Dissertations

6-2015

Parents' Expectations of Developmentally Delayed Children With Special Education Needs (SEN) When Transitioning Into and Out of the Public Middle School Environment

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Recommended Citation

Parents' Expectations of Developmentally Delayed Children With Special Education

Needs (SEN) When Transitioning Into and Out of the

Public Middle School Environment

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

June 2015

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June 2015

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moved mountains together at immersions, and you all have a place in my heart. Thank you so much for all of the wonderful memories.

To Valerie Castaldi, thank you for your words of wisdom and support. Your hugs and words of advice kept me motivated to succeed. You believed in me, and that's all I could have asked for. The laughter, the tears, and the friendship kept me together while at work.

ABSTRACT

Parents' Expectations of Developmentally Delayed Children With Special Education

Needs (SEN) When Transitioning Into and Out of the

Public Middle School Environment

by Areza Enea

Transitions occur at every stage during the educational experience. Transitions from

preschool to adulthood affect students and their parents when entering or leaving each

educational level. The most difficult transitions for any parent occur when students

advance to the next level of their educational journey. Special education students'

transition experiences are unique and more formalized. The students' identified special

education needs (SEN) impact where and how they will transition. These needs are

considered during the formalized individualized education plan (IEP) process, involving

parents, educators, and other key stakeholders. Parents of special needs students rely on

parent-teacher-administrative collaborations to assist students in successfully

transitioning to new classroom environments. Research is needed to assess best practices

related to transition planning for middle school youth. Little is known about transition

planning and how parents of middle school SEN students feel about the process; each

child with SEN is different due to the disability/disabilities he or she is diagnosed with,

making each transition plan unique to the individual. The purpose of this qualitative

study was to identify and describe the expectations of parents of developmentally delayed

SEN middle school children regarding their children's transition into and out of public

middle school. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify the extent to which

schools are meeting the needs of their students during the transition process as perceived

by parents. The method chosen for this study was a collective case study using semistructured, one-to-one interviews to gather data-rich personal accounts of participating parents' SEN children's experiences.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Transitions occur at every stage during the educational experience. Transitions from preschool to adulthood affect students and their parents when entering or leaving each educational level. The most difficult transitions for any parent occur when students advance to the next level of their educational journey. Research by Perkins and Gelfer (1995) indicated that parental support during transitions is imperative to help students accommodate to the new school environment. The major transitions during the educational experience include preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and then the final transition into adulthood. For some students, transitions may be smoother, without any issues, than for others.

Special education students' transition experiences are unique and more formalized. The students' identified special education needs (SEN) impact where and how they will transition. These needs are considered during the formalized individualized education plan (IEP) process, involving parents, educators, and other key stakeholders. Parents of special needs students rely on parent-teacher-administrative collaborations to assist students in successfully transitioning to new classroom environments.

The special needs population is diverse, requiring interactions and agreement between parents and teachers on issues including the IEP, stakeholder collaboration, cultural perspectives, and transition planning for students. As L. Hughes, Banks, and Terras (2013) stated,

> It would be wise to provide comprehensive training to school staff to raise
> awareness of the wide spectrum of Special Education Needs (SEN), particular

characteristics, specific difficulties these children may encounter and how best to

support the needs of children with different diagnoses. (p. 32)

Stakeholders for a child with special needs can include a variety of these different team

members: administrators, school psychologists, speech/language pathologists,

occupational therapists, physical therapists, behaviorists, adaptive physical education

teachers, low incidence service providers for students who are deaf and blind, members

of outside agencies, parent advocates, and other outside resources that serve to meet the

needs of the child based on his or her IEP. The stakeholders are determined as a direct

result of the disability of the student and the corresponding need to plan and provide

educational support along with related specialized services. The IEP is a legal agreement

between the school district and parents that specifies the program services the child

needs, along with the necessary accommodations and modifications that will be

implemented for the student to receive educational benefit.

Special education has moved to the forefront of education as a result of laws like

the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). These laws serve as the checks-and-balances system within

special education, holding IEP stakeholders accountable for educating students with

special needs. The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2012)

has identified 13 categories in the IDEA law that qualify students for special education:

- autism;

- deaf-blindness;

- deafness;

- emotional disturbance [ED];

- hearing impairment [HI];

- intellectual disability [ID];

- multiple disabilities [MD];

- orthopedic impairment [OI];

- other health impairment [OHI];

- specific learning disability [SLD];

- speech or language impairment [SLI];

- traumatic brain injury [TBI]; or

- visual impairment [VI]. (p. 2)

IDEA 2004 stipulated that transition planning must occur for all children with disabilities no later than age 16 (Yi-Li, Basset, & Hutchinson, 2009). Under federal law, students with disabilities may be eligible to receive special education and related services from 3 to 21 years of age (Lee McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro Reed, & Wildenger, 2010).

Researchers C. H. Wilson and Christian (2006) established that a danger exists as "schools are held accountable for higher academic standards and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their assessment programs: inappropriate emphasis will be given to the results of such measures at national achievement tests or report cards" (p. 3). The result of NCLB is that special education teachers are held more accountable than they have ever been to increase test scores. Federal school funding for public schools is dependent on these test scores that translate into Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP; C. H. Wilson & Christian, 2006). Schools that do not meet the AYP are in danger of losing federal funding and will be placed on a program improvement plan to raise test scores. The special needs student subgroup is also included in the AYP scores. By holding schools

accountable for the progress of their students with special needs, administrators are now required to closely examine the quality of the teachers and the structure of their programs (Ayers, 2012).

As with other education trends, many transition programs are being developed and implemented without the collection of any real data regarding the effectiveness of services, with little effort toward program evaluation, and with no measure of student outcomes (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). Transitions in special education relate to school readiness: mainstreaming/inclusion, changing a special education placement to a more restrictive or least restrictive environment (LRE); the natural progression from elementary to middle and finally high school; adult transitions; and determining what services the child will have, if the child will exit out of a special education service, and how the IEP team will promote the transition. The work of Salas, Lopez, Chinn, and Manchaca-Lopez (2005) established that "if we want parents to be empowered individuals and decision makers they need to comprehend what special education teachers are asking them to do" (p. 52).

Parents who have children with SEN may not understand the laws, what educators are asking of them, and the services that are available to them during a transition period for their children to receive educational benefit. Further complicating the IEP process and transition, Russell (2003) indicated that "parents often feel labeled by the other parents who don't have children with SEN due to their child's disability and feel perceived by others as needing help to fulfill their role as a parent" (p. 144). Studies have shown that students struggling with the transition process may manifest their difficulties

in sudden outbursts of inappropriate behavior, detachment from their new environment, or chronic illness (Maras & Aveling, 2006).

Transition planning is a lifelong activity in which SEN students, families, and professionals work together to plan for a successful adult life (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Students with disabilities and their parents value parental involvement in the transition process (Landmark, Zhang, & Montoya, 2007). Understanding parental perceptions and expectations can help to improve the transitions of children throughout their educational journeys.

Background

Key issues affecting the success of SEN students include government policy and funding, transition, parental involvement, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families who are English as a second language (ESL) learners. In the United States, the first formal attempts to provide special education date back to the 19th century, when special schools were set up for children who were blind or deaf (or both) or mentally retarded (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). According to Nietupski (1995), prior to the signing of Public Law 94-142, "there was no coherent concept of LRE for students with severe disabilities, perhaps because students with severe disabilities were mostly excluded from public education and served in private, segregated settings, or left to languish at home" (p. 40). In 1975, according to Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), "a landmark education law was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Gerald Ford—the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (often referred to as Public Law 94-142 or EAHCA)" (p. 5); the passage of this law ensured a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children with disabilities. Public Law 94-142

is known as IDEA, with its last reauthorization occurring in 2004 by then-President

George W. Bush. The most recent reauthorization of IDEA

> emphasizes access for all students with disabilities to the general education
>
> curriculum and participation in general larger scale assessments, in alignment to
>
> NCLB. Hence, NCLB and IDEA both focus on what to teach (curriculum) and
>
> where to teach it (instructional environment) and suggest what is valued and
>
> desired in the education of students with disabilities. (Bouck, 2009, p. 3)

The reauthorization of IDEA included a transition component for students with SEN that

was embedded into government legislation. Students who are identified with special

needs must have an IEP by the age of 3, and by the age of 16, a transition plan must be

implemented for postsecondary education. NCLB and the IDEA laws are intertwined

with one another.

While IDEA focused on FAPE, NCLB focused on accountability. The four

pillars that NCLB was founded on were more freedom for states and communities (i.e.,

greater local control), use of proven educational methods (i.e., scientifically based

research), and more choices for parents (Bouck, 2009). The accountability piece is

derived from "high-stakes" testing. High-stakes testing forced instruction to change from

exploratory, lifelong learning to teaching to the test through "drill and kill" (Smyth,

2008). The subgroups that were identified in NCLB include economically disadvantaged

students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, African American

students, Asian American students, Caucasian students, Hispanic students, and Native

American students (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Under

NCLB, if any of these identified subgroups did not make AYP toward proficiency, the school would be labeled as "needs improvement" (C. H. Wilson & Christian, 2006).

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) is another important piece of legislation that was signed in July 1990 by then-President George H. W. Bush. It protects all individuals with disabilities from discrimination, and it requires most employers to make reasonable accommodations for them (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). ADA is considered instrumental for those who are in adult transition programs looking to find jobs. ADA, IDEA, and NCLB are instrumental in identifying and mandating the services that SEN students receive throughout their educational journeys, in particular effective transition services.

Special education is a field that is growing, with increasing numbers of students placed in special education programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the special education criteria categories served under IDEA have steadily increased since 1976 with the number of students being served. The increased number of students in special education has led to an increase in the numbers of special education programs and services. The share of total U.S. school budgets spent on special education increased from 4% to 21% from 1970 to 2005 (Levenson, 2012). As a result of a higher student population, more government funding is utilized to keep small class sizes, specifically trained education specialists, support personnel, and proper equipment/facilities. Research by Levenson (2012) showed,

> From 2009, the total number of children with special needs grew by less than 3 percent, but during the same period, students with more challenging disabilities like autism (up over 300 percent), developmental delay (up 73 percent) and other

health impairments (up 128 percent)—which are often surrogate for complex

behavior issues—became a greater share of children served in special education.

(p. 91)

As budgets shrink, special education spending, which is protected by laws and lawyers, is

seldom cut, leaving general education to feel the pain (Levenson, 2012).

Education is the largest share of state and local government budgets and a

continuing concern of lawmakers, the courts, educators, and the public (Verstegen, 2011).

Funding for education is based on four factors:

States provide funding to public elementary and secondary school districts within

their borders using one of the four traditional finance formulae advanced by

theorists in the early 1900s, including the following: 1) Foundation programs,

2) District Power Equalization Systems, 3) Full State Funding, and 4) Flat Grants.

(Verstegen, 2011, pp. 7-8)

Special education is funded by cost reimbursement methods, and these methods usually

define eligible cost categories and the percentage of these costs that will be reimbursed

by the state (Verstegen, 2011). Verstegen (2011) stated,

Foundation program allocation schemes support education through a set state

guarantee per pupil or per teacher unit that historically was intended to pay for a

basic minimum education program. Localities contribute to this amount usually

through a uniform tax rate funding that would result from it in local revenue

sources, mainly the property rate tax base. California uses a foundation program

with the base amount referred to as a revenue limit. (p. 8)

Special education requires extra teachers, either because a general education class in which students with disabilities are included has two teachers rather than one or because the pupil-to-teacher ratio is lower in special education than in general education (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) referenced the high cost of special education and related services: "Special education costs are also higher than general education costs because of special transportation, curriculum material, special equipment, and administration" (p. 59). The determining factor of cost in special education is based on the IEP services agreed on by the stakeholders.

Once students are identified as needing special education services, an IEP team is formed. IEP teams require stakeholder collaboration and participation at all levels. In California, prior to the start of an IEP, parents are offered the Notice of Procedural Safeguards (California Department of Education, 2009). This document informs parents of their legal rights at an IEP meeting. IEP teams vary in size depending on the needs of the student. Among the required components of the IEP, a transition plan is required outlining the services and supports a student will need to progress in his or her education. With the myriad of transition stakeholders, collective and collaborative practices along with knowledge sharing must occur to facilitate a smooth transition (Trach, 2012). Transition plans vary from student to student depending on each student's needs, and these plans are updated annually, with participation by professionals from agencies outside of the school typically increasing as the students near graduation or school departure at age 21 (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). IEPs have value to all stakeholders involved:

For example, they are signed by the individuals who participate in their development, including the student's parent or guardian. They also list a justification for the placement recommended. A decision that the student should receive some services in a pullout program might be justified on the basis of the student's need for one-on-one or small-group intensive instruction to succeed. (Friend & Bursuck, 2006, p. 85)

Transition

Children will experience multiple transitions throughout their educational journeys. The transition to middle school is often accompanied by a mix of emotions: excitement, apprehensiveness, curiosity, and concern (Carter, Clark, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2005). Students with SEN may experience rougher transitions due to their disabilities and specific needs. In each educational environment, students will experience transitions within their programs prior to movement into a new educational environment—for instance, new staff, teachers, administrators, and service providers working with the students. New staff members can be met with resistance until the students are acclimated to the new change. According to Irvin (as cited in Carter et al., 2005), although variations exist across schools and districts, the transition from elementary to middle school typically involves moving from a smaller, tight-knit school community to one that is substantially larger and sometimes less personal. In many elementary schools, students spend the majority of their day with just one or two educators (Carter et al., 2005). In middle school, students need to adjust to their class schedule, navigate through campus, meet staff, and learn school policy.

