included in their contract, so I couldn’t drop her off. So, we had to skip the orientation.

At that time, Stella knew it was important that she advocated for her daughter at the administration level to express her concerns in hopes of facilitating change.

Tasha expressed that she noticed a difference of communication from the public schools and from the charter school. Her daughter is now at a charter school and she noted how pleased she is with the communication. She was expressed that her daughter needed a supportive environment. Tasha states:
[T]hey listen to me, they always ask me what is my opinion and what do I see, because sometimes, you know, they think I see more at home because they work with her and they ask what do she need more help in?

She believes her thoughts are valued by staff and they solicit her input in various forms of communication such as phone, text, and in person. Tasha stated that she is known as a parent that will pop up at the school unannounced, and the administration has no problem with her showing up at the school. While four of the six parents noted communication was great, the other parents did not disagree entirely, but they felt communication needs improvement because they initiate most of the exchanges.

**Support at home.** Four of the six parents expressed with excitement the work they do with their children at home. They found that actively working on homework at home promoted discussion about school. Carol states that her husband enjoys helping her son, who as ADHD, with his math problems. She states, “My husband is all about the math. We have a giant white board and he will sit there and help him work through calculations. He will write one and have him learn it and work through it.” Carol mentioned that her son was interested in STEM careers, and it was necessary that they support him at home in addition to at school.

Renae also found a unique way to capture her son’s interest in learning at home. She stated that she is a religious person and lives her life according to her faith. She wanted to reach her son through this interest. She states:

I have 3 children and I have them read a scripture from the Bible because we go to church. So, I have them read little Biblical cards, so I have him explain to me what that means and then he will tell me, and he will read another one, because he
is progressing with that just from taking that 10 minutes and wanting to read one more before leaving out the door.

Tasha took a similar approach by incorporating her family in her daughters’ learning. She mentioned that she adopted her daughter, who is now a senior. She states that her daughter had had issues with behavior in the past. Tasha knew that it was pivotal for her daughter to gain a positive attitude because in the past her negativity impacted her daughter at school. Tasha states: “I give her a scenario and I give her the consequences of a scenario and explain it to her. She picks it up a lot better because my mom said it, like she listens very well.”

The parents of this study demonstrated clarity in knowing what their children need to be successful, despite their disabilities. The parents presented a positive attitude when serving as advocates for their children. Their advocacy initiatives improved communication and learning at home.

**Emphasis on Individual Needs of Students’**

**IEP process.** The Individualized Education Program is designed to meet the individual needs of children during the transition planning from high school to employment or higher education. Five of the six parents in this study did not find that to be reflected in their experiences. This theme will share their experiences of meeting schedules, “cookie-cutter” IEPs, and parental desire for improved plans.

Three of the five parents have children in the 9th grade. During the interviews, parents who had children in the 9th grade stated that none of their children had their first IEP meeting in high school. All the meetings would take place at the end of the school year, what appeared to be standard practice. The parents did not complain to the
interviewer; however, it was clear that parents of 9th graders desired for the IEP to start earlier and may have lost that school year for moving toward the ultimate transition goal.

Stella, a parent mentor, did not complain; however, she noted the need to have those discussions earlier, being that, legally, transition services begin at age 14. Stella states

Right now, I will probably just work to see what kind of options there are out there. I might do some research myself to see where we can start at with her, because a lot of times that’s how it starts because they will say, well, we don’t know if that company will take her or for an intern or something. But lot of times, parents will do a lot of the footwork.

“Cookie-cutter”. Four of the six parents believed the IEP meetings were just a formality versus assessing the individual needs of the students. Michelle, who is closely affiliated with the school, stated that she has observed a pattern of special education professionals rushing through the process. Michelle states:

I would prefer if she listens to him more to, like, find out what he really like to do versus making it cookie cutter. Like, ok, if you go to the career center you don’t necessarily have to go to college. You know, like having more detail or ask more questions, and the more you ask it seems like he will be able to answer based on asking more questions.

Tasha, the parent of a senior is high school shares similar views as Michelle. However, Tasha references a difference in public versus charter schools. Tasha states,

“I don’t feel like the public schools focus on her IEP. It was more or less brushing them under the rug, trying to send her home. Like, literally, I will get calls 3 times a day before she got to…. And “I feel like they don’t focus on these kids and that’s where
these kids fall through the crack at, and then when they keep pushing them along and keep pushing them along because no child is left behind.”

Tasha expressed her dissatisfaction with public schools and their views of the IEP. She noted a significant difference once her daughter transferred to a charter school.

Carol found that there is an increased focus on weakness during the IEP as opposed to incorporating strengths. She presents a unique perspective since she works as a special education teacher, stating: “Initially, I didn’t tell the teachers I was a special education teacher because sometimes it gets weird because then they make sure their t’s are crossed and i’s are dotted. You should do that for every parent.”

While Carol, Michelle, and Tasha noticed the lack of individualized attention during the IEP meetings, Renae did not verbalize the lack of details, but states: “IEP meetings they just went over the education plan (I should have brought that paper with me), also where the teachers thought he needed more help.” This statement suggests that teachers took the leadership role in developing the plan and did not solicit much information from the parent. One may assert that the parent is free to offer thoughts and opinions; however, that assumes that every parent understands the process.

**Improvement of teachers’ role.** There was a consensus among parents that they desired improvement for the IEP process. When asked to describe her observation of the special education system, Michelle states, “I would say in general it needs work, and not just try to make everybody the same. You know everybody in the same bubble. I mean just kind of learn about the children.” This statement supports the lack of individuality in the IEP plans. Similarly, Tasha expressed that she was not happy with what she has
witnessed over the years, not only with her daughter, but her family members’ experience as well with the special education system. Tasha states:

I just wish these teachers will get these IEP (students) together, just a class or two. Just educate them on how they can help them and if they need help with it. Because you got 6 teachers in the office, why can’t one of them go in the class just to take something off the other teacher. Because sometimes you need a shoulder to lean on and when you got 29 kids to one teacher, that’s not gon’ work, somebody is missing out on their education in that classroom, so no one learns the same.

The additional training for teachers was commonly referenced during the interviews. Stella described a story of a teacher who was in the field for over twenty years and described her lack of knowing how to work with a child with additional needs. She states:

[A] couple of years ago when she had that big blow up in middle school, the teacher had been teaching 20 years (special ed teacher) and she was in charge because her teacher was off. It’s a Monday, she didn’t have any prepping, so she decided, I’m going to take 16 kids, and half of them had autism, I’m going to take them off their day. Yes, she took them off their schedule on a Monday and she put them on their schedule they had a year before. So, she took them to lunch with the kindergarteners and my daughter lost it. She flipped the table and the kids slid off and knock down the teacher.
Resistance versus Empowerment

There was an unspoken energy in the parent narratives. It was evident that three of six parents believed that were navigating this journey alone. Based on responses, it appeared that three of six parents could be viewed as resistant in the special education system. However, the parents made it clear that they desired more support and lacked knowing exactly what process demands. The researcher found that participants really wanted to feel empowered in the process. There was a sense of wanting the moral support from the special education professionals.