SEN students are not a homogeneous group, and interindividual differences will always occur, both in terms of difficulties and preferences for support (Maras & Aveling, 2006). Posttransition concerns include increased workloads and hours at school (L. Hughes et al., 2013). For younger students, vertical transitions represent changes over time (early intervention to preschool), whereas horizontal changes represent changes within a fixed period of time (e.g., a day or week; Rous & Hallam, 2012). These vertical and horizontal transitions also take shape for those who are older.

Collaboration in Middle School Transitions

The fields of special education and rehabilitation have adapted the term *transition* to describe the movement of students with disabilities from school to independent, productive, satisfying postschool environments (Trach, 2012). At the middle school level, transition planning technically begins when the child reaches seventh grade. According to the California Department of Education (2014c), "The California *Education Code (EC)* establishes a minimum set of requirements for graduation from California high schools" (para. 1). Support for Families of Children with Disabilities (2014) noted,

> A certificate of completion is awarded to a student as an alternative to a high
>
> school diploma. It certifies that the student has satisfactorily completed a
>
> prescribed alternative course of study, or has met the goals of his/her
>
> Individualized Education Program (IEP) or has participated in high school
>
> instruction and has met the objectives of the statement of transition services.
>
> Students can participate in graduation ceremonies if they receive a certificate of
>
> completion. A certificate of completion is not a high school diploma and students

with certificates of completion may not qualify for admission to post-secondary

educational institutions (colleges, universities). ("Certificate," para. 1-2)

The high school certificate of completion is also known as a nondiploma-track education.

Research showed that parents did not have a clear understanding of the transition process

and would have appreciated further clarification of the roles and responsibilities (Larson,

2010).

Entry into high school requires collaboration to facilitate a smooth transition at

the middle school level. Carter et al. (2005) identified nine key steps to facilitating a

collaborative best practice transition approach into middle school:

1. "Start Planning Early"—Make sure the receiving school understands the needs of the

   student, for example, "assistive technology, adaptive equipment," and instructional

   strategies that work.

2. "Collaborate Across Schools"—Receiving a student is "a shared responsibility" for

   both sending and receiving schools. The IEP team must come together to support the

   transition.

3. "Prepare Students Early"—Common "concerns can be . . . addressed with advance

   planning" and establishing routines.

4. "Encourage and Support Family Involvement"—Keep lines of communication open.

   Make sure that the family has one point of contact to discuss the concerns that they

   have for their child.

5. "Encourage Ongoing Communication"—"Adults should remain alert for external

   indicators that a child is struggling with the adjustment." Make the child feel

   comfortable to talk about his or her issues.

6. "Address Organizational Issues"—Take the time to discuss accommodations and modifications such as how "to open a locker, finding classrooms, locating the restroom, and keeping track of" textbooks.

7. "Develop Peer Support"—Have a peer from general education support the student.

8. "Support School Involvement"—Make sure the student has the opportunity to attend grade-level functions.

9. "Foster Independence"—Teach students "self-management" skills (pp. 9, 11-13).

The adolescent years are times when students experience rapid growth spurts, hormonal changes (puberty), and social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Students transition from the smaller elementary school environment, where they have developed close bonds with friends and educators, to the hustle and bustle of a middle school environment, where students experience a rotating class schedule, a larger student population, and interaction with multiple educators in one day. More responsibilities are added, making students responsible for their own academic growth and achievement. At the same time, the gap between the academic performance of students with severe disabilities and their classmates widens, increasing the challenges associated with ensuring that all students are accessing the general curriculum (Carter et al., 2005).

Dorman (2012) identified a four-step transition planning model from the middle school environment to high school:

1. "Accurate and useful information"—Schedule an orientation night for incoming families to learn about the school climate/culture. Tours can be scheduled and given by student leadership.

2. "Supporting social success"—Align incoming students with an advisor. Create a tutorial period for ninth graders. Have an eighth-grade student shadow a high school student.

3. "Supporting academic success"—Monitor academic preparation of students from middle school. Provide tutoring and intervention services. Identify at-risk students.

4. "Collaboration"—Prepare a comprehensive transition plan between school sites district-wide. Facilitate program and program visits between high school and middle school staff. Allow time for staff collaboration (pp. 22-23).

Based on students' identified disabilities, transition planning services are differentiated based on student need. Additional supports for middle school students can include a calm corner when students feel stressed, having familiar faces involved in the transition, prior visits to the new school, and a teacher-created student portfolio to be passed along to the receiving school (Maras & Aveling, 2006). Building a meaningful and valued life for individuals with learning disabilities requires sustained, diligent, and coordinated efforts of family members, supported by educators, and the individuals themselves (H. Wilson, Bialk, Freeze, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012).

Parents' Perspectives

Parents of special needs students have expectations for their children just like those parents who have typically developing children:

> Through early research, a picture emerged of transition as a potentially stressful event for families of children with disabilities and for the need to address the social, communication, and adaptive skills of the children during transition for a successful adjustment in the next environment. (Rous & Hallam, 2012, p. 233)

Parents might feel uneasy, intimidated, and frustrated with multiple school personnel sharing more about the needs than about the strengths of their children during a meeting (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). What they envisage will happen to themselves and their children in the future can be difficult to imagine until they start to develop some understanding of their new situation and build new expectations (Russell, 2003). Expectations originate from and have an impact on individuals' interactions across their social environments (Russell, 2003). These expectations have roots in cultural values and can influence beliefs.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an important piece for students who are transitioning. Epstein and Dauber (1991) reaffirmed parental involvement in their work by categorizing parental involvement into six categories:

1. basic obligations of families:

   - positive home conditions that support health/safety to support learning;

2. basic obligations of schools:

   - communication;

3. involvement at school

   - volunteering and families who come to support school performances, sports, or school events;

4. involvement in learning activities at home:

   - assisting their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children's classwork;

5. involvement in decision making:

- participatory roles in Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO); and

6. collaboration and exchanges with community organizations:

- access to community support services.

Based on Epstein and Dauber's earlier work, parental involvement has been redefined using six categories:

(a) traditional (parent as audience or bystander-observer), (b) parent as a decision maker (PTA), (c) parent as a classroom volunteer, (d) parent as a paid paraprofessional or teacher's aide, (e) parents as learners (participants in child development or parenting classes), and (f) parents as teachers of their own students at home. (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012, p. 42)

Involved parents understand the needs of their children and those of the school. They will be more informed and equipped to handle their children's transitions.

Cultural Perspectives

Creating a classroom in which students' cultures are acknowledged and valued is a fundamental characteristic of multicultural education, that is, curriculum and instruction that reflect the diversity of society (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). To ensure that the families' cultural values are considered during transition planning, CLD parents should actively work with professionals and express their needs (Kim, Lee, & Morningstar, 2007). Teaching requires cultural awareness and sensitivity to students and families who have different ethnic backgrounds (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). Most teachers who teach are Caucasian and come from middle-class backgrounds and may not have experience in working with children who are CLD, resulting in little understanding of the cultural contexts that these children come from (Salas et al., 2005).

Despite the benefits of parental involvement, the reality is that parents of students with disabilities are not often involved in their children's transition planning (Landmark et al., 2007). While CLD students may encounter discrimination or insensitivity by the education system at any grade, it may become particularly important during the transition period (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005). The lack of participation by CLD parents is alarming because American society has become increasingly multiethnic and multilingual in recent years (Landmark et al., 2007). Differences in culture and ethnicity can affect families' involvement in transition planning and the goals that they emphasize for their children (Cote, Jones, Sparks, & Aldridge, 2012).

Statement of the Research Problem

It is crucial for research to clarify how children with SEN experience and adjust to the transition process to help educators improve transition procedures and inform interventions (L. Hughes et al., 2013). Parents should be the primary contributors of knowledge concerning their children's actions, behaviors, attitudes, language, and culture, which is necessary and useful information for educational planning and curriculum development (Salas et al., 2005). Research is needed to assess best practices related to transition planning for middle school youth (Weidenthal & Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). Middle school is a time when preadolescents are experiencing hormonal changes and mixed emotions. For some students, middle school represents a new milestone—an indicator that they are approaching young adulthood (Carter et al., 2005).

The existence of special needs transition services at prospective new schools is an important factor in students' and families' expectations and attitudes toward the transition (Maras & Aveling, 2006). According to Trach (2012), a closer examination of transitions

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will help to develop a greater understanding of the children, the implications of their

disabilities, and more importantly, how relationships are developed between parent and

child, parent and teacher, and teacher and child. Russell (2003) stated there is little

evidence of research about what parents of disabled children expect from such transition

services and whether their expectations are realized. Additionally, there is a great need

for understanding the context of families along with recognizing families' cultural

backgrounds when working through the transition process (M. T. Hughes, Valle-Riestra,

& Arguelles, 2008). Arguably it would be more beneficial to compare and contrast the

individual experiences of young people with differing types of SEN (Maras & Aveling,

2006). To be influential transition advocates, parents need to be familiar with legal

mandates as well as available services (Kim et al., 2007). Little is known about transition

planning and how parents of middle school SEN students feel about the process; each

child with SEN is different due to the disability/disabilities he or she is diagnosed with,

making each transition plan unique to the individual. Transition planning is a part of

IDEA, and it is a collaborative effort for all IEP stakeholders involved. Transition

outcomes are dependent on effective parental involvement, as they provide the key

information for their children with SEN to be successful throughout their educational

journeys. Understanding the experiences, expectations, and perceptions of the parents of

SEN students regarding their students' middle-grade transitions can help improve the

transition process and add to the existing body of research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the expectations

of parents of developmentally delayed special education needs (SEN) middle school

children regarding their children's transition into and out of public middle school. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify the extent to which schools are meeting the needs of their students during the transition process as perceived by parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?

2. What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?

3. What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?

4. In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

Significance of the Problem

Parents of SEN middle school children who are developmentally delayed are the key stakeholders in the process of the decision making related to current and future educational placement. Although the law is clear and mandates parental involvement in school districts, most districts have discretion over deciding what role they want the parents to play, what parent programs they offer, and what kind of partnership teachers want to have with parents (Salas et al., 2005). Culture also plays an important role in transition, and to encourage parents from diverse cultures to actively participate in their children's transition planning, educators need to understand these parents' current knowledge levels on transition issues and their experiences with transition participation

(Landmark et al., 2007). Teaching the skill of self-determination is highly valued among

educators. Elementary and middle school educators place a fairly high value on teaching

an array of independent skills that are presumed to promote self-determination (Stang,

Carter, Lynne Lane, & Pierson, 2009).

The existing body of research describes the need for understanding parents'

attitudes regarding SEN transitions at key points of their children's educational

experiences. A lack of research exists that directly measures parental expectations.

Future educational performance is attributed to parental attitudes and expectations that

are especially important during the transitions into and out of middle school. Middle

school students experience significant physical and developmental changes at this stage

of their educational journeys. Russell (2003) argued that "while it is important to

investigate and provide for what parents of disabled children need, it can also be useful to

support them to explore, articulate, and review what they expect" (p. 144). Studies

further exploring students' and families' knowledge and perceptions of transition

planning practices would contribute to the understanding of facilitators and barriers to

transition implementations (Weidenthal & Kochhar-Bryant, 2007).

Thematic Dissertation

This study was developed as a thematic dissertation in partnership with three

other closely related studies. The four studies focused on researching parental

perceptions and expectations related to the SEN transition planning process at the

different ages and school levels. The research team pursued the same foundational

concept but in unique settings and contexts. The thematic dissertation approach allowed

the research team to work collaboratively, sharing their expertise, resources, results, and

insights. The team also shared the same dissertation chair and committee members. Utilizing the thematic approach provided the opportunity to comprehensively investigate the topic in a team atmosphere and provide in-depth comparative findings that typically would not emerge from a single study. The participants and their dissertation titles included the following:

1. Arika Spencer-Brown, executive director of Head Start Program—*Parental Expectations and Perspectives as They Relate to Their Children With Developmental Delays/Special Education Needs (SEN) During Transition From Early Intervention/ Preschool to Kindergarten*

2. Lisa Ecker, special education teacher—*The Expectations of Parents of Elementary Aged Students With Special Needs Regarding Their Children's Transition Into and Out of the Public Elementary School*

3. Areza Enea, special education teacher—*Parents' Expectations of Developmentally Delayed Children With Special Education Needs (SEN) When Transitioning Into and Out of the Public Middle School Environment*

4. Sharon O'Neil, special education program specialist—*The Expectations of Parents of Students With Special Needs When Transitioning From the School Community to Adult Programs*

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined for the relevance and conceptual framework of this study:

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). ADA is a law that prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities because of their disabilities.

Case manager. A case manager is the assigned stakeholder who works with SEN students and is the point of contact for all IEPs.

Collaborative partnerships. This concept assumes there will be parity among all partners, shared decision making, shared expertise, shared responsibility, and shared accountability (deFur, 2012).

Continuum of alternative placements (CAP). Placements ranging from separate special schools, hospital schools, and home instruction to special classes, resource rooms, inclusion in regular classes with supplementary services, and all other placement options must be available to every student with a disability (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). CLD refers to students with SEN who come from culturally and linguistically diverse family backgrounds (Cote et al., 2012).

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Every student with a disability is entitled to an appropriate education at public expense (at no cost to parents or guardians; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

Individualized education plan (IEP). Every student with a disability is to have a written IEP, which includes a statement of the special services to be provided and the goals of those services (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA (1997, 2004) mandated transition planning for students, not later than age 16, requiring the identification of professionals to assist in the transition planning process (Trach, 2012).

Least restrictive environment (LRE). Every student with a disability is to be educated in the LRE that is consistent with his or her educational needs, as close to home

as possible, and insofar as possible, with students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB is the federal law that reinforced the drive for standards-based education by stressing that highly qualified teachers have subject matter competency (Yi-Li et al., 2009).

Parental involvement. This study used the definition of parental involvement that was used in Epstein and Dauber's (1991) study that pinpoints the six types of parental involvement.

Self-determination. Self-determination is encouraged by providing meaningful opportunities for students with disabilities to express their needs and goals to promote independence to guide their decision making (Friend & Bursuck, 2006).

Special education. As defined by IDEA (2004) Section 300.39, special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Special education local planning agency (SELPA). As defined by the California Department of Education (2014a),

> SELPAs facilitate high quality educational programs and services for special needs students and training for parents and educators. The SELPA collaborates with county agencies and school districts to develop and maintain healthy and enriching environments in which special needs students and families can live and succeed. (para. 2)

Stakeholders. Stakeholders include all members who are part of an IEP team who help plan and facilitate the process.

Transition. This term describes the movement of students with disabilities from school to independent, productive, satisfying postschool environments (Trach, 2012).

Transition plan. Children who are identified as developmentally delayed must have an IEP by the age of 3 in addition to a mandated transition plan between the ages of 14 and 16 that describes strategies for adult transition (Russell, 2003).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to parents of SEN students from the Contra Costa SELPA in Northern California. The Contra Costa SELPA includes the 16 local education agencies (LEAs) that are in Contra Costa County: Acalanes, Antioch, Brentwood, Byron, Canyon, Contra Costa County Office of Education, John Swett, Knightsen, Lafayette, Liberty, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pittsburg, and Walnut Creek.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter II is a review of literature about special education policy on transition, transition in and out of the middle school environment, parental involvement, cultural barriers, and the skills needed for transition planning. Chapter III explains the research design and the methodology used in this study. This chapter includes the population, sample, data-gathering procedures, and analysis procedures that were used to analyze the data that were gathered. Chapter IV explains the presentation of themes, data analysis, demographic data, and observational data that were gathered during the semistructured interviews. Chapter V contains the summary of the study, which includes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In addition to the preliminary literature introduced in the Chapter I background, statement of the research problem, and significance of the study, a separate extensive review of the literature is presented in Chapter II. This chapter contains a review of literature that pertains to the purpose of this study. The literature review is broken up into four primary areas of focus. The first section contains special education policy regarding transition, which highlights the history and legal context of special education along with the individualized education plan (IEP) process. Section 2 focuses on SEN students' transitions from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. Section 3 discusses collaboration/parental involvement and the cultural barriers that SEN students and their families face during transition. The last section outlines the skills SEN students need during the transition planning process, in particular self-determination, and the person-centered planning (PCP) approach. Chapter II ends with a summary highlighting the important findings.

Special Education Policy Related to Transition

Major transition points for SEN children during their educational journeys include the start of preschool, the transition from preschool to elementary school, from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, from high school to postsecondary education, and lastly into adult transition programs. All educators should be guided by the idea that special education is a service, not a place (Burns, 2007). Burns (2007) stated,

> The meaning of this is that the needs of children with disabilities are best met by
> providing appropriate services, having high expectations for all children, and

using the general curriculum and the regular education classroom as the

benchmark for educational success and participation. (p. 5)

Government legislation has set the standards for students with disabilities regarding

transition policy. Transition policy is embedded into the history and legal context of

special education.

History and Legal Context of Special Education

According to Kauffman and Hallahan (2005),

Special education dates back from the 19th century, before special schools were

established, children with disabilities were cared for at home and usually were

offered nothing at all in the way of formal education, unless their family could

pay the cost of highly unusual education. (p. 4)

Students with disabilities that were relatively mild—that is, learning or behavior

problems or minor physical impairments—were educated along with other students

because their needs were not considered extraordinary (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). Large

metropolitan areas during the late 19th century and the early 20th century experienced a

change in the education system. Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) stated,

A major problem of large city school districts at the beginning of the 20th century

was extreme variability among children to be taught in systems that required

school attendance. The solution to the problem was special education in the form

of special classes and schools offering a wide variety of curricula and methods of

teaching. (p. 4)

Special classes in public schools that began as compulsory education became widespread

during the 1920s and 1930s (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). By the 1950s, special education

programs were available in many school districts, but some undesirable outcomes were becoming apparent (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unlawful under the 14th Amendment to discriminate arbitrarily against any group of people.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s led to a major shift in the disability rights movement from one primarily focused on social and therapeutic services to one focused on political and civil rights (Laudan & Loprest, 2012). Before the 1970s, no major federal laws specifically protected the civil or constitutional rights of Americans with disabilities (Laudan & Loprest, 2012). One of the outcomes of the civil rights movement has been legislation designed to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities, whether they are children in schools or adults in the workforce (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). The passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, especially Section 504 of the act, banned recipients of federal funds from discriminating against people with disabilities (Laprairie, Johnson, Rice, Adams, & Higgins, 2010; Laudan & Loprest, 2012). According to Laudan and Loprest (2012), Section 504

> entitles children to public education comparable to that provided to children who
> do not have disabilities, with disability broadly defined to include any person who
> has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major
> activities, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such an
> impairment. (p. 99)

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 changed the focus of transition planning from something that might happen to something that must happen (Trach, 2012).

In 1975, a landmark education law was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed

into law by then-President Gerald Ford: the Education for All Handicapped Children Act

(EAHCA; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). EAHCA was also referred to as Public Law 94-

142. EAHCA required

> that if a state wanted to receive any federal education monies, then it had to have
>
> a plan to offer special education to all handicapped children, not just some, and it
>
> had to give priority to special education for those with the most severe disabilities.
>
> (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005, p. 5)

Since 1975, Public Law 94-142 has been reauthorized several times (Friend & Bursuck,

2006). According to Shaw (2006), Public Law 94-142 was reauthorized in 1990 and

amended in 1997, and the most recent update occurred in 2004. In 1990, the name of the

law was changed to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to reflect

more contemporary "person first" language (Friend & Bursuck, 2006).

IDEA established the rights of children with disabilities to attend public schools,

to receive services designed to meet their needs free of charge, and, to the greatest extent

possible, to receive instruction in regular education classrooms alongside nondisabled

peers (Laudan & Loprest, 2012). The basic provisions of the law remained intact: Free

and appropriate education (FAPE), continuum of alternative placements (CAP), least

restrictive environment (LRE), and the IEP remained the bedrock of the law, and all other

provisions were intended to guarantee these for all students with disabilities (Kauffman &

Hallahan, 2005). IDEA included the requirement of postsecondary transition planning

for students with disabilities beginning at the age of 16 (Prince, Katsiyannis, & Farmer,

2013). Prince et al. (2013) addressed, "Amendments to IDEA in 1997 require transition

planning begin at age 14, with a transition statement regarding the student's course of

study and, at 16 (or younger), a statement of needed transition services with links to

outside agencies" (p. 287). The 2004 amendments to IDEA required that transition

planning be based on students' strengths, not just their preferences and interests, and that

the process be results oriented (Laudan & Loprest, 2012).

IDEA 2004 defined transition services as

a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- Is designed to be within a results-orientated process, that is focused on

  improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a

  disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school

  activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated

  employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult

  education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

- Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's

  strengths, preferences, and interests; and

- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, . . . and other

  post-school adult living objectives, and . . . acquisition of daily living skills

  and functional vocational evaluation. [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C.

  1401(34)]. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, para. 4)

Under the reauthorization of IDEA, special education teachers are mainly responsible for

IEP meetings and the direct service delivery; as such, they should integrate

responsibilities for planning and delivering transition services and activities (Yi-Li et al.,

2009).

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and IDEA are the two most important special education laws that impact services for individuals with disabilities (Chiang & Hadadian, 2007). Six major pillars have been identified from IDEA 2004:

- zero reject, which holds that no student can be denied access to education based on disability;

- nondiscriminatory evaluations to ensure appropriate assessment practices are used when determining students' eligibility for special education and their progress in meeting their educational goals;

- FAPE and the IEP, which set the standards for what constitutes appropriate education for a particular student;

- LRE, which holds that delivery of special education services should occur in the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate;

- parent and student participation, which requires that parents partner with schools in the processes related to special education; and

- the right of students and parents to due process, which provides a grievance procedure when parents and schools disagree about services (Chiang & Hadadian, 2007; Laprairie et al., 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was signed into law January 8, 2001, by then-President George W. Bush (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; C. H. Wilson & Christian, 2006). When passed in 2001, NCLB articulated a standard of ensuring that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education (Macfarlane, 2012). NCLB required that at least 95% of students take high-stakes tests (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). NCLB made clear its focus on improving educational

outcomes for all students (Handler, 2006). This legislation governed elementary and

secondary education in the United States, ensuring that all students, especially those with

disabilities, would reach high academic standards (C. H. Wilson & Christian, 2006).

Tracking, sorting, and labeling students has been the education standard modus operandi

since the nation decided to educate the masses, and using standardized tests gives

administrations the numbers that allow for this type of practice to take place (Smyth,

2008). According to Epstein (2004), NCLB had a parent and school communication

component:

> NCLB also requires schools to communicate with parents about their child's
>
> achievement: test scores, the school's status in making Adequate Yearly Progress
>
> (AYP), disaggregated scores for major groups of students in the school, teachers'
>
> professional qualifications, options for parents to change schools and to select
>
> supplementary education services for eligible students, and other information
>
> about education programs. (p. 17)

The NCLB of 2001 emphasized the important role that families play in their

children's education, and IDEA of 2004 mandated parental involvement in educational

planning (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009). A large focus of both IDEA (2004) and

NCLB (2002) was accountability (Bouck, 2009). According to Handler (2006),

> NCLB and IDEA—Both documents include statements of purpose focused on
>
> achieving that goal and reflect a shared underlying assumption that achievement
>
> of the goal of widespread improved educational outcomes for all students requires
>
> unprecedented levels of collaboration between professionals and agencies of all
>
> levels. (p. 5)

Bouck (2009) stated, "NCLB and IDEA both focus on what to teach (curriculum) and where to teach it (instructional environment) and suggest what is valued and desired in the education of students with disabilities" (p. 3). Yi-Li et al. (2009) found that "some educators have suggested that increased focus on NCLB standards would decrease the amount of time schools allocate to community based learning experiences, and that this is compounding the difficulty of transition into the community" (p. 169). Special education exists for the primary purpose of providing better instruction to students at the extremes of statistical distributions of achievements (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

IEP Process

Born from the civil rights framework, the IEP process has focused on policies, rules, and regulations (deFur, 2012). An IEP is developed for each student who qualifies for special education (Laprairie et al., 2010). IEP development is a team process with the intended outcome of identifying educational services that provide a FAPE to the student with a disability (deFur, 2012). The IEP serves as a communication tool between parent and school, and it offers a unique forum for problem solving (deFur, 2012). The IEP specifies the program time frame and the methods for assessing and reporting student progress; in addition, the related services and supplemental aids and supports are delineated (Laprairie et al., 2010). According to the IEP standards, parents should provide information about the child's personality, development, and learning through open communication and cooperation (Underwood & University, 2010). This requires parents to provide information, but it does not necessarily lead to shared decision making or parents having a meaningful voice in the education process (Underwood & University, 2010). When it is time to schedule an IEP, the case manager of the student sends out an

IEP team notification form. When scheduling IEP meetings, the student's case manager

will contact the parent a month before the IEP due date via personal contact (e.g.,

telephone, newsletter, note home) to determine availability before sending the official

prior notice form home (Staples & Diliberto, 2010).

Although specific state requirements for IEPs vary somewhat, according to Friend

and Bursuck (2006), the federally required elements of an IEP remain the same:

1. Present level of functioning. Information about the student's current level of

   academic achievement, social skills, behavior, communication skills, and

   other areas of concern must be included in the IEP.

2. Annual goals and short-term objectives. Annual goals are the

   multidisciplinary team's estimate of what a student should be able to

   accomplish within a year, related to meeting his or her measured needs

   resulting from the disability. Short-term objectives are descriptions of the

   steps needed to achieve an annual goal, and they generally are required only

   for the IEPs of students with significant intellectual disabilities.