Barriers/external support. Four of six parents expressed their distress with constant stress of having to move their children to different schools. The instability of school affected parents both negatively and positively. Renae’s son is a 9th grader and she vividly described her frustration prior with his previous schools. Renae states:

Well, he’s been in 4 or 5 schools already and that was mainly because, everybody said the same thing, he’s a distraction to the class, he’s not doing what he’s supposed to and he’s just in and out of his seat or he won’t sit still or walking in and out the classroom, so he gets irritated.

Renae thought her son was misunderstood and judged based on his behavior versus examining his needs. She asserts that since placing him in the charter school, he receives the necessary attention based on his needs versus behaviors. As previously mentioned, she allows the professionals to take a leadership role in her son’s academics, stating, “I think they are there for moral support and to elaborate more and get the moral support and that is their role is at the school is I guess getting him where he needs to be.” She explained her desire for the additional support from the school professionals.
Stella shares a similar challenge with finding a good fit for her daughter as she has changed many schools due to behavior issues in the classroom. She states:

[T]he way our district is structured, we would have to move around. She has to be in a multidistrict classroom and the best setup for her is a self-contained unit, meaning that don’t really leave the unit very often to go out because of her disability. So, we’ve been in different room since she started preschool since she was 3, just because some units move, some units close, and some just aren’t a good fit. So, I just find that it’s a struggle to find that unit. She needs consistency because of her disability.

Stella acknowledges that her daughter has some behavior issues. However, she asserts the bigger problem is that she has not encountered many teachers who are properly trained to work with children who have autism. Stella is a parent who is closely connected with the school system, yet she still desires for her daughter to be empowered through increased supports from the teachers. She wants for the professional staff to acknowledge her abilities versus her disabilities.

Tasha shares similar reflections on her experience in the city versus charter schools. There was a sense that she wanted her daughter to feel a place of belonging. However, her experience in the public school was multiple calls about behavior. She states:

[So] it made me say no for the public school when I seen this was the 2nd middle school she had been at and it wasn’t working out for her at public schools, we talking about a child that has straight Fs. Yes, she has straight Fs because no one
was paying attention to what she was crying out for and she got to [her current school].

She indicates that her daughter needs additional help and often expressed it through her behavior. For example, she described her daughter as having trouble with reading out loud in class, so she would do something disruptive to avoid reading. Tasha believed that instead of calling her throughout the day, teachers should take the time to focus on her daughter’s needs and identify the “why” behind her behaviors.

Carol, who has a son now in a city school, has experienced instability in the schools. However, she described her dissatisfaction with the charter school as opposed to Stella’s and Renae’s reviews of multiple schools within school district. She also described her son as being taller than most kids his aged and kids often bully him. Carol states:

- In 4th grade, the charter school, he encountered a lot of bullying with adults and student, in 4th, 5th, 6th grade, so I moved him to a different school in 7th grade because again he was the biggest kid. He would get picked on for his size.

Carol believed that the charter school was unstructured, and she desired more structure for her son. It is important to note that Carol works for the city schools as a special education teacher and highly advocates for the teachers.

**Knowledge Gap of Parental Rights**

**Rights and responsibilities.** Four of the six parents expressed that they never received documents regarding their rights and responsibilities. The other two parents were able to describe the document in detail. It is important to note that the parents who were able to describe the document worked for the school system. It was clear that it was
a benefit that the parents who were affiliated with the school system understood their rights. For example, Stella is a parent mentor for parents of students with disabilities and Carol is a special education teacher. The other four parents were unaware that there was a book regarding their rights, often responding, “What book?”

Michelle, the parent of a 9th grader who is diagnosed with specific learning disability, was recently hired to work within the school system as a parent mentor to parents who have children with disabilities. She expressed her dissatisfaction with the communication between parents and teachers prior to her mentor role and she is more satisfied with communication now that she has the school position. She is still new in her position and says that she has a lot to learn. Michelle expressed her dissatisfaction with the communication when it regards her son’s needs. She states:

[I] feel like if I was a teacher I would reach out more to the parents versus the parents reaching out to me. I know they have a lot of students, but, still, especially with them being in a small classroom.

When asked about her knowledge of any community supports, she states that she would like to get involved in support groups but she has not found any, yet. This was a clear indication that she was not informed of supports that may be available to her. Her not knowing has not stopped her from wanting to learn more and advocate for other parents. Michelle states:

I would probably suggest for parents to make sure that they work with the schools as best they can, but also know their rights and what their children rights are and ask for what they need to help their children be successful.
Not knowing all her rights did not stop her; in fact, it drove her towards wanting to know more to support her child as well as help other parents.

**Relationships.** Tasha demonstrated that she was highly involved with her daughter’s planning for post-high school guidance. She acknowledges that the school counselor is instrumental in that process. She stated that she never received paperwork regarding her rights and responsibilities. While she has not received the mandated book explaining her rights, she believes the teachers do a wonderful job explaining to her what she feels she needs to know. In search of additional direction about her daughter’s transition planning, Tasha states that people in the helping profession help her with helping with her daughter. Tasha states:

[So] I have a friend that’s a psychologist, and I was talking to her about the situation, and we was looking things up, you know, searching, and find out what works, and I was explaining it to her because I want to know just as much as she does because I don’t want to set her up for failure.

There was a noticeable desire for her to want to know more. Her passion was demonstrated with her voice tone and she spoke with her hands in detail. Tasha was clear that she will reach out to the necessary people to assist her daughter. Tasha mentioned that when she was younger she wanted to finish college, but she did not, and she will support her daughter in any way to help her achieve her goal. She finds value in connecting with people who have knowledge about working with people with disabilities. She states:
I have a lot of friends that’s social workers, psychologist and doctors, things like that, so she can get that aspect of where she wants to be. I try to keep a lot of people talking to her and to figure out where she wants to be.

Kelly noted that her grandson is in the 9th grade and she has not received documents regarding her rights and responsibilities. However, she said she was fully aware that she can access the necessary documents online. Kelly responded with limited information due to the lack of conversation with IEP staff about her grandson’s transition plan. It was obvious that Kelly was taking responsibility for her grandson’s trajectory and there was not a desire to want to know more. Her lack of desire is due to her believing that no child should be in special education classes. However, she acknowledged that her grandson receives additional support from a counselor that is instrumental in their family’s life.

Renae was extremely reserved throughout the interview. There was a sense of urgency for her to know more.

When asked about her rights and responsibilities as a parent, there was a puzzled look on her face. She mentioned that at times she needs help and direction. She stated that she did not receive any paperwork regarding her rights. The only thing she received was an IEP and she did not bring that to the interview meeting. She states that she did not remember much about the IEP details. When asked about her initial communication about his son’s needs and her rights, she states, “They were just trying to see his mindset and anything he needed help with and that’s pretty much it.” At the end of interview, she responded with how grateful she was to tell her story. She said that no one really asks her how she is doing and, as a single mother, she keeps things bottled up.
Participants Stella and Carol were well-informed of their rights based on their roles in the education system. Stella is a parent mentor for students with disabilities and Carol is a special education teacher. They both stated that their positions require them to be informed and they recognize that other parents may not have the same opportunity. While the parental guide is accessible online, there is an underlying assumption that parents understand what they are reading.

In all, four of the six participants desired more knowledge beyond their self-taught methods. There were both spoken and unspoken methods to gain direction in how to support their children. While some parents voiced that they desire assistance, others responded with not knowing the next steps or the appropriate people to reach out to. Also, it was found that some parents were unaware that there was a manual, and assumed they were receiving all appropriate information.

Summary

This chapter reflected views and common issues expressed by six African American parents of high school students with learning disabilities. The researcher gained depth and breadth of their experiences to answer the initial research question, how do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their involvement during transition planning? Four themes emerged from the data collected through the interviews: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights. These themes were identified through pattern matching of the narratives and explanation building analysis. The next chapter will share the participants’ experiences in relation to the research question.
Table. 2. Summary of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents are Experts</th>
<th>Emphasis on meeting the Individual Needs of Students</th>
<th>Resistance Versus Empowerment of Parents</th>
<th>Knowledge gap of Parental Right</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carol</strong></td>
<td>“my role was to advocate for him and let them know he has a voice in this process as well so he can be heard”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tasha</strong></td>
<td>“[T]here is an epidemic of testing children too early and labeling Black males with ADHD, you know, or with a disability or having a disability, so she wanted to know, you know, having some concrete evidence.”</td>
<td>“I feel like they don’t focus on these kids and that’s where these kids fall through the crack at, and then when they keep pushing them along because no child is left behind.”</td>
<td>“Well, he’s been in 4 or 5 schools already and that because, everybody said the same thing, he’s a distraction to the class, he’s not doing what he’s supposed to and he’s just in and out of his seat or he won’t sit still or walking in and out the classroom, so he gets irritated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michelle</strong></td>
<td>“I would prefer if she listens to him more to like find out what he really like to do versus making it cookie cutter, like ok if you go to the career center you don’t necessarily have to go to college.”</td>
<td>“A lot of time when they walk in those meetings all the professionals are sitting there and they are the only parent and they feel like they don’t know what they are talking about, they should feel empowered, but they know their child better than anyone else.”</td>
<td>“[So] I have a friend that’s a psychologist, and I was talking to her about the situation, and we was looking things up, you know, searching, and find out what works, and I was explaining it to her because I want to know just as much as she does because I don’t want to set her up for failure”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stel</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>“I have a lot of friends that’s social workers, psychologist and doctors, things like that, so she can get that aspect of where she wants to be. I try to keep a lot of people talking to her and to figure out where she wants to be.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stella</strong></td>
<td>“I see myself as a partner.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[S]omeone who loves her but let her know that she’s in charge, because if she sees someone that she feels she can take a little of a step over them, she will, and that’s when she can get over them. Because of her behavior issues, she will target someone who she feels is less than”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kelly</strong></td>
<td>At first, it was hard mainly when it came to females, because of the issue with his parents, female authority he had nothing to do with. He will try to manipulate you, and when I got him over that it became a problem with males. He had issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Michelle</strong></td>
<td>For the most part they will call or email me, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Stella</strong> Right now, I will probably just work to see what kind of options there are out there. I might do some research myself to see where we can start at with her, because a lot of times that’s how it starts because they will say, well, we don’t know if that company will take her or for an intern or something. But lot of times, parents will do a lot of the footwork.</td>
<td><strong>Carol</strong> 4th grade, the charter school, he encountered a lot of bullying with adults and student, in 4th, 5th, 6th grade, so I moved him to a different school in 7th grade because again he was the biggest kid. He would get picked on for his size.</td>
<td><strong>Michelle</strong> “I would probably suggest for parents to make sure that they work with the schools as best they can, but also know their rights and what their children rights are and ask for what they need to help their children be successful.” “[I] feel like if I was a teacher I would reach out more to the parents versus the parents reaching out to me. I know they have a lot of students, but, still, especially with them being in a small classroom.” “I would probably suggest for parents to make sure that they work with the schools as best they can, but also know their rights and what their children rights are and ask for what they need to help their children be successful.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>that’s more so me emailing them more than them emailing me. I like, I check every couple of weeks to see how he’s doing, if there any updates.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Renae</strong></td>
<td>I have 3 children and I have them read a scripture from the Bible because we go to church. So, I have them read little biblical cards, so I have him explain to me what that means and then he will tell me</td>
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**Renae**
I have 3 children and I have them read a scripture from the Bible because we go to church. So, I have them read little biblical cards, so I have him explain to me what that means and then he will tell me.
Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, & Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the parental involvement of African Americans of high school students with disabilities, particularly during transition planning from high school to work or to post-secondary education. This study focused on an urban school district in the Midwestern United States. Research was conducted through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with six African American parents. The researcher also conducted a documents analysis of two parent guides distributed in 2012 and 2017. This chapter will include analysis, the findings from the data collection and discuss the implications and recommendations regarding transition planning for various stakeholders. These stakeholders include educational professionals such as counselors, teachers, administrators, and suggestions for policy makers and other decision makers. Research Questions were sought to explore:

1) How do African American parents of students with disabilities describe their parental involvement of transition planning in urban high schools?

   Sub Questions include:

2) What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning?

3) How do African American parents describe their understanding of the Individualized Education Program?

This chapter shares conclusions drawn from the participants’ narratives which were examined through the lens of Epstein’s (2005) parental involvement theory. The findings were concluded from the data and it was evident that there is a lack of clearly defining parental involvement. Four themes emerged following the coding of the data including: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs of student IEP’s;
resistance versus empowerment from parents; and knowledge gap of parents regarding parental rights.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study it was evident that the six parents were involved in their child’s transition planning. However, involvement was different from traditional involvement in each case. African Americans often support their children more at home than at the school (Griffin, 2012). Consistent with Griffin’s notions, the researcher found that the parents were highly involved with more of the support for their children occurring outside the classroom than at school. This does not suggest that the parents did not attend any school meetings or other school activities. This is a departure from the literature that suggest that many African American parents do not participate in activities at their children’s school. For example, the Center for Public Education (2011) noted that Caucasian parents were more likely to attend school activities than African Americans.

Further, the results of this study are inconsistent with research that claims the African American parents lack certain levels of involvement in comparison to Caucasian families’ involvement (Brandon, 2007; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007). The researcher found that the bigger issue is the lack of defining parental involvement when it relates to minority families. Like Robinson’s (2017) study, it was found that parents recognize the importance of involvement and may be unaware of how they could participate in their child’s schooling. The participants in this study were six African American parents of high school students with disabilities. Four themes emerged from the data: parents as experts; emphasis on meeting the individual needs; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights. The researcher adopted the established theoretical lens
from Epstein’s (1995) body of work. While the model is criticized for the lack of competence for minority families, the researcher found that it supported the families in this study.