3. Extent of participation in general education. The IEP must include a clear

   statement of justification for placing a student anywhere but in general

   education for all or part of the school day.

4. Services and modifications needed. The IEP contains a complete outline of

   the specialized services the student needs; that is, the document includes all

   the special education instruction to be provided and any other related services

   needed to ensure instructional success.

5. Behavior intervention plan. Students with significant behavior problems, not just those students labeled as having emotional disabilities must have as part of the IEP an intervention plan based on a functional assessment of the student's behavior.

6. Date of initiation and frequency and duration of service and anticipated modifications. Each IEP must include specific dates when specialized services and modifications begin, the frequency of the services and modifications that are part of the services, at the period of time during which services and modifications are offered.

7. Strategies for evaluation. When a team develops an IEP, the members must clarify how to measure student progress toward achieving the annual goals and how to regularly inform parents about this progress.

8. Transition plan. For all students who are fourteen years of age or older, part of the IEP is a description of strategies and services for ensuring that the student is prepared to leave school for adult life. (pp. 56-61)

The eight federally required components compose the primary structure of all IEPs. According to Meadan, Shelden, Appel, and DeGrazia (2010), "These required components address the students' needs that result from their disability" (p. 9). IEP meetings represent

exchanges between parents and school district personnel, yet these meetings typically include numerous school officials who use technical language to describe the child through a deficit/medical model; that is, they use medical jargon to compare the child with a typically developing child and focus on the

skills he or she cannot perform rather than what he or she can do. (Mueller,

Milian, & Lopez, 2009, p. 113)

Results from an IEP meeting, according to Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, and Valdes

(2012), reinforce the "importance and value parental involvement has in their children's

education" (p. 151). For a team focused on developing an IEP for a student with

disabilities, this issue will involve the supports and services a student needs in order to

make effective progress on the goals and objectives of his or her IEP (Macfarlane, 2012).

Transition

Special Education Transition

Special education transitions differ from general education transitions. Rous and

Hallam (2012) expressed the need for "collaboration, coordination, and relationships as

critical to supporting successful transition experiences" (p. 235). Transition services are

highly individualized, and what might work for one student may not be appropriate for

another (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Student age is an important factor in

understanding variations in the likelihood of students' attending IEP/transition planning

meetings and of their participating actively or taking the lead role in the meetings

(Wagner et al., 2012). According to deFur (2012), "Transition service providers seek to

create collaborative partnerships over time with families" (p. 64). In a true partnership,

each partner has both choice and voice (deFur, 2012). Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2012)

stated,

Individual transition planning team members often have different vantage points

from which to observe a student, each may hold distinct expectations about the

transition domains that are important to address for a student, and/or each may

compile different information about a student's competence and support needs.

(p. 246)

Such multi-informant approaches may be particularly important when conducting

planning for students who have complex communication challenges and may encounter

difficulties articulating their own goals, interests, strengths, and support needs (Carter et

al., 2012).

Participation of all stakeholders in the transition process is critical to its success

(Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008). If effective collaborations are not achieved, the

desired outcomes for these students may not be accomplished (Trach, 2012). Trach

(2012) indicated that "transition has been primarily seen as a school related program

when in reality, it must be the connection between two service systems (outcome focused

planning and collaboration); therefore, it is an active process not a passive program"

(p. 41). A timeline delineating who will be involved and when helps ensure a seamless

transition between meaningful educational opportunities and services for a child with

special needs (Brandes, Ormsbee, & Haring, 2007). Sound transitional support can have

a positive effect on the trajectory of a child's social, emotional, and academic

development as well as his or her response to future transitions (Larson, 2010).

Laudan and Loprest (2012) indicated that transition services may include

coordination of services (e.g., vocational training, case management, and benefit

counseling) in and outside of schools, assessments of students' interests and aptitudes,

help with gathering information on and choosing among relevant opportunities, and

planning for necessary supports including assistive technology. Children with SEN have

more concerns/anxieties regarding bullying and posttransition (L. Hughes et al., 2013).

The discrepancy between parents' dreams for their children and the perceived future may cause parents some emotional turmoil that may hinder their involvement in the transition process (Landmark et al., 2007). Therefore, it is also important for transition professionals to provide adequate training and interventions so that parents may better understand the transition process (Landmark et al., 2007).

Partnerships/collaborations between parents and service providers during the transition period represent a critical strategy toward achieving student transition goals (deFur, 2012). According to deFur (2012), the family partnership model is organized into 10 strategies that contribute to collaborative transition partnerships:

1. Staying student and family centered throughout the transition process.

2. Developing a shared vision for student transition outcomes.

3. Being culturally responsive and recognizing that families, students, and service providers have complementary expertise to contribute to the transition process.

4. Communicating proactively.

5. Being caring and committed.

6. Giving choice and voice to all parties involved in the transition process.

7. Facilitating creative problem solving to implement effective transition services.

8. Offering helpful connections for families and students during the transition years.

9. Taking action on decisions regarding transition services.

10. Reflecting on and celebrating accomplishments during the transition process.

(p. 59)

The strategies listed above are designed to improve on parent partnerships/collaborations during the transition planning process. Transition planning should be an ongoing dynamic process designed to help the student achieve his or her long-term goals (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Kellems and Morningstar (2010) also reinforced parent partnerships/collaboration by offering examples of transition planning tips:

1. Organize a transition group that meets once a month.

2. Start the transition process early by having realistic transition goals in place by the ninth and 10th grade.

3. Use a transition interview with students beginning at age 13.

4. Have students develop a portfolio.

Elementary to Middle School Transition

As adolescence approaches, students experience rapid social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth (Carter et al., 2005). The middle school environment differs significantly from that of the elementary school (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995). These developmental changes make the middle school years an especially awkward and complicated time for students (Carter et al., 2005). The students' transition from elementary to middle school involves a group of individuals (the children from general education/special education programs, teachers, specialists, and other relevant individuals) who can work together as a team (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995). Students can expect differences in class size, schedule, activities, teacher methodologies, rules, and expectations for their performance and their interactions with adults and peers (Perkins &

Gelfer, 1995). In addition, Maras and Aveling (2006) also "identify changes ranging

from building size, teaching styles, and the complexity and organization of the school

day, to concerns about relations with other students as areas of concern for SEN students"

(p. 196). In the new setting, young adolescents must apply previously learned skills and

understanding, learn new school rules, make new friends, function in different physical

and social environments, work more independently, and conform to greater teacher

expectations (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995).

Elementary and middle school educators must find effective and meaningful ways

of supporting these students' transitions to ensure that all students are confident,

knowledgeable, and well prepared as they begin their new school experiences (Carter et

al., 2005). According to Maras and Aveling (2006), "Shadowing programs, peer

mentors, teacher driven supports, and parent programs are some interventions that can

assist in a seamless transition" (p. 196). The five essential components of the

elementary-to-middle school transition model are (a) developing a planning team,

(b) generating goals and identifying problems, (c) developing written strategic transition

plans, (d) acquiring the support and commitment of teachers and all those involved in the

transition process, and (e) evaluating the transition process (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995).

Authors Carter et al. (2005), as mentioned previously, "offer nine strategies for educators

and parents to facilitate and support a successful adjustment" (p. 9). Detwiler (2008)

suggested that "parents take their child to visit the middle school prior to transition to

meet with the school nurse, counselors, principal, and teachers; in addition, visiting

student areas such as the restrooms" (p. 22). A new IEP does not need to be developed to

transition children to middle school (Detwiler, 2008).

Middle School to High School Transition

Many adolescents approach high school with mixed feelings (Frasier, 2007). Special education students need a distinctive orientation to high school (Dorman, 2012). While the transition from middle to high school is challenging for all students, the transition is even more difficult for students with special needs (Frasier, 2007). Although middle school youth need to begin to think ahead about postschool outcomes, their focus should be on developing ways (e.g., self-determination skills) to ensure success in their current coursework and documenting transition planning efforts throughout middle and high school (Weidenthal & Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). Dorman (2012) suggested "scheduling matriculation meetings to prepare the way for incoming students with IEPs" (p. 23). These meetings should be held for the middle school and high school special education staff and should be seen as case conferences for staff, as opposed to IEP meetings for parents (Dorman, 2012). Research by Maras and Aveling (2006) indicated that "for most students, a significant stressor in adjusting to secondary school was the increased workload, including homework, and, for some, the increased hours of school" (p. 200).

Matriculation meetings should be held in the latter part of the last month of school and coordinated with the feeders and recipient school staff (Dorman, 2012). According to Dorman (2012), "The middle school case manager should be present along with student records, and it's also important to have a summary form that documents basic information regarding the student" (p. 25). Case managers play a crucial role in communicating with parents and in fostering collaborative transition planning (Ankeny et al., 2009). Case managers should acknowledge the family stress that revolves around the

students' ongoing needs and should give parents connections to community supports and resources (Ankeny et al., 2009). As mentioned previously, Dorman (2012) suggested four ways to support transition plans for SEN students and their families:

1. Accurate and useful information

2. Supporting social success

3. Supporting academic success

4. Collaboration (pp. 22-23)

People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school and three times more likely to live in poverty compared to people without disabilities (Geenen et al., 2005). Families of youth with disabilities face additional sources of stress concerning their children's social-sexual adjustment, vocational options and career choices, guardianship and advocacy issues, financial security, and needs for recreation and leisure (Ankeny et al., 2009).

Barriers

Parental Involvement and Teacher Collaboration

In the early years of the United States, education of children was the primary responsibility of parents, with little or no formal involvement from a structured educational entity (Watson et al., 2012). Watson et al. (2012) explained that "as the American population began to . . . swell [with mass] immigration, the large cities, like farming communities, began using children in the labor force until organized unions protested and disrupted the practice" (p. 42). As a result, over time groups were formed like the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, the forerunner to the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). During the 1960s, more policy evolved that touted parental

involvement as a promising way to improve education for poor and disadvantaged

children. Federally funded Head Start preschool programs resulted from a number of

federal laws and regulations implemented since the 1960s, and parental involvement is a

critical component in these programs (Henrich, 2010). The most recent policy is as

follows:

> *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* and the Head Start
>
> Program Performance Standards stipulate that parents must be involved in the
>
> governance of their Head Start and Early Head Start program (Section 1304.50).
>
> Parents contribute to program governance through their participation in Policy
>
> Councils and Policy Committees, the majority of members on each must be Head
>
> Start parents. (Henrich, 2010, p. 3)

Over time, parents have come to be viewed as critical partners in the education of their

children (Watson et al., 2012).

The traditional definition of parental involvement includes activities in the school

and home; the Epstein model provides the basic framework for parental involvement

strategies (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Bower and Griffin (2011) added to the traditional

definition of parental involvement that it "requires investments of time and money from

parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed

uninvolved" (p. 79). In essence, traditional definitions of parental involvement make

demands of parents to help facilitate the success of the school, while reciprocal demands

are not made of the school to ensure the success of their families (Bower & Griffin,

2011). Epstein (2008) stated that by "selecting activities that focus on parenting,

communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with

the community, schools can help parents become involved in different ways" (p. 11).
The basis of parental involvement in the school setting is characterized with this six-step approach:

1. Parenting—helping all families understand child and adolescent development and establishing home environments that support children as well as students.

2. Communicating—designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication about school programs and children's progress.

3. Volunteering—recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or other locations to support the school and students' activities.

4. Involvement in learning activities at home—providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities.

5. Involvement in decision making—having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees and, with their leadership, obtaining input from all parents on school decisions.

6. Collaborating with the community—identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families, and organizing activities to benefit the community and increase students' learning opportunities (Epstein, 2004; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

The framework of six types of parental involvement has helped researchers and educators think systematically about the different ways to involve parents, without criticizing those who cannot come often to the school building (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

In the *Ecology of Human Development*, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided a biological perspective that offered insights that can enhance educators' understanding of

families by empowering them and understanding their children's strengths and needs at a young age. Swick and Williams (2006) stated, "Bronfenbrenner explicates that the world of the child . . . consists of five systems of interaction" (p. 371):

1. Microsystem: "Consisting of the child's most immediate environment (physically, socially and psychologically), this core entity stands as the child's venue for initially learning about the world" (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 372). As stated by Russell (2003), "The parent of a disabled child has personal experience of their child and their parental role in caring for a child with additional support needs" (p. 146).

2. Mesosystem: Swick and Williams (2006) argued, "There must be loving adults beyond the parents who engage in caring ways with our children" (p. 372). According to Russell (2003), "Parents of disabled children will automatically generate unconscious expectations of people delivering services designed to meet the needs of disabled children and their families" (p. 146).

3. Exosystem: As described by Swick and Williams (2006), "The close, intimate system of our relations within families creates our buffer and 'nest' for being with each other" (p. 372). Russell (2003) noted, "Social interactions between parents, teachers and schools cannot be viewed in isolation" (p. 147).

4. Macrosystem: According to Swick and Williams (2006), "The larger systems of cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and 'community happenings' act as a powerful source of energy in our lives" (p. 372). Russell (2003) added,

> They advocate a move away from the dominant view towards disability, which is
> based on the "medical" or "deficit" model, to a "social" model of disability,

whereby the barriers created by society that prevent people with impairments fully participating are challenged and removed. (p. 148)

5. Chronosystem: Swick and Williams (2006) explained, "All of the systems influence family functioning, they are dynamic and interactive—fostering a framework for parents and children. Our understanding of the 'contexts' in which family stressors occur can help us in being effective helpers" (p. 373).

Each system depends on the contextual nature of the person's life and offers an ever-growing diversity of options and sources of growth (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Traditional or nontraditional, biological, foster, or adoptive families provide vital support to students with disabilities through the transition process as well as throughout their lives (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). In the era of accountability, the promise of increased academic achievement, especially with regard to the achievement gap, places the need to increase and improve parental involvement in children's education in a powerful position (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Building relationships between school personnel and high-minority/high-poverty parents may increase their participation and the impact of existing strategies within the school by increasing ownership, accountability, and social networks (Bower & Griffin, 2011). When students are assessed by school staff and qualify for special education and related services, according to Russell (2003), this process can also create needs of parents of SEN children: "the need for information, advice, support, and practical help resulting in the need to be involved at every stage of the identification of the disability" (p. 144). Intellectually, parents need to learn and understand a new body of knowledge relating to their children's diagnosis and the systems designed to support them (Russell, 2003). Parental

involvement strategies should consider race and ethnicity because research has demonstrated differences in parental involvement among African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian families (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Despite the benefits of parental involvement, the reality is that parents of students with disabilities are not often adequately involved in their children's transition planning process (Landmark et al., 2007). While the importance of parental participation is clearly recognized, actual parental involvement in school-based transition planning typically declines during the transition period (Geenen & Powers, 2001).

Van Haren and Fiedler (2008) identified the need for special education professionals to support and empower families to increase parental participation. One study found that parents with higher levels of involvement in supporting their children's education at home and at school and those who belonged to support groups for parents of children with disabilities were significantly more likely to attend IEP/transition planning meetings (Wagner et al., 2012). Parental involvement also appears to spur students' attendance at their IEP/transition planning meetings and their active participation in transition planning (Wagner et al., 2012). To nurture parents' involvement in the transition planning process, case managers must maintain honest and respectful communication with parents while respecting the families' vision for their children's future (Ankeny et al., 2009). Families can be supported and empowered through the following strategies:

> (1) display empathy for families, (2) individualize family participation,
>
> (3) recognize families as experts and build on family strengths, (4) value and
>
> support family decision, (5) be professional ally of families, (6) engage families in

open communication, (7) enhance family access, (8) offer family networking,

(9) extend support system, (10) embrace and celebrate families' successes,

(11) enhance families' sense of self-efficacy, (12) model effective problem

solving for families, (13) increase family coping skills, (14) build family

competencies and capacity, (15) offer training and professional development to

families, (16) engage family members in all stages of the IEP, (17) encourage

student participation in the IEP meeting, (18) involve families in community

collaboration, (19) foster hope, (20) and assist families in articulating their vision

for their child's future. (Van Haren & Fiedler, 2008, pp. 231-235)

Staples and Diliberto (2010) suggested that the fundamentals of parental involvement

needed for successful parent-teacher collaboration within a school environment include

(a) building parent rapport, (b) developing a communication system with a maintenance

plan, and (c) creating additional special event opportunities for parental involvement.

Cultural Barriers

There is a growing body of research describing bilingual and multilingual

language acquisition in children with a wide range of disorders (Guiberson, 2013).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) adolescents and young adults with disabilities

appear to be at even greater risk for poor transitions than their nonminority peers with

disabilities (Geenen et al., 2005). Although there has been tremendous progress toward

including CLD populations in public education, transition policies and practices remain

dominated by culture, values, and biases of the majority Caucasian middle class (Kim &

Morningstar, 2005). Baer and Daviso (2011) indicated that "ethnicity . . . play[ed] a

significant role in the types of special education and transition services received" by

students in their study (p. 173). M. T. Hughes et al. (2008) reaffirmed that "the

[relationship between] home and school . . . is an essential one, [and] educators need to

become familiar with the different cultures they work with" (p. 243). Cultural

differences and practices, individual differences, and misunderstandings that can occur

between teachers and parents and among parents themselves can impede parental

involvement practices (Bower & Griffin, 2011). According to Landmark et al. (2007),

parents from CLD backgrounds in their study relied on other forms of support, such as

"friends, family members, and school psychologists, to help them advocate for their

children during IEP transition meetings" (p. 73).

      While there is wide diversity within ethnic groups, students from African

American, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, Polynesian, and most Asian cultures are

more likely to hold collectivist goals and values (Black, Mrasek, & Ballinger, 2003). In

contrast, students with European backgrounds tend to align more closely with

individualist goals and values (Black et al., 2003). Black et al. (2003) found that

"individualism emphasizes standing out from the crowd, independent enterprise, and

personal accomplishments," while "collectivist cultures focus on the group, which may

be family, neighborhood, or tribe" (p. 20). Although most schools translate written

communication, translation should not end with written language if schools truly desire

parents' involvement and collaboration (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Information must be

understandable (i.e., in the family's native language and easy to read) and accessible to

families in a variety of formats as well as presented according to cultural values and

preferences of CLD families (Kim et al., 2007). Consequently, parents from diverse

cultures face additional challenges and barriers when attempting to become involved in their children's transition from school to adulthood (Landmark et al., 2007).

Differences in culture can influence the transition goals that families emphasize the most (Cote et al., 2012). According to Geenen and Powers (2001),

> Parents of all ethnic groups are likely to encounter barriers to school participation, including (a) parental fatigue; (b) lack of parental knowledge regarding their rights, school procedures or policies; (c) logistical constraints, such as a lack of child care or transportation; (d) rigid or limited options for parent involvement in educational planning; and (e) language. (p. 279)

In a later study, Geenen et al. (2005) found that for CLD families, the barriers to parental involvement include "(a) power imbalance; (b) psychological/attitudinal; (c) logistic; (d) information; (e) communication; (f) [socioeconomic status and other] contextual barriers; and (g) cultural factors or influences" (p. 8). Effective strategies for promoting cultural competence and reciprocity among all members of the IEP team include the following:

1. "Knowing your own worldview." According to Kim and Morningstar (2005), "Professionals must become aware of the cultural values and expectations embedded in their own perspectives of transition regarding work, community integration, role expectations, and social functioning" (p. 99). Kim et al. (2007) added, "Understanding implicit and explicit views of transition is a first step toward knowing your own worldview" (p. 261).

2. "Learning about the families in the community served." Teachers need to enhance their cultural awareness.

3. "Respecting cultural differences." Kim et al. described this as "acknowledging the differences between professional transition expectations and those of CLD families" (p. 262).

4. "Reaching mutual goals." These goals are "acceptable both to their professional values and to those of the family" (Kim et al., 2007, p. 262).

Cote et al. (2012) reinforced the importance of professionals' involving CLD families and students in successful transition planning by promoting an updated four-step approach:

1. Enrich Families' Lives.

2. Demonstrate Cultural Competence.

3. Support Family Values.

4. Promote a Family-Centered Approach. (pp. 51-53)

The lack of focused attention on the cultural aspects of transition planning is troubling as CLD youth with disabilities often experience poor transition outcomes, even more so than their non-CLD peers with disabilities (Geenen & Powers, 2001).

Skills Needed for Transition Planning

Self-Determination

Within the realm of academics, SEN students need a specific functional academic skillset to prepare them for the real world. Skills that are necessary to support students in being self-determined and to teach self-determination skills to students with disabilities are different from skills that are necessary to support a more traditional model of transition planning (Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002). According to Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, and Algozzine (2004),

Self-determination was first written into law in the Public Housing Act of 1988,

and quickly followed in other major pieces of legislation written for people with

disabilities, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1992 and 1998 and the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and 1997. (p. 9)

Thoma et al. (2002) stated that "IDEA requires special educators learn new strategies that

support student self-determination not only throughout the transition process, but also in

all educational program development in the years preceding transition planning" (p. 85).

The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (as cited in

Thomas & Dykes, 2011) stated, "To pay attention to transition early in a child's career,

teachers should consistently promote activities that explore education, vocational,

recreational, and personal interests thereby facilitating successful outcomes in post-

secondary education and training, employment, and civic engagement" (p. 3). As

children develop and mature, they will begin to create a profile of identity and start to

understand their abilities as they relate to their disabilities (Weidenthal & Kochhar-

Bryant, 2007). Self-determination is one area that needs growth in transition planning;

according to Epstein and Dauber (1991), "People who are self-determined are able to take

action to achieve their desired quality of life without the undue influence or interference

of others" (p. 48). Wood et al. (2004) stated, "Self-determination includes teachable,

measurable skills, such as choice making . . . and problem-solving" (p. 10). Self-

determination instruction should be infused into the general curriculum (Stang et al.,

2009). All students, not just special education students, need previous experiences, the

ability to crystallize and clarify their preferences and interests, and the ability to

communicate preferences and interests in an appropriate manner (Thomas & Dykes, 2011).

Life skills curricula are often provided as foundational courses at career and technical education centers or in self-contained special education classrooms, and occasionally as elective courses in regular high schools (Smyth, 2008). Stang et al. (2009) found that "enhanced self-determination is associated with improved in- and postschool outcomes," it "should comprise an important aspect of educational programming for students with disabilities," "systematic instruction and frequent practice opportunities" for students allow them to "acquire the knowledge" to enhance their self-determination, it should be embedded in general education curriculum, and it should "begin [prior to] high school" (pp. 94-95). According to Wood et al. (2004), the environment remains a critical factor in how well students achieve self-determination, and the people in the students' lives must

- Encourage generalization of self-determination skills and behavior.
- Honor the choices and decisions the student makes.
- Support the goals that the student sets. (p. 10)

Wood et al. identified the following self-determination skills needed to effectively plan IEPs to increase classroom instruction to encourage SEN students to become self-determined citizens:

- Choice and decision making
- Choice making (with communication)
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making

- Goal setting and attainment

- Self-regulation

- Self-advocacy

- Self-advocacy and self-awareness

- Self-efficacy (pp. 13-15)

Person-Centered Planning

PCP is a technique based on a set of core elements but open to a variety of options and formats to achieve a personalized approach to planning (Hagner, Kurtz, May, & Cloutier, 2014). PCP is a process that allows the person with a disability, family members, and friends an opportunity to share information regarding the individual to develop a personal profile and future vision for the person (Wells, Sheehey, & Moore, 2012). PCP is an example of self-determination, and this method was developed by professionals from the United States and Canada (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). When SEN students with developmental delays transition into the high school environment, the focus is more often on PCP (Wells et al., 2012). Friend and Bursuck (2006) emphasized the following dimensions of PCP:

- Community presence. Identify the community settings that the student uses and the ones that would benefit him or her.

- Choice. Identify decisions made by the student and decisions made for the student.

- Competence. Identify skills that best assist the student to participate fully in the school and community and strategies that are most effective.

- Respect. Clarify roles the student has in the school and local community.

- Community participation. Specify people with whom the student spends time at school and in other settings. (p. 43)

Personal Futures Planning, McGill Action Planning Systems or Making Action Plans, Essential Lifestyle Planning, Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope, and Group Action Planning are PCP planning approaches (Meadan et al., 2010; Wells et al., 2012). IEP team members collaborate, using a problem-solving approach, to develop a holistic long-term vision and plan for the individual with a disability (Meadan et al., 2010).

PCP was not developed to replace the IEP; instead, the development of the IEP is informed by PCP events that occur prior to the IEP meeting (Meadan et al., 2010). PCP typically has been used with students with low-incidence disabilities; however, it can benefit all students with disabilities and their families (Meadan et al., 2010). Creating a long-term vision for students with disabilities includes the following steps:

- Choose or modify tools that will help with the development.

- Identify a leader.

- Support and guide parents.

- Develop a long-term vision.

- Share the vision at the IEP meeting.

- Revise and update the vision (Meadan et al., 2010).

Due to the flexibility of PCP, individuals who experience difficulties with communication, anxiety, and other social difficulties are able to participate actively in facilitated group planning sessions (Hagner et al., 2014).

Synthesis Matrix

Synthesizing literature involves comparing, contrasting, and merging disparate pieces of information into one coherent whole that provides a new perspective (Roberts, 2010). A high-quality literature review reflects careful analysis of all sources and a critical synthesis in which previous studies and information are related to each other (Roberts, 2010). The synthesis matrices developed for this study highlight the literature that was reviewed and identify key points in SEN student transitions. Four matrices were developed by the researcher (Appendix A) that merge all pertinent information regarding the SEN student transition processes into and out of the public middle school environment.

The first matrix highlights parental involvement and the strategies needed for parents to become successful during transition planning for their children who have SEN. The most widely used definition for parental involvement in the school setting for the past 24 years has been Epstein and Dauber's (1991) definition. It is evident that law and policy govern the transition planning process. Collaboration and communication between all stakeholders is an integral piece for transition planning. Cultural barriers can have an effect on transition planning, and it is equally important to have some type of strategies in place to facilitate the transition planning process.