**Epstein Parental Involvement Theory Challenges**

Some researchers highlight the lack of cultural competence in Epstein’s parental involvement framework (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Griffin, 2011; Freeman, 2010; Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Epstein acknowledges the benefits and challenges of the model for both parents and teachers. This model describes six areas which hope to explicate supporting families in both the classroom and home environments. In the parenting and community areas of the model, Epstein highlights the implication of diversity for teachers adhering to this model. However, the model lacks the suggestion of what this process looks like across various racially diverse groups. For example, this study focuses on African American parents which minority experiences may differ from white counterparts based on diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. Documentation shows that African Americans have experienced racism and discrimination in the education sphere (Blanchett, 2006; Skiba, Staudinger, Simmons, & Azziz, 2006). Strides have been made for racial equality, yet there remains a need for equitable experiences for minority parents. Understanding diversity goes above stating it exists to a more practical use of what diversity means and looks like.

The findings in this current study support Epstein’s model as it relates to the strengths of teachers assessing these areas. The parents operated on the notion that all six areas were important. However, the model does not support how the areas are unique based on racial groups. For example, in the parenting area, the parents in this study
supported their children at home which differed from the models’ original practices. While the model practices may not be rigid, parenting can look different across cultural norms. Parents’ in this study recognized their children’s challenges of having a learning disability with a few parents developing unique practices to support their children at home. To illustrate, one parent stated that her religion drove her parenting practices as she helps her son read by his reading and explaining Bible scriptures. Noteworthy to highlight the fact that many African American families build support through their church community.

Awareness of community resources is of keen importance for teachers and parents when working with diverse families of children with disabilities, specifically in supporting transition planning services. The researcher of this study noted that in the area of collaborating with community, neglected is how to address the lack of community resources in urban districts. This has the potential to impede partnerships between school and communities, which further impacts parental inclusion. For further illustration (see Appendix D).

**Analysis Related to the Research Questions**

The parents demonstrated increased involvement; however, there were noted concerns when it related to transition planning preparation from the parents of students in the 9th grade. Iver et al., (2015) noted that freshman (9th grade) year is a critical year of transition and a determining factor in student success. Kelly, the guardian of a 9th grader, stated, “No, we have not had a formal meeting, but from him and I talking, his plan is that he is going to college.” Michelle, the mother of a 9th grader, stated that she is getting support from her son’s middle school teacher who initially developed the IEP. She states,
“His teacher from last year who I spoke a lot and, so she was just reaching out to see if I had any additional ideas and goal.” At the time of the study, the parents of 9th graders were yet to have an IEP meeting during the 9th grade year addressing the transition needs of the students, although there is a mandate to address transition planning at age 14 (IDEA 2004 Close, 2015). However, the meetings were scheduled later in the school year, which adheres to the law, yet the students are lacking direct planning needs for one entire school year.

Parents in this study mentioned that the meetings were scheduled in April and May, at the end of school year. While the later meetings will help prepare for 10th-12th grade year, the later meetings reflect an entire school year that students are missing classes that could positively affect their post-high school goals. Existing literature asserts that African American parents demonstrate a lower level of involvement (Brandon, 2007; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007), when in fact the results of this study showed that the parents-initiated meetings at school.

Parenting. Epstein (1995) describes parenting as creating a supportive environment at home to support students’ academic success. Epstein notes that parents will recognize the needs and challenges of their child. The results of this study support this tenet of the model. Stella, the parent of a 9th grader, stated:

She comes home with just about whatever is going on in the school, like recently they requested to do some more sensory integration with her from the OT so they brought that home... and she has a self-regulation chart that she uses.

The parents in this study indicated that creating an environment to support their children at home was important. However, the support from the staff at school was
needed to understand what it takes to support a child at home. The discussion of partnership has been common in the literature for many years. As identified in chapter two, Burnette (1998) suggested that a shared vision between parents and teachers increases effective collaboration. Landmark et al (2013) asserts that teachers have a responsibility for taking the lead role. The notion of teachers taking more responsibility supports Epstein’s (1995) framework in advocating for teachers creating workshops for parents to know how they can support their children in school and home environment parents. These perspectives all confirm what resulted from the data collection in this study.

Five of six participants explained how it was important to collaborate with staff because they wanted to be involved in the process. While the Epstein’s model has been criticized for the lack of cultural competence (Bower & Griffin, 2011), the researcher found that the partnership between staff and parents created a learning environment for the teachers to learn about the parent’s cultural background. Epstein noted that a benefit for teachers is that they work more closely with parents and understand the impact of working with diverse students. For example, students represent diverse groups; such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability and family dynamics. All the listed components are important when working with the individual needs of students. It is imperative to understand how cultural differences can impact a student’s role in the classroom. It is necessary for teachers to be attentive to these dynamics to properly serve the students and furthermore effectively collaborate with families.

**Communicating.** The results of this study suggest that increased communication between parents and teachers increased parental involvement. Epstein (1995) asserted
that increased communication about school policies and students’ progress is a benefit to parents, which then increases parental involvement. The lack of communication between teachers and parents has been noted as a known barrier to parental involvement (Brandon, 2007; Brandon & Brown, 2009; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007; Lott-Daley, 2013). Five of the six parents initiated communications with the school and made it clear that they are accessible if the school wanted to connect with them.

The parents believed that communication was not a problem, due to parents being involved in their child’s progress. For example, Stella, the parent of a 9th grader, would often initiate communication. She stated, “I just had an impromptu, formal meeting with them and told them about the behavior plan and the positive reinforcements they would need and gave them the packets, self-regulation charts.” Three of the six parents in this study asserted that the teachers valued their input when transition planning for their child was discussed, because the teachers recognized them as experts on their children. Tasha believed the teacher valued creating a partnership: she stated, “Her teachers at […] are great, they are on her, they let her know the path she needs to go down, they are more like a parent role to her.”

While communication was good for most of the parents, the researcher found it interesting that there were increased effective communication for the three parents who worked in the special education system. One of the parents who was a special education teacher noted that the teacher’s attitude changed once they recognized that she was familiar with the system. Carol stated, “Initially, I didn’t tell the teachers I was a special education teacher because sometimes it gets weird because then they make sure their Ts are crossed and I’s are dotted. You should do that for every parent”. This indicates that
teachers base their treatment of students based on their perception of the parent. This presents a problem if there is a responsibility for teachers to provide equitable services to all students. This also suggest that teachers assess students based on hierarchy. Carol identified that the teachers more intentional when it came to her child because they knew she was familiar with the procedures. Carol’s comments suggest there is a lack of thorough assessment if the teacher believes the parent is not knowledgeable of proper procedures.

Learning at home. The results suggest that the parents in this study did not have a problem with initiating learning at home; however, it was developed on their own as opposed to the teachers implementing ways to support families. Epstein (1995) describes these acts of learning at home as a form or collaboration with teacher helping families develop activities to support children at home. Renae’s son with a learning disability struggles with reading. She indicated that he likes sports, so she was intentional in getting him to read: “I will try to get him sports books or magazines to read every morning before he goes to school.”

Hamblet (2014) also described similar strategies to support families of students with disabilities, one being for teachers to reach out to families more and educate them on roles and responsibilities. With the exception of one of the parents who has a daughter with autism, the parents implemented self-help activities to support their children at home. In support of Epstein’s model, the parents benefited from helping their children at home because they understood their children challenges and personalities. Epstein’s (1995) model of support is consistent with these findings and suggests that teachers benefit by understanding different family dimensions such as single parent homes, dual
income homes, and different socioeconomic status. Yet, in this study only one parent indicated that teachers implement activities to support families at home. Reynolds et al., (2015) conducted a study of teachers in an urban district and the teachers acknowledged playing a significant role in parental involvement.

**Decision making.** Decision making is a critical factor in parental involvement; the parents revealed that they believed they were experts in the process of planning for their children. Howard (2015) conducted a similar study exploring African American parental involvement and their perceptions of public school and found that parents with increased leadership roles demonstrated a positive relationship and influence in the child’s schooling. Epstein’s (1995) model drives the concept of creating parent leaders. The model supports engaging parents in the schools’ policies and procedures. Further, this tenet supports teachers valuing the input of parents and recognizing they are key players in their child’s progress. Epstein notes that a challenge is to include parents from all racial groups and socioeconomic levels in the decision-making process. Durodoye, Combes, and Bryant (2004) support the notion of providing more ethnically-appropriate resources for minority families. This will in fact require additional training on cultural competencies for school professionals.

**Collaborating in community.** Collaboration with community partnerships is critical in supporting families (Epstein, 1995, 2011; Robinson, 2017). Overall, the parents in this study were unaware of available resources for supporting their families. Yet, there was a desire to know more of parent support groups and additional supports for families. One of the parents in the study was highly knowledgeable of community resources and credits that to her position as a parent mentor for the special education system. Epstein
(1995) recognizes funding as a challenge for external resources. This is particularly true for urban school districts that often lack funds (Applequist, 2009). While collaboration is key towards involving parents, there are existing stigmas of people with disabilities which concerned some of the parents in this study. Their concern is an indicator of parents questioning the support systems in place.

**Stigma in community.** There is a history of negative attitudes and stigma against African Americans with disabilities (Blanchett, 2006; Patton, 1998; Skiba, Staudinger, Simmons, & Azziz, 2006). Tasha, the mother of two African American daughters, one who has a disability, was very bold in asserting that she refuses for her children to feel inferior and she will empower them with all means. She states:

> You walk around, and you think you better than them, you don’t have to tell them that, but nobody is going to boost your confidence you know. You don’t need nobody stroking your ego. I always try to make feel above and beyond. I’m not telling them to act like you above and beyond, but aspects in life what you trying to do and the negative things they’re doing, you’re better than that, you were raised better than that.

She was clear that it was not about teaching her children they are better than others, but reminding them that despite race or disability, you can do anything you want, and Tasha wanted to support her daughter’s dreams.

Kelly shares a similar perspective in pushing her grandson to strive for the best. She states:
I wanted to make sure that he knew exactly what he was doing. Please, by all means and I emphasize that, don’t just pass him because he’s a Black male you and want to just pass him to the next grade, I don’t want that.

It was clear that Kelly believed race and gender were relevant to how her grandson was treated in the special education system. It appeared that Kelly was resistant to receiving special education services, when in fact she wanted to create an empowering environment for her grandson. She believes it takes a partnership to create that environment, and she was the leader in that process, stating, “I sure do, because those resource rooms are a crutch and I am trying my hardest to tell him you don’t need a crutch, baby.” She shared her frustration with her grandson having an IEP and he beliefs. Kelly states:

[M]y biggest thing with the IEP, know why IEP is there, because he has two, one for education and one for behavior. I understand why it’s there, but I don’t want him to be handicapped or crippled because of it. I don’t want him to be treated no different than nobody else.

Kelly finds the system to be crippling to youth with disabilities. She believes that teachers view the IEP as a behavior plan versus preparing students for the next steps of life. Carol notes that her roles as a parent and special education teacher intermesh. Yet it was clear that she respected the role of teachers much more than the other parents do. She believes that Black parents need to take a leadership role in their child’s educational endeavors. She states,

I think we need education amongst ourselves, so we will know, in the Black community specifically, it’s ok, you know, if your child needs help, it’s ok to get help. And not only special education, even mental health because that’s another
dynamic, we’re afraid to sought out mental health services for ourselves because that’s a stigma attached to that also, because a lot of times these things, you know you need help in this area and you made need help in another area, buts it’s ok. And parents need to know its resources out there to help them, who are willing to help.

It was apparent that she acknowledged the existing stigmas and attitudes in the African American community, and believes they hinder the progression of the youth and they potentially miss out on the help they need to be successful. Lott- Daley (2013) conducted a similar study interviewing parents in urban school districts and found that there were existing attitudinal barriers when it came to parents who they believed were in a lower socioeconomic status. Preconceived notions are noted barriers which often disrupt communication (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Harry, 1992; Jeynes, 2007).

**What do African American parents see as their role in transition planning.** Transition planning in special education is defined “a process mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEIA 2004) for all students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in K-12 education. The purpose is to facilitate the student’s move from school to post-school activities” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, para .1, 2017). Accordingly, IDEIA requires schools to begin the transition process at the age 14 (IDEIA, 2004).

The researcher found that three of six parents in this study were clear on the transition planning process and their role in the process. Two were parent mentors and one a special education teacher. This is important to note because the parents who were well-connected were employees of the school system. In fact, one of the parents brought
the IEP to the interview and was prepared to explain how she and the staff will implement the goals. Stella stated, “I think a lot times they are reactive instead of proactive. I feel like that, in my case, they need to do a better job in providing training for autism because the state is saying inclusion and my daughter cannot do inclusion.” According to McDermott et al., (2015), having a child with autism is a tremendous responsibility on families and additional support is needed. Stella understood the importance of being proactive versus reactive. The researcher observed that the other parents did not comment on the presence or absence of a reactive approach when teachers were taking a reactive approach, due to their lack of knowledge of the transition planning process.

The researcher found the misconception of the lack of parental involvement is connected to parents not asking the right questions. The greater problem is that the parents are asking questions; however, they may not ask the questions using familiar terminology or know when to ask the questions. For example, “transition planning” is a term commonly used in special education services and it would be helpful if educators communicated the goals with all parents in common terms. While the parents who were connected to the education system were well-informed, the researcher found that the other parents in the study had the same desire of involvement, yet the process looks different due to their lack of understanding the process. Parent participation at school meetings is how school typically access involvement (Center for Public Education, 2011), and that was not solely the case in this study.

The parents who were not affiliated with the school were unable to articulate the process, yet there was a spoken desire to learn more. The parents were unaware of their
rights and responsibilities. It was clear that the parents adopted self-help methods to support their children. The parents mentioned assessing their children’s interest at home in terms of what they want to do after high school. Griffin (2012) supports self-advocacy among African American parents and the need for parents to no longer be silenced in the process.

**How do African American parents describe their understanding of the individualized education program.** Overall, the parents in this study demonstrated a basic understanding of the Individualized Education Program. In the late 1980’s, Smith and Simpson (1989) examined 214 IEP’s for students who had behavior disorders in a Midwestern state and noted that the IEPs lack attention to certain mandated areas. As of 2018, this remains a problem. Although, there is an accessible parent guide online describing parents’ roles and responsibilities, four of the six parents described their understanding minimally. The parents viewed the IEP more as a formality than a way to support their child and post-high school goals. It was clear that there was a lack of understanding the complete IEP. For example, when the researcher asked the parents about the IEP process, the participants responded with descriptions of the child’s behavior. Tasha stated, “She was a little behind and I wanted to focus on her education IEP versus her behavior IEP. She had it as behavior first, but that’s no longer. And I feel like they were sweeping it under the rug.” Parents described an environment where the IEP is a procedure as opposed to a process.