The second matrix highlights the importance of SEN transitions. SEN transitions are unique to the individuals involved. To prepare a student who has SEN, PCP and self-determination help stage develop the foundation for transition planning. Transition IEPs require collaboration between all stakeholders involved, preplanning the transition, and stakeholder involvement. Parents have heightened levels of stress and anxiety during

transition planning; to ease these uneasy feelings, strategies that can help the family cope can assist with the transition into a new school environment.

The third matrix highlights the barriers affecting SEN student transitions. Parental involvement is a barrier because it has potential harmful effects on postschool outcomes for students with SEN. If educators/service providers can take preplanning steps with the involvement of parents prior to the IEP, communicating with the parents, understanding cultural values/norms, and taking their emotional needs into account, they can produce a transition plan of which all stakeholders are a part.

The fourth matrix highlights the impact of culture on the transition planning process. The impact of the transition planning process on SEN families shows that there is added anxiety and stress for CLD families. Educators and service providers need to understand the family dynamics and values to create a shared transition plan. Strategies to support school staff can enhance transition outcomes. CLD parents have difficulties with academic language and the basic understanding of their parental rights. Properly translated documents and weekly communication can assist and alleviate the overall stress and anxiety associated with transition planning.

Summary

The information provided in this literature review was intended to highlight the challenges that developmentally delayed SEN students and their parents face as they transition into and out of the public middle school environment. The middle school experience is characterized by adolescence, the transition from a smaller school environment to a larger one, a rotating bell schedule, new teachers, navigating the campus, and a new set of school policies that need to be learned. High school is an

extension of the middle school environment on an even larger scale. Parental

involvement is critical for SEN student outcomes, but parental involvement can be stifled

due to CLD barriers. Equipping SEN students with self-determination and PCP strategies

helps to increase student and parental involvement during transitions. Strategies have

been outlined as to how to increase involvement and ease parent/student anxiety. Chapter

III outlines the methodology that was used to conduct this qualitative study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter presents the methodology and the procedural components used to conduct the research in this study. The purpose statement and the research questions provided the rationale and foundational basis for the research on middle school special education needs (SEN) students and their parents' expectations regarding transitioning into and out of the public middle school environment. The chapter also includes the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, reliability/validity, data collection/ analysis, and limitations as they pertain to this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the expectations of parents of developmentally delayed special education needs (SEN) middle school children regarding their children's transition into and out of public middle school. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify the extent to which schools are meeting the needs of their students during the transition process as perceived by parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?

2. What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?

3. What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?

4. In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

Research Design

The research method used for this study was a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Roberts (2010) stated that "qualitative research is really an umbrella term that refers to several research genres that share certain characteristics . . . such as case study research, historical research, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, action research, and hermeneutics" (p. 143). Yilmaz (2013) defined qualitative research in more depth by stating,

> Qualitative research is based on a constructivist epistemology and explores what it assumes to be a socially constructed dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive; i.e. an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved. It tries to understand how social experience is created and given meaning. From a qualitative perspective, reality or knowledge are socially and psychologically constructed. The qualitative paradigm views the relationship between the knower and the known as inextricably connected. (p. 312)

Creswell (2008) stated, "Qualitative research design begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). In the fields of special education and disability, qualitative research contributes

by capturing involved people's perspectives and by adding to the understanding of discourses that shape social life in schools and society (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

The method chosen for this study was a collective case study. A collective case study is research that takes place at multiple sites or includes personalized stories of several similar (or distinctive) individuals (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The case study may be a program, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With a collective case study, more than one example or setting is used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "Case studies data collection is extensive and varied, depending on the question and situation" (p. 345).

According to Patton (2002), "Qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents" (p. 4). A specific model for data collection was used. The qualitative data collection and analysis were interwoven and overlapped in a five-phase cycle (see Figure 1):

1. Phase 1: Planning. Analyzing the problem statement and the initial research questions will suggest the type of setting or interviewees that would logically be informative. In Phase 1, the researcher locates and gains permission to use the site or network of persons.

2. Phase 2: Beginning Data Collection. . . . Researchers obtain data primarily to become oriented and to gain a sense of the totality for purposeful sampling. Researchers also adjust their interviewing and recording procedures to the site or persons involved.

Phase 1: Planning	Phase: 2 Beginning Data Collection	Phase 3: Basic Data Collection	Phase: 4 Closing Data Collection	Phase: 5 Completion

Planning   **Data Collection Period**

_____   _____

Data Recording

_____ ------------------

During   Closing

------------ Initial Data Analysis and Diagrams ------------------

During

                                               Formal Analysis and Diagrams

                         Tentative Interpretations

--- _____ _____

                        During   Closing

_____ Primary process ------------ Secondary process
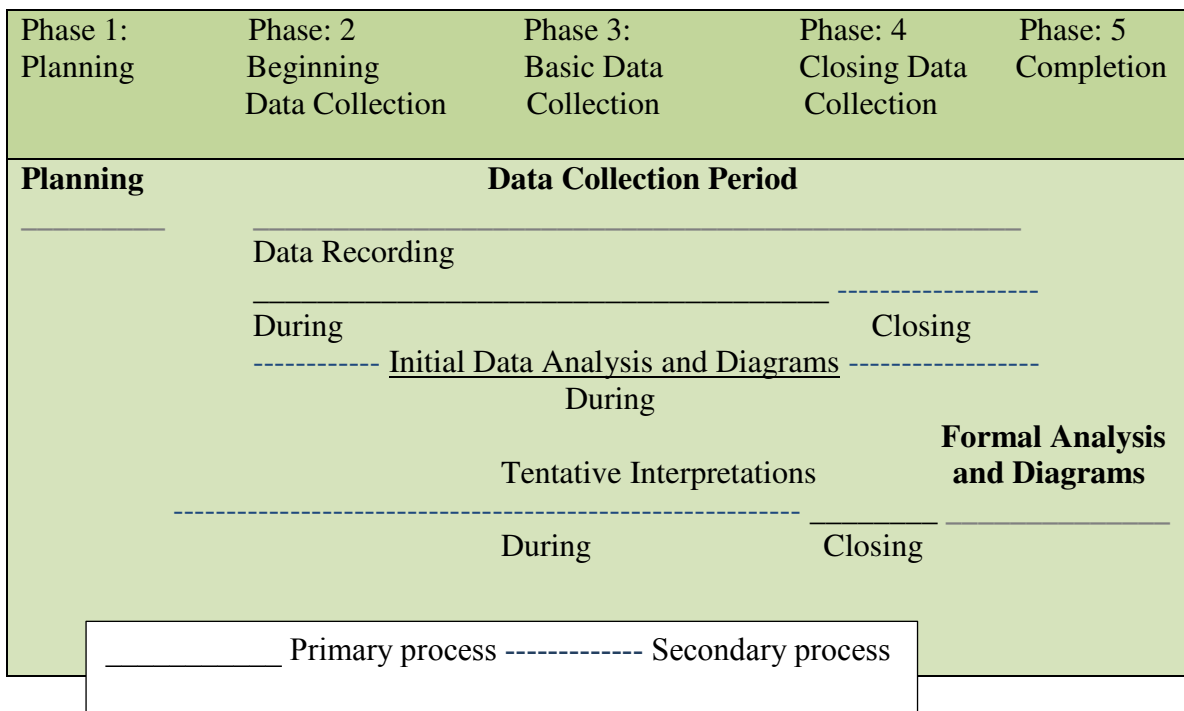
Figure 1. Data collection and analysis five-phase cycle. From *Research in Education: Evidence Based Inquiry* (7th ed.), by J. McMillan and S. Schumacher, 2010, p. 353, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

3. Phase 3: Basic Data Collection. . . . Choices of data collection strategies and informants continue to be made. Tentative data analysis begins as the researcher mentally processes ideas and facts while collecting data. Initial descriptions are summarized and identified for later corroboration.

4. Phase 4: Closing Data Collection. The researcher . . . conducts the last interview. Ending data collection is related to the research problem and the richness of the collected data. More attention is given to possible interpretations and verifications of the emergent findings with key informants, remaining interviews, and documents. . . .

5. Phase 5: Completion. Completion of active data collecting blends into formal data analysis and construction of meaningful ways to present data. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, pp. 353-354)

For the purpose of this qualitative study, the five phases of data collection and analysis were implemented. A sample of parents who fit the criteria of SEN parents who had children enrolled in high school who had experienced the transitions into and out of the public middle school environment were interviewed in depth using semistructured interviews, which provided rich detail regarding their own personal accounts of transition.

Population

The description of the population should be very clear about how many individuals make up the larger population and how many are included in the target population. A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which researchers intend to generalize the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). About 10% of California's students, or 686,352, in 2011-2012 had disabilities affecting their education (see Table 1; Ehlers, 2013).

The Contra Costa County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in the Northern California Bay Area region is divided into four different SELPAs. Contra Costa, Mount Diablo Unified School District, San Ramon Valley Unified School District, and West Contra Costa Unified School District are the four SELPAs located in Contra Costa County. Mount Diablo Unified School District, San Ramon Valley Unified School

Table 1

California's Students With Disabilities (SWD) Population, 2011-2012

Disability	Number of SWDs[a]	% of SWDs	% of total K-12 population
Specific learning disability[b]	278,698	41%	4.4%
Speech or language impairment	164,600	24%	2.1%
Autism	71,825	10%	1.0%
Other health impairment[c]	61,843	9%	0.9%
Mental retardation	43,303	6%	0.5%
Emotional disturbance	25,984	4%	0.4%
Orthopedic impairment	14,261	2%	0.2%
Hard of hearing	9,991	1%	0.1%
Multiple disability	5,643	1%	0.1%
Visual impairment	4,327	1%	0.1%
Deaf	3,946	1%	0.1%
Traumatic brain injury	1,771	—[d]	—[e]
Deaf and blind	160	—[d]	—[e]
Totals	686,352	100%	9.9%

Note. Adapted from *Overview of Special Education in California*, by R. Ehlers, 2013, Figure 2, retrieved from Legislative Analyst's Office website: http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/special-ed-primer/special-ed-primer-010313.aspx.
[a]Reflects SWDs ages 3 to 22 receiving special education services. [b]Includes disorders resulting in difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. [c]Includes having chronic or acute health problems (e.g., a heart condition, asthma, epilepsy, or diabetes) that adversely affect educational performance. [d]Less than 0.5%. [e]Less than 0.05%.

District, and West Contra Costa Unified School District are the largest three school districts in Contra Costa County and have their own SELPAs (California Department of Education, 2014a). The Contra Costa SELPA contains 16 different local education agencies (LEAs) that were considered for this collective case study. The Contra Costa SELPA consists of the Contra Costa County Office of Education and 15 school districts: Acalanes, Antioch, Brentwood, Byron, Canyon, John Swett, Knightson, Lafayette, Liberty, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pittsburg, and Walnut Creek (Contra Costa SELPA, n.d.). The student populations served come from a variety of socioeconomic

backgrounds, are ethnically diverse, and have a variety of special education needs. As of

2013-2014, Contra Costa County had a total of 261 schools serving 173,020 students in

Grades K-12. The special needs population of the county totaled 19,937 (Contra Costa

County Office of Education, 2014). The Contra Costa SELPA had a total of 1,445

students enrolled in ninth and 10th grades (California Department of Education, 2014b).

The researcher identified a total of 20 middle schools in the Contra Costa SELPA.

The Liberty Union High School District (LUHSD) was the focus of this study.

LUHSD has three comprehensive high schools: Freedom High School, Liberty High

School, and Heritage High School; it is the only high school district within Contra Costa

County and comprises the largest geographic area within the county. During the 2013-

2014 school year, LUHSD had a combined student population of 5,109, with 600 SEN

students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Liberty Union High School District SEN Enrollment, 2013

High school	Enrollment	SEN enrollment
Freedom High School	1,830	261
Liberty High School	1,686	137
Heritage High School	1,593	202
Total	5,109	600

Note. Adapted from "Administrative Services: School Accountability Report Card (SARC)," by Liberty Union High School District, n.d.a, retrieved October 6, 2014, from http://libertyunion .schoolwires.net/page/42.

The LUHSD represents 3% of both the 2013 high school and SEN enrollment

within Contra Costa County. The seven middle schools represent 7% of the middle

school population in Contra Costa County (California Department of Education, 2014b).

LUHSD receives ninth-grade students transitioning from seven middle schools within the

Oakley, Brentwood, Byron, and Knightson elementary school districts. The middle

schools had a combined total of 1,917 ninth-grade students who transitioned to one of the

three high schools in 2013. In 2012, the number of ninth graders transitioning was 1,930

(California Department of Education, 2014b). In 2013-2014, LUHSD had a total of 327

students in ninth and 10th grade who had identified disabilities (California Department of

Education, 2014b).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "The target population is often

different from the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected, which is

termed the survey population or sampling frame" (p. 129). With three high schools and

seven middle schools across a wide geographic area, LUHSD was recommended by the

SELPA program specialist as having students with a variety of disabilities, as having

parents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and as being logistically

accessible. Further, the three high schools and the seven middle schools from the three

elementary districts provided parents for the study who had a variety of transition

experiences. Therefore, parents and guardians from the LUHSD had SEN children who

transitioned from the feeder middle schools into one of the three district high schools.