It is critical for special education professionals to take a leadership role in explaining to parents the details of the process. While there are mandated parental guides, the IEP teams are not explaining to parents their rights and responsibilities. The guides
are accessible online, and every parent was aware of that, yet few were familiar with the
guide. Two of the parents had a copy of the document and they received the document
because they work in the school system. The other parents never received a document.

Summary

Based on the findings of this study, African American parents are actively
involved in their children’s transition planning. Yet, additional support is needed from the
teachers to provide a more thorough understanding of the process. The parents initiated
self-help models to create a learning space at home. For example, recognizing their
children’s limitations they created untraditional homework help which capture their
child’s interest. The researcher anticipated that the parents’ narratives would differ from
the existing statistics, due to the lack of recent studies hearing the parents’ perspectives as
related directly to transition planning. The main difference was these parents experienced
effective communication between parents and teachers.

While communication was overall good, the parents lacked understanding of
their rights, which impeded the process of optimal advocating for their children. The
parents described their roles as advocates and as learners in the process. It was clear that
each parent in this study wanted their child to be successful despite their disability. Based
on the findings, the IEP was viewed and assessed based on the students’ behavior instead
of the educational goals. The parents desired more emphasis on their child’s strengths as
opposed to being evaluated from a deficient stance.

It was clear that when the researcher entered the field, it was difficult to access
African American parents as participants, based on the lack of trust in the African
American population as it relates to school institutions. Bridging the gap between the
education system and families is necessary to create a trusting environment, particularly when working with families who have children with disabilities. African American families have often encountered negative experiences with the education system, thus there is an existing lack of communication. However, it is difficult to build these relationships in high school when mistrust begins in the earlier years of schooling.

The results of this study suggest a need for further explanation to parents of children with disabilities regarding their rights and responsibilities. There is an apparent assumption that parents understand the process. One parent who was a special education teacher noted the difference in how they treated her before they knew she was also a special education teacher. Better-aware, more-educated parents may inspire better collaboration with special education professionals and more satisfying outcomes. Epstein’s parental involvement promotes a partnership between parents and professionals.

Creating partnerships takes intentional work and effort. Establishing a partnership is necessary, but a shared vision is paramount. Preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary success is the optimal goal and the IEP team, parents, and students should be actively involved in this process. The findings of this study showed that students were not attending the IEP meetings because parents did not want them involved or parents did not know student participation is allowed.
Recommendations for Practice

Support Groups for African Americans Parents of Students with Disabilities

African American parents who have children with disabilities need more advocates. McDermott et al. (2015) posits a gap in literature addressing the stress of minority families, particularly families who have children with autism (p. 1728). With the optimal goal being involved parents, better strategies to engage minority parents in the transition process is needed. Ha, Greenberg, and Seltzer (2011) stress the importance of increased positive interactions to support African American families of children with disabilities. In this study, the parents all attended an urban district in the Midwest. Urban districts typically lack resources, impacting the residents in the community. The research substantiates the need for more accessible support groups in urban communities (Applequist, 2009; Ha et al., 2011; Harry, 2002; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). For example, Renea, who has a son with a disability, states that she is overwhelmed, but without an outlet, she does not share her feelings.

In this study, four of the six parents were dependent on receiving information from school officials relating to supporting their child with a disability. If teachers lack the competence and tools to support parents creating support groups for parents of children with disabilities in urban district will offer parents another outlet of support. Further, support teachers as well since they have limited time in their day. One parent urged the city and state levels for support programs with the push back being both lack of time and money. Iadarola et al. (2015) findings were similar when interviewing parents of students with autism and their teachers in an urban district.
Identifying appropriate advocates to implement a program of such is important. For example, various school districts have parent mentors who help provide parents of children with disabilities with resources to support their families. In this study, parents who were not affiliated with the school were unaware of these resources. The researcher stresses the need for the school district to take a direct role in connecting with their communities. Epstein’s (1995) parental involvement framework suggests assisting families in their home community environment. Local churches offering seminars on parental rights and responsibilities with on children receiving special education services is a good example of building and connecting resources in the community.

The literature demonstrates that African American parents are more involved outside the classroom thus creating support groups in the community or churches is necessary. African American families often build community in churches (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Boyd-Franklin, Morris, Morris, & Bry; 1997; Pickett-Schenk; 2002). Therefore, these venues could provide possible means for school administrators and teachers to reach parents. Based on the population in this study, the urban school district is defined by the makeup of the population, high minority, access, socioeconomic status, and resources (Ohio Typology, 2013). Teachers must be intentional in providing for the needs of the students and families they serve. Since the urban district described is a high minority population, a need for delivery of culturally sensitive practices is necessary and profitable to all parties.

The researcher recommends the need for digital support groups. Since school districts have many documents online, the researcher proposes the district provides online parent forums to engage them. Parent mentors in the school district are there to support
parents of children with disabilities. However, these parents are more likely to support each other in a closed forum such as in a Facebook or twitter support group, where they parents can privately interact and pose questions when concerns or use as a platform for sharing information.

Training Groups for Teachers

Teachers who work with students with disabilities have an increased need for training (Hamblet, 2014). Students with disabilities require unique teaching and individualized skills based on the severity of the disability; therefore, the teacher must understand student challenges, psychosocial issues, and family norms. The parents in this study desired the teachers to work with students from an individual approach versus adopting a “one size fits all” model. Robinson (2017) asserts that educators often struggle to create strategies to involve families. Ongoing teacher training versus “one time” training models provide more depth. Administrators using the one-time trainings hold expectations that teachers can now adequately serve students with disabilities, instead of recognizing that only the surface was scratched.

Implementing strategies is important, however there is more benefit in ongoing training. The beneath the surface attitudes and biases of teachers who work with students with disabilities is the first step to address. Negative attitudes towards the African American culture have been noted for many decades (Harry, 1992). In addition to being African American, having a disability can enhance the likelihood of discriminating attitudes. Increased exposure to individuals with disabilities contributes towards positive attitudes (Lawson, Cruz, & Knollman, 2017). Negative attitudes can be implicit as well as knowingly. Having honest conversations about teachers’ perceptions and comfort level
of working with students with disabilities can begin discussions to identify areas of improvement. This leads researchers to the suggested consultation model.

As early as the 1980’s consulting has served an intricate role in special education programs. The school-based consultation and collaboration model addresses mental health concerns, behavioral, and academic issues in youth (Dougherty, 2014). This study demonstrated that parents were dealing with the challenges of their child’s disability as well as being impacted by their child’s behavior and academic concerns. Researchers support the consultation model, to help teachers address the needs of students and their families. To support families, teachers must be more knowledgeable of the laws which mandate them to support students with disabilities. Knowing the laws exist and understanding the applicability of laws in the classroom are especially important with general education teachers who do not often work with students with disabilities. Commonly, general education teachers are working with students with disabilities and assuming the same role and responsibility with all students, while clearly not understanding the students’ limitations.

Iadarola et al. (2015) validates the need for practical support strategies for educators who work with children with autism in an urban setting. More collaborative trainings between special education teachers and general education teachers support an inclusion model. Iadarola et al. (2015) exposes tension between general and special education teachers as it relates to supporting children with autism. Rarely do general education teachers have specific training to work with students with disabilities; districts adopt the pull in model required by law where students with disabilities are mainstreamed in the classroom. Though there is some disagreement with this model, if a district chooses
to adopt this model, trainings should be mandated. The cookie-cutter instructional strategies does not work for all students. The parents in this study all have children with learning disabilities and each child’s limitations vary, all parents expressed different concerns as related to how their child learns. While teachers may have the best intentions for the students, their lack of understanding disabilities and the impact on the student, impedes the learning process. For example, Tasha, the parent of a child with a disability, states, “I don’t know if they not equipped, you putting one teacher in the class with 28 or 29 kids that even equipped to deal with a child with an IEP.” This study shares the voices of parents and their desire for better training for teachers, in turn improving the parent-teacher relationship.

**Implications for Policy Makers**

Policy makers must understand their role in supporting minority families who have children with disabilities. Policy makers and city officials need to take more of an effort to provide funding to support more groups in the community to support minority families who have children with disabilities. Creating additional supports will help build parents trust with policy makers. If policy makers create such opportunities, this would bridge the gap of stronger partnerships between parents and the school district. Another need is for policy makers to implement more user-friendly documents to explicate the rights and responsibilities of parents.

Legislation is in place to support students with disabilities; however, policy makers need to stress to the school districts the need to enforce laws. For example, some teachers implement the bare minimum for students with disabilities to satisfy a check mark on their duties. Implementing change is not always easy especially when people are
comfortable with daily practices and everyone is feeling overwhelmed. One of the parents in this current study expressed that she believes teachers are overwhelmed in the classroom which is impeding on their individual time needed with students.

Further, policy makers commonly make laws without hearing the voices of the people the law impacts. For example, if their mandates directly impact parents, then parents should be invited to the table to lend. While policy makers are in positions of power to implement change, there is a clear need to include the expert in the room, the parent. Power differential between teachers and parents often impact the parents’ position in the room. For example, some may feel less than or powerless in a room full of people, whether it is a cultural, educational or economic level differential. Stella states:

A lot of time when they [parents] walk in those meetings all the professionals are sitting there and they are the only parent and they feel like they don’t know what they are talking about, they should feel empowered.

In this study the parent participants were African American women from diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and marital status. What unified this group was their love for their children, advocacy for their children, and desired external support for their children. For policy makers, this is an opportunity to reach all families beyond the classroom as it is quite difficult to separate a child’s home environment from their school. Therefore, there is increased need for policy makers to go above and beyond in order to meet the need of minority families by going directly to those families in the community and not relying on parental engagement at the school as the only source of connection with the parents.
**Recommendations for Parents**

Parental advocacy is critical in a school partnership between parents and school professionals. The parents in this study indicates that advocating for their child who had a disability was first nature, though not all identified specific resources. The researcher recommends parents be included more in every step of the IEP process. One example is to ask teachers to take additional time to explain every aspect of the IEP with a detailed description. Further, not only complete the necessary components of IEP to satisfy a check mark, but to require teachers to explain how the goals will be met. The act of doing so place the position of powers in the hands of the parents. As well, parents can learn to take more initiative and request teachers to give them more time to review the IEP prior to the meeting. For example, Michelle, required that the teachers email her a few days prior to the IEP meeting to have time to review and prepare her questions. The IEP phase can be more of a partnership as opposed to a review of what teachers and other members have composed in the document. Stella, a participant in this study, affirmed that parents are the experts.

**Counselor Inclusion to Support Families**

Transition planning is a critical time for students with disabilities and their families, preparing for the next steps after graduation. However, this research found a lack of counselor inclusion during the transition planning process. The parents expressed a desire for additional support. It is critical for counselor-educators to prepare staff to work with students of minority populations. An ongoing discussion of counselor’s responsibility is one of learning to better serve minority families. Even so, minimal
changes have been noted. The parents in this study expressed their desire for additional supports outside the school, to become better equipped to advocate for their children. Ha et el, (2011) notes the impact of African American parents’ well-being when having a child with a disability. Carol, the parent of a 9th grader with a specific learning disability, expressed her desire for counseling services at the school. When presented with the service opportunities, she soon realized the services were not accessible or affordable. While school and transition counselors are often present in the school, there is need for more accessible mental health counselors to support the vocational and behavior needs of students and to further support their families.

As the counseling profession serves a diverse body of clients, multicultural competencies are continuously revamping so professionals can remain abreast in the field. Table 3 suggests a model towards preparing counseling professionals to work with students with disabilities. The model was designed to identify the areas of improvement, CACREP standards in which counselor educators are obligated to demonstrate, multicultural and social justice competencies, and the researchers recommendations.
Table 3. Recommendations counselor education programs, practitioners, counseling related professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORE AREAS</th>
<th>Identify Areas of Improvement</th>
<th>CACREP STANDARD</th>
<th>Multicultural &amp; Social Justice Competencies</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>• Adequate supervision training for rehabilitation counselors</td>
<td>B.2.I; B.2.J</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>- Provide quarterly training as it relates to reinforcing the role of supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What does supervision training look like?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Counseling Interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>• Effective teaching strategies for working with students with learning/physical disabilities</td>
<td>B.3.A.; B.3.B; B.3.H</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>- Challenge existing norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More in-depth Multicultural training – infused in all counseling classes versus ONE class</td>
<td></td>
<td>Counseling Interventions</td>
<td>- Infuse cross cultural training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- more service learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORE AREAS</th>
<th>Identify Areas of Improvement</th>
<th>CACREP Standard</th>
<th>Multicultural &amp; Social Justice Competencies</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>outlets</td>
<td></td>
<td>/advocacy interventions</td>
<td>for graduate students for such research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>• Develop cultural competence</td>
<td>B.1. F.</td>
<td>-Counseling Interventions</td>
<td>-Service learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased disability awareness of culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Self awareness</td>
<td>-Increased disability content in courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Advocacy</td>
<td>• Graduate programs should consider more outlets to connect with disability advocate programs.</td>
<td>B.5.I; B.5.J; B.5.K.; B.5.L</td>
<td>- Advocacy Interventions</td>
<td>- leadership training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Self Awareness</td>
<td>- Additional faculty training on working with individuals who have disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Panel discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Active involvement in organizations that include content for working with individuals with physical disabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study focused on involvement of African American parents of students with learning disabilities in an urban school district. Future research is needed to explore teachers’ perceptions of their role in transition planning and to examine their training for working with students with disabilities in low-income school districts. This study also suggests a low competence of school administrators’ ability to optimally serve students with disabilities. It was apparent in this study that there was a lack of involvement from school administrators. Moreover, a comparative study is desired to
compare the supports of African Americans of students with disabilities in an urban district with those in a suburban district as this study demonstrated that resources play a significant role in transition planning.