The researcher worked with the SELPA program specialist to distribute letters to the

superintendent and other administrative staff within LEAs and to parents indicating the

nature of the study (Appendix B). A letter was first sent out to the superintendent to clear

the study with the school board. Once the approval was given, the researcher and SELPA

program specialist distributed the information to the high school administrative staff and

the teachers involved in the study.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals, as it "allows small groups of individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 489). According to Patton (2002),

> There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources. (p. 264)

This study focused on parents and legal guardians who had developmentally delayed high school SEN children in ninth and 10th grade enrolled in a public school setting with an individualized education plan (IEP) receiving special education services. They were selected for the study to recall their experiences related to their children's transitioning into and out of the public middle school environment. The sample for this study was drawn from the target population of parents/legal guardians who had children enrolled in the LUHSD and whose children had experienced the two transition periods.

The researcher and the SELPA program specialist collaborated to identify 200 parents/guardians of ninth- and 10th-grade SEN children who transitioned into and out of public middle schools and were enrolled in the LUHSD at the time of the study. The researcher determined that including parents who had more recent experiences with the transition process could add to the richness of the data collected, and those parents were more likely to participate in the study.

Qualitative samples must be large enough to ensure that most of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time, if the sample is too large,

data become repetitive and eventually superfluous (Mason, 2010). Saturation is used as one guiding principle that affects sample size in a qualitative study (Mason, 2010). According to Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013),

> The concept [of] *data saturation* (developed originally for grounded theory studies but applicable to all qualitative research that employs interviews as the primary data source) "entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy."
>
> (p. 11)

Single case studies should generally contain 15 to 30 interviews (Marshall et al., 2013). It was recommended by Dr. Jeffrey Lee (personal communication, July 30, 2014), a qualitative research expert from Brandman University, that a 10% response rate, or 20 parents, would be a sufficient sample size for the purpose of this study. Therefore, the sample size for the study was 10% of the 200 identified parents with developmentally delayed ninth- and 10th-grade students enrolled in the LUHSD who were receiving special education services at the time of this study.

The term "developmentally delayed refers to children who have significant delays in physical, cognitive, communication, social-emotional, or adaptive development but is applied instead of one of the more specific disability categories" (Friend & Bursuck, 2006, p. 24). The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2012) has identified 13 categories in the IDEA law that qualify students for special education:

- autism;
- deaf-blindness;
- deafness;

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- emotional disturbance [ED];

- hearing impairment [HI];

- intellectual disability [ID];

- multiple disabilities [MD];

- orthopedic impairment [OI];

- other health impairment [OHI];

- specific learning disability [SLD];

- speech or language impairment [SLI];

- traumatic brain injury [TBI]; or

- visual impairment [VI]. (p. 2)

For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to use all of the criteria/identifiers that qualify students for special education. It was the intent of the researcher to generalize these criteria to find common themes while analyzing data to make future recommendations.

A letter of consent was sent to the target population by the SELPA program specialist/researcher via the special education teachers at the three high schools. Fourteen teachers at Freedom High School, 14 at Liberty High School, and eight at Heritage High School (Liberty Union High School District, n.d.b) distributed the letters of consent to SEN families asking for their participation to begin the purposeful sampling method (Appendix C). The district mailing system was used to send printed consent letters to all teachers in the form of a research packet. The letters included a statement conveying the voluntary nature of participation and that respondents would be able to withdraw at any time without penalty, participant responses would remain anonymous,

only group data would be reported, and the participants would have the ability to receive results if they so requested (Warrell, 2010). Parents had the option of mailing back a self-addressed envelope to the researcher directly, e-mailing the researcher, or sending a text message to the researcher. The letters of consent were signed and returned by the mode of communication that was easiest for the parents, indicating "yes" or "no" for participation. A "yes" response from a parent included name, contact information (in the form of phone number or e-mail address), and availability. As responses were received by the researcher, each participant was assigned an identification number to protect the personal information shared with the researcher. All correspondence and information that was received was kept in a locked file cabinet or stored on the researcher's personal laptop computer requiring a personal access code that the researcher kept at all times (not accessible to anyone else).

A free computer program, Research Randomizer, was used to create a random number table to randomly choose the participants to be included in the 10% of parents selected for the interview process. In the event that more than 20 participants were obtained, Research Randomizer randomly selected only 20 participants.

Instrumentation

Parent participants were offered the option of participating through a telephone interview, a face-to-face interview, or a Skype video conference. Multiple methods were offered to parents to make the interview process convenient and comfortable. The researcher made an effort not to disrupt or impose on their daily household routines. Translators were also offered in the parents' native language if needed. A semistructured

interview was used to collect data. Semistructured interviews are by far the most widely used type of measure for collecting data for qualitative research (Patten, 2012).

The interview questions were created by the researcher and the thematic dissertation team after a review of literature was conducted. Interview questions were created based on the research questions, the synthesis matrices (Appendix A) analyzing common themes/findings, and consultation with advisors who were qualitative experts in developing interview questions. The synthesis matrices were visual representations of the common themes derived from the literature review. The interview questions were also field tested to ensure reliability and validity. Interview questions were created using a specific approach: question sequence. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), effective probing and sequencing of questions follow these guidelines:

1. Interview probes

2. Statements of the researcher's purpose and focus

3. Order of questions

4. Demographic questions

5. Complex, controversial, and difficult questions (pp. 358-359)

The semistructured questions were fairly specific interview questions that allowed for individual, open-ended responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A demographic questionnaire was given to parents to fill out immediately before the interview (Appendix D). If parents did not understand the demographic questions that were asked, they were encouraged by the researcher to ask for clarification to answer the questions properly. The researcher also asked participants to elaborate and go into further detail on some questions for which they had lots of information to express. A total of 12 interview

questions were asked (Appendix E). Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

The semistructured interviews were scheduled with parents based on their choice to interview in person, by telephone, or by video conference. The participants' signed letters of consent included permission to audio record the interviews (Appendix C). The advantages of recording the interviews were that the taped interviews could be examined at a later date and could be examined by other researchers who were collaborating on the research project (Patten, 2012). When each interview was finished, the interview was transcribed and coded to identify common themes and patterns within the data.

Reliability and Validity

In any type of academic research, reliability and validity need to be tested. Reliability is a necessary condition for validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results (Patten, 2012). The thematic dissertation team incorporated coder reliability, also known as interrater reliability, to help ensure validity of the data. This method is considered "a standard measure of research quality" and solidifies that "two or more independent coders agree on the coding of . . . interest" based on the participants' "answers to open-ended questions" (Cho, 2008, para. 1). Cho (2008) stated, "Intercoder reliability [or intrareliability] is a critical component in the content analysis of open-ended survey responses, without which the interpretation of the content cannot be considered objective and valid" (para. 1). Validity, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), means "the degree to which scientific explanations of phenomena match reality, it refers to the truthfulness of

findings and conclusions" (p. 104). It is important to note that reliability applies to data, not to measurement instruments (Yilmaz, 2013).

The semistructured interview questions were field tested with SEN parents who had high school children from different SELPAs/LEAs who were not from the identified target population. The field test utilized telephone interviews and the open-ended interview questions sent by e-mail to simulate the interview process. Parents were asked to review the interview questions to determine whether the questions were clear, if they believed a parent could understand the questions, what answer they would give to each question, if they believed the interview could be finished within an hour, if they had suggestions for improving any questions, and whether they could provide any additional feedback regarding the instrument. The feedback from the field-test participants was reviewed by the researcher.

The preliminary qualitative data results were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by the researcher to determine if the interview questions needed to be reworded to obtain a more reliable/valid interview that was aligned to answer the previously stated research questions. The researcher also used a 10-step process to enhance the validity of the interview questions:

1. prolonged and persistent fieldwork,

2. multimethod strategies,

3. participants' language and verbatim accounts,

4. low-inference descriptors,

5. multiple researchers,

6. mechanically recorded data,

7. participant researcher,

8. member checking,

9. participant review, and

10. negative and/or discrepant data (Patten, 2012).

The validity of a study is enhanced by using a combination of these steps, and it is also important to note that the researcher can pick and choose how he or she determines the validity. According to Yilmaz (2013), "Terms such as credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity, neutrality or conformability, dependability, applicability or transferability and the like are those that qualitative researchers use most in their discussion of the concepts of reliability and validity" (pp. 320-321).

Data Collection

Data were collected from different school districts in the SELPA/LEAs regarding their special education middle school programs. Once the target population was informed, the data collection began with the various LEAs within the identified SELPA. A 1-month time frame was allotted for data collection. Legal guardians and parents were allowed to participate in the study. In the case of both parents' participation, separate interviews were conducted at different times to gain insight into their differing parental perspectives. Parents filled out a basic demographic questionnaire before the semistructured interview began.

The interview protocol consisted of written directions for conducting the interview as well as a standard set of predetermined questions to be asked of all participants (Patten, 2012). The researcher also used an observational journal to keep

notes while parents were interviewed. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010),

the researcher can decide on five different types of observational recording styles:

1. Duration Recording. . . . [T]he observer indicates the length of time a

   particular kind of behavior lasts. [A timer] is used to keep track of the

   duration of the behavior. . . .

2. Frequency-Count Recording. . . . [T]he observer is interested only in the

   frequency with which the behavior occurs, not how long it persists. . . .

3. Interval Recording. . . . [A] single subject is observed for a given period of

   time and the behaviors that occur are recorded. . . .

4. Continuous Observation. . . . [T]he observer provides a brief description of

   the subject's behavior over [time]. . . .

5. Time Sampling. . . . [T]he observer selects, at random or on a fixed schedule,

   the time periods that will be used to observe particular kinds of behavior.

   [Time sampling] is used in conjunction with each of the four previously

   mentioned [observational recording styles]. (p. 210)

The semistructured interview helped obtain more in-depth answers to questions

based on the preinterview results. Parents were able to tell the researcher more about

how they felt and their emotions associated with the transition planning process. While

the interviews took place, the researcher was also taking observational field notes. The

researcher used a combination of the five types of observational recording styles during

the interview process. Each interview was recorded upon consent from the parent of an

SEN child. The locations of the interviews were determined by the participants for

convenience purposes and time constraints. Each interview was numbered, and the

participants received an identification number. Participants had access to their own data, if requested, solely by the number they presented; this protected the anonymity and confidentiality of other participants involved in the study. Interviews were typically between 45 minutes and an hour long. The interviews took place in a room free from any distractions, and the researcher and participant sat face-to-face to make eye contact. A total of 12 interview questions were asked of each participant, and additional probing questions were asked if the researcher wanted more elaboration on a particular question. After each interview, the researcher immediately transcribed the data word for word to code, analyze, find common themes, and triangulate data.

The researcher also attended local community events pertaining to the SEN transition process, where parents of the special needs community were in attendance. The Contra Costa SELPA also provides parents with workshop opportunities to assist families during transition. In 2015, a workshop on the transition into middle school was scheduled for January. The researcher took observational field notes at all of these events to enhance the quality of the research.

This qualitative study was presented to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BIRB) for quality review on February 15, 2015. The main purpose of the IRB is to protect those participating in a research study, particularly regarding ethical issues such as informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality (Roberts, 2010). The IRB form was accessed, and once the form was filled out, it was submitted to the BIRB. Once the form was submitted, it took 2 weeks for the researcher to receive approval. The BIRB process required detailed and comprehensive information about the study, the consent process for participants, how they would be contacted, and how their

confidential information would be protected for anonymity. The IRB committee's signed

permission is necessary before data collection can begin (Roberts, 2010). This study,

upon BIRB review, posed minimal risk because the probability of harm or discomfort to

the participants was not greater than they would ordinarily encounter. Upon BIRB

approval, a letter was sent to the researcher that included the study's assigned number for

the researcher's reference (Appendix H).

Data Analysis

In order to analyze data, qualitative researchers rely on inductive analysis.

Inductive analysis is the process through which qualitative researchers synthesize and

make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and

patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). While analyzing data, the researcher relied

heavily on comparing and contrasting data. Prior to analyzing data, the researcher

decided to preplan the data collection process by organizing data using five sources

recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2010):

1. The research question and foreshadowed problems or subquestions

2. The research instrument, such as an interview guide

3. Themes, concepts, and categories used by other researchers

4. Prior knowledge of the researcher of personal experience

5. The data themselves (p. 369)

The predetermined categories assisted with the data analysis process.

The semistructured interviews were transcribed and analyzed using coding

techniques. A format and spacing process to transcribe data was followed by the

researcher:

- Use large margins for additional comments and coding.

- Leave space between interviewer questions and participant responses.

- Highlight as appropriate to show headers, questions, different participants, and comments.

- Type in words to record what was occurring during the sessions that could be important (e.g., [pause], [long silence], [cell phone call]; Creswell, 2008).