Concluding Statement

This researcher conducted a qualitative research study exploring six African American parents of students with disabilities in a central Ohio urban school district. While not anticipated all the participants were mothers. The case study explores their involvement during transition planning during high school while preparing for post-high school plans. Data were analyzed through open coding which was categorized based on Epstein’s parental involvement framework to support the findings. Four themes emerged: parents as experts; emphasis on individual needs; resistance versus empowerment; and knowledge gap of parental rights. The researcher recommends increased training to support African Americans who have children with disabilities, more training for teachers who work with children with disabilities, and a more prominent role for counselors in supporting students through the transition planning process, increased parent engagement, and implications for policy makers.
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who are African American and have disabilities: What do we know and what do we need to know. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 45*, 149–158.


doi: 10.1177.0044118X114966.


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Demographics

Name:

Age:

Marital Status:

Education level:

Employment Status:

Type of disability of child:

Grade level of child

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What do you think it has been like for your child to go to school?

2. What are common things your child says about being in school?

3. Does your child come home with paperwork, if so, what type?

4. When your child was first enrolled in high school, what were some of the initial conversations you had with staff?

5. Tell me about the IEP meetings?

- What is your role in the IEP meetings?

6. What has happened from the initial transition planning meeting until now?

7. Describe your role in your child’s transition planning?

8. How would you describe the teachers/counselors role?

9. Describe a situation where you worked with teachers or counselors?

10. What do you think of the special education system?
11. What community supports does your child receive to assist with transition planning?
- Any volunteer opportunities offered?

12. What are strategies that you would want teachers to hear?

13. Is there anything else you wish would
Appendix B: Consent Form

Ohio University Adult Consent Form With Signature

Title of Research: A Case Study: Exploring African American Parental Involvement in Transition Planning of an Urban School district

Researchers: Simone Hicks, MRC, CRC

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore African American parental involvement during transition planning in urban high schools. A case study will be used to explore the African American parents’ involvement of students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to college or work. The explanatory case study design will seek to gain a better understanding of parental involvement during the transition process in an urban school district.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in an interview the primary investigator that will be audio recorded. You should not participate in this study if you
suspect any harm to self or child. For your participation in the study you will be asked to be available for at least two interview sessions.

Below please select the box that indicate whether you agree or disagree to be audio recorded during interview.

___ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded during interviews

___ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded during interview

**Risks and Discomforts**

You will be asked to describe your involvement regarding your child’s transition planning. There are minimal risk associated with this study regarding the questions. If this happens or you wish to discontinue, you may do so at any time. The primary investigator will be available to answer any questions you may have prior to interview, during, and after.

**Benefits**

The participants may not gain any specific individual benefits; however, this study is important to society particularly students with disabilities as it relates towards increasing support of African Americans.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential by the Principal Investigator. Your information will be stored on a password protected computer where the information is unidentifiable.
Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Compensation**

As compensation for your time/effort, you will receive a $25 Visa Gift Card upon completion of interview. If you discontinue the interview you will receive, $10 visa gift card.

Please be aware that certain personal information, such as name, address and social security number, may be provided to the Ohio University Finance Office to document that you received payment for research participation. However, your study data will not be shared with Finance.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator Simone Hicks, sh617515@ohio.edu or 1-334-275-1554 or the advisor Dr. Mona Robinson robinsoh@ohio.edu, 740-593-4461.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu. By signing below, you are agreeing that: you have read this consent
form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered; you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction; you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study; you are 18 years of age or older; your participation in this research is completely voluntary; you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature __________ Date ______________

Printed Name_____________ 

Version Date: 09/23/17
### Appendix C: Document Analysis Template

**Source:** “Parents Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) “– Ohio Department of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Document?</th>
<th>Parents’ guide for special education system</th>
<th>Parents have the rights to know their rights and responsibility regarding their children in the special education system.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who wrote the document?</strong></td>
<td>Ohio Department of Education</td>
<td>My initial thoughts are who is the team composed of? are there any parents that administration consults with to make decisions on what is needed for the system? Is anyone on the team with direct experiences in the special education system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intended Audience?</strong></td>
<td>Parents of students with disabilities</td>
<td>Parents are the intended audience; however, the questions is whether the parents are accessing the documents? Is the document user friendly? Does anyone in the administration review the document with parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the purpose of the document?</strong></td>
<td>Procedural safe guard for parents</td>
<td>The document appears to speak to provide information to parents if they were to encounter a problem in the special education system. However, the question arises Is this enough and does it speak to culturally diverse families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What are basic assumptions? | • Parents can will read a booklet  
• Parents have access to online documents  
• Parents understand what they are reading  
• Parents know to ask about their rights  
• Are parents given this document immediately |
| Can the document be accessed? | Online & some schools provide copies  
How is accessibility determined? What if a parent can not get to meetings? How is the document given to parents? |
| Last update of document? | April 2017  
The previous document was updated April 2nd, 2012, there are notable improvements, the updated document is condensed, and there are less words and less pictures. |
| What legislation is referenced? | FERPA-  
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act  
- FERPA is referenced and link attached, assuming parents have access or understand the process of follow up.  
- While the document is in the process... |
| accordance with the IDEIA (2004) |
## Appendix D: Parental Involvement Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epstein’s model</th>
<th>Current Study- Implications for Diverse groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>➢ The lack of defining how “parenting looks different across different racial groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>➢ The need for multiple forms of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>➢ Create more supportive environments outside the classroom/ school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>➢ Understand the home environment and the difficulty to separate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Describe how students home environment impacts student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>➢ Create a governance that supports parents as experts in the decision-making process in effort to promote efficient transition planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with the community</td>
<td>➢ Consider more accessible resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Increased funding in urban schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Understand how African Americans build community to support children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix E: IRB Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Number</th>
<th>17-X-265</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Status</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee</td>
<td>Social/Behavioral IRB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Contact</td>
<td>Rebecca Cale (<a href="mailto:cale@ohio.edu">cale@ohio.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Investigator</td>
<td>Simone Hicks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title</td>
<td>A Case Study: Exploring African American Parental Involvement of Students with Disabilities during in Transition Planning in a Urban School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Review</td>
<td>EXPEDITED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Social/Behavioral IRB reviewed and approved by expedited review the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRB Approved:</th>
<th>11/17/2017 08:52:08 AM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expiration:</td>
<td>10/03/2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review Category:</td>
<td>6,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Waivers: No waivers are granted with this approval.**

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations / agreements must be obtained, if needed. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Periodic Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of the IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. All records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least three (3) years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
This approval is issued under the Ohio University OHRP Federal wide Assurance #00000095. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Compliance staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.
Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer

ARE YOU THE PARENT OF CHILD WITH A DISABILITY?

If so, I would love to talk with you!

You Are Eligible if:

- Your child attends Urban City School
- Identify as African American
- Identify as the parent/legal guardian of a student with a disability
- Student must have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)
- Student is in grade 10th, 11th, or 12th grade at the time of the study

Commitment to participate in this research investigation includes:

One Semi-Structured Interview

Each interview will last no more than one hour. Each interview will take place face-to-face. Upon completion of the interview, participants will receive ONE $25 Visa Gift Card.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact

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