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the data word for word using Microsoft Word, printed multiple hard copies that were used to fill in a precoded chart, and uploaded the interview into NVivo, a computer-based data collection tool (Appendix F). Each copy was highlighted for common themes and repetition of words/phrases in the margins. Data segments were also used. A data segment is text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of relevant information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher also took notes within the margins to color code and analyze for common themes. Upon the identification of common themes, the researcher created a visual chart, cutting each of the answers to the interviews to find exemplary quotes that were used to answer the research questions (Appendix G). Colored Post-It notes and highlighters were used to keep data organized. Once all of the data were collected, the researcher was able to formulate answers to the research questions and make recommendations for future research.

Limitations

It is important to outline the limitations of this research. The population/sample was composed of parents in the Contra Costa SELPA/LEA. This population did not include nonpublic school (NPS) high school-aged students in more restrictive educational

placements. Parents of SEN students represent a community that is sensitive to their

children's educational needs. It was important that the researcher proceeded with great

care and did not make parents feel any discomfort during the interview portion of the

study. Parents were allowed to skip questions if they preferred not to answer them, and

they also had the option to stop the interview entirely. The submission of all respondent

data provided an honest account according to their middle school transition experiences.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to inform the reader of the purpose of the study

and the research questions that were posed by the researcher. The population of parents

who had developmentally delayed SEN children was identified through a SELPA/LEA

and personal acquaintances of the researcher. A semistructured, one-to-one interview

was constructed specifically for this study. Experts and academic advisors guided the

development of the semistructured interview. The field test helped the researcher make

the necessary adjustments to interview questions, which helped with the reliability and

validity. Once the target population was identified, the case study method and purposeful

sampling were used to collect the qualitative data. Consent was also needed in order for

parents to participate in a one-to-one, semistructured interview. The limitations were

presented and reviewed. The final two chapters of the study reveal major findings,

provide recommendations for future research, and conclude the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Since the transition movement in the 1980s, numerous transition practices in special education have been developed (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2012). For example,

A free and appropriate public education [FAPE] in the least restrictive environment [LRE] was mandated for children with disabilities in this country in 1975 under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act [now known as the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA)]. (Greene, 2014, p. 239)

According to Greene (2014), "More than 30 years have passed since this landmark legislation. Many of the children with disabilities who benefited from this law have since left school and entered adulthood" (p. 239). The role of parents in their children's educational treatment has changed over the years to include an emphasis on empowerment and decision making (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006).

This chapter investigates the parental perceptions and expectations of the transition process from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school of children with special needs. This chapter also reviews the purpose statement, research questions, research methodology, and the data collection methods utilized. The population examined and the samples are outlined, followed by the presentation of the themes and data analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the expectations of parents of developmentally delayed special education needs (SEN) middle school children regarding their children's transition into and out of public middle school. In

addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify the extent to which schools are meeting the needs of their students during the transition process as perceived by parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?

2. What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?

3. What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?

4. In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

Research Design/Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research method used for this study was a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context (Brantlinger et al., 2005). In the fields of special education and disability, qualitative research contributes by capturing involved people's perspectives and by adding to the understanding of discourses that shape social life in schools and society (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The researcher chose a collective case study utilizing a qualitative research approach. A collective case study is research that takes place at multiple sites or includes personalized stories of several similar (or distinctive) individuals (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The case study may be a program, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010). With a collective case study, more than one example or setting is used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher and the Contra Costa Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) program specialist collaborated to identify 200 parents/guardians of ninth- and 10th-grade SEN children who transitioned into and out of public middle schools and were enrolled in the Liberty Union High School District (LUHSD) at the time of the study. The collective case study focused on Freedom, Liberty, and Heritage High Schools in the LUHSD. The researcher determined that including parents who had more recent experiences with the transition process could add to the richness of the data collected, and those parents were more likely to participate in the study.

A demographic questionnaire was given to parents to fill out prior to the semistructured interview (Appendix D). Translators were also offered in the parents' native language if needed. A semistructured interview was used to collect data. Semistructured interviews are by far the most widely used type of measure for collecting data for qualitative research (Patten, 2012). Interview questions were field tested by SEN experts to ensure reliability and validity. The semistructured interviews were scheduled with parents based on their choice to interview in person, by telephone, or by video conference. Participants were given a letter of consent that included the Participant's Bill of Rights and permission to audio record the interview (Appendix C). When each interview was finished, the interview was transcribed and coded using the NVivo software program to identify common themes and patterns within the data.

Population

Researchers frequently draw a sample from a population, which is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested (Patten, 2012). A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which researchers intend to generalize the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). About 10% of California's students, or 686,352, in 2011-2012 had disabilities affecting their education (Ehlers, 2013).

The Contra Costa SELPA in the Northern California Bay Area region is divided into four different SELPAs. Contra Costa, Mount Diablo Unified School District, San Ramon Valley Unified School District, and West Contra Costa Unified School District are the four SELPAs located in Contra Costa County. Mount Diablo Unified School District, San Ramon Valley Unified School District, and West Contra Costa Unified School District are the largest three school districts in Contra Costa County and have their own SELPAs (California Department of Education, 2014a). For the purpose of this study, the Contra Costa SELPA was consulted to find a student population for study. The student populations served in Contra Costa County come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, are ethnically diverse, and have a variety of special education needs.

The LUHSD was the focus of this study. LUHSD has three comprehensive high schools: Freedom High School, Liberty High School, and Heritage High School; it is the only high school district within Contra Costa County and comprises the largest geographic area within the county. During the 2013-2014 school year, LUHSD had a combined student population of 5,109, with 600 SEN students. LUHSD represents 3% of

both the 2013 high school and SEN enrollment within Contra Costa County. LUHSD

receives ninth-grade students transitioning from seven middle schools within the Oakley,

Brentwood, Byron, and Knightson elementary school districts. The middle schools had a

combined total of 1,917 ninth-grade students who transitioned to one of the three high

schools in 2013. In 2012, the number of ninth graders transitioning was 1,930 (California

Department of Education, 2014b). In 2013-2014, LUHSD had a total of 327 students in

ninth and 10th grade who had identified disabilities (California Department of Education,

2014b).

The target population for this study was selected from a larger group of persons,

identified as the population, the group of subjects from whom data were collected (even

though the subjects were not selected from the population; McMillan & Schumacher,

2010). With three high schools and seven middle schools across a wide geographic area,

LUHSD was recommended by the SELPA program specialist; therefore, parents and

guardians from LUHSD with SEN children who transitioned from the feeder middle

schools into one of the three district high schools were invited to participate. This group

is referred to as the target population or universe (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals, as it "allows small groups of

individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of

interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 489). This study focused on parents and

legal guardians who had developmentally delayed high school SEN children in ninth and

10th grade enrolled in a public school setting with an individualized education plan (IEP)

receiving special education services. They were selected for the study to recall their

experiences related to their children's transitioning into and out of the public middle school environment. The sample for this study was drawn from the target population of parents/legal guardians who had children enrolled in the LUHSD and whose children had experienced the two transition periods.

Qualitative samples must be large enough to ensure that most of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time, if the sample is too large, data become repetitive and eventually superfluous (Mason, 2010). Saturation is used as one guiding principle that affects sample size in a qualitative study (Mason, 2010). Single case studies should generally contain 15 to 30 interviews (Marshall et al., 2013). Therefore, the sample size for the study was 10% of the 200 identified parents with developmentally delayed ninth- and 10th-grade students enrolled in the LUHSD who were receiving special education services at the time of this study to avoid saturation of data.

Twenty-five participants agreed to participate in the study. The Research Randomizer program was used to narrow the sample to 20 participants. A total of 20 participants were interviewed. The parents who participated in this study met the following criteria: Each participant had to (a) be a parent of a high school-aged student with developmental disabilities in the ninth or 10th grade and (b) have a child enrolled in one of the three identified high schools from LUHSD: Freedom High School, Liberty High School, or Heritage High School.

Presentation and Analysis of Demographic Data

The 20 parent participants involved in the study were asked to provide demographic details through a preinterview questionnaire that asked the following

questions: (a) gender of participant's child, (b) child's grade level in school, (c) nature of child's disability/special education classification, (d) participant's occupation, (e) participant's highest degree of education, (f) marital status, (g) participant's ethnicity, (h) spouse's occupation, (i) age when child was classified for special education services, (j) whether participant was a legal guardian or foster parent, and (k) if participant was part of a parent support group (see Appendix D). Participants were apprised that the demographic information would be used solely for statistical purposes and to provide a context for the final results of the dissertation study (see Table 3).

An analysis of the demographic data revealed that 80% of the participants were married, 10% were divorced, 5% were single, and 5% were widowed. All participants were legal guardians. Ninety percent of the participants had a job outside the home, and for those who were married, all of their spouses worked outside the home. Participant occupations included the following: realtor, notary, safety specialist, In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) provider, inside sales representative, administrator, substitute paraprofessional, restaurant owner, waitress, freelance paralegal, personnel clerk for school district, engineer, certified interpreter, teacher ($n = 2$), and special education paraprofessional ($n = 3$). Sixty percent of participants had an associate's degree or higher. Fifteen percent of the participants reported having a high school diploma as their level of education. The highest level of education noted was a master's degree.

The participants' ethnicities were noted as 45% Caucasian, 10% African American, 25% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 10% multiracial. The multiracial participants identified themselves as Caucasian/African American and Hispanic/Caucasian.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant number	Grade level of child	Participant education	Participant profession	S/M/ D/W	Partner/ spouse profession	LG or FP	Ethnicity	Nature of child's disability	Age of child when classified	Gender	Parent support group
1	10th	SC	Special education para-professional	W	NA	LG	H	Autism	2.5	M	Yes
2	10th	SC	Real estate/ notary	M	Crane operator	LG	C	Speech and language	5	F	No
3	9th	SC	Special education para-professional	M	Mail carrier	LG	H	Speech and language	10	F	No
4	10th	MA	Teacher	M	Teacher	LG	C	Autism	3	M	No
5	10th	SC	Safety specialist	M	Service writer	LG	C	Specific learning disability/ADHD	5	F	Yes
6	9th	SC	IHSS provider	M	Customer service for Shea homes	LG	C	Autism	2 yrs. 10 months	F	Yes
7	9th	AA	Homemaker	M	Engineer	LG	AA	Specific learning disability/ADHD	3	M	No
8	9th	AA	Special education para-professional	M	AT&T security network engineer	LG	H	Autistic	4	M	Yes

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Participant number	Grade level of child	Participant education	Participant profession	S/M/ D/W	Partner/ spouse profession	LG or FP	Ethnicity	Nature of child's disability	Age of child when classified	Gender	Parent support group
9	9th	MS	Administration	M	Labor and relations analyst	LG	AF	Specific learning disability/Dyslexia	10	M	No
10	10th	BA	Inside sales representative	D	NA	LG	MR (H/C)	Autistic	7	M	No
11	10th	HS	Substitute para-professional	M	Truck driver	LG	H	Specific learning disability	8	F	No
12	9th	BA	Restaurant owner	M	Restaurant owner	LG	C	Autism	3	M	No
13	10th	BA	Teacher	M	Sales management	LG	C	Autism	2	M	Yes
14	9th	BS	Stay at home mom	M	Commercial real estate Appraiser	LG	C	Other health impairment	3	F	Yes
15	9th	AA	Waitress	M	Truck driver	LG	MR (C/AF)	Intellectual disability/Down's syndrome	3	F	No
16	10th	AA	Freelance paralegal	D	NA	LG	AF	Intellectual disability/Speech and language/ Autism/OCD	3	M	Yes

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Participant number	Grade level of child	Participant education	Participant profession	S/M/ D/W	Partner/ spouse profession	LG or FP	Ethnicity	Nature of child's disability	Age of child when classified	Gender	Parent support group
17	10th	HS	Personnel clerk for school district	M	Owns a business	LG	AA	Autistic	3	M	Yes
18	10th	BS	Engineer	S	NA	LG	C	Intellectual disability/Down's syndrome	3	M	No
19	9th	BA	Certified interpreter	M	Automotive technician	LG	H	Intellectual disability/Speech and language	6	M	No
20	9th	HS	Stay at home mom/Respite provider	M	Longshore mechanic	LG	C	Intellectual disability/Hard of hearing/Koolen deVries syndrome	2	M	Yes

Note. S = single; M = married; D = divorced; W = widow; LG = legal guardian; FP = foster parent; MA = Master of Arts; MS = Master of Science; BA = Bachelor of Arts; BS = Bachelor of Science; AA = Associate of Arts; SC = some college; HS = high school; C = Caucasian; AF = African American; AA = Asian American; MR = multiracial; H = Hispanic; NA = not applicable; M = male; F = female.

Participants consisted of 19 mothers and one father. The reason behind the high rate of mothers' participation in comparison with fathers' participation is unknown. Forty-five percent of the participants were involved in parent support groups/organizations at the time of the study. The following is a list of parent support groups/organizations in which participants were involved: Special Haven, Care Parent Network, Special Kids Foundation, Special Olympics, Challenger Bowling, Challenger Baseball, Antioch Little League, Regional Center of the East Bay (RCEB), All Children Aloud, East County Little League—Challenger Division, online parent support group for Koolen deVries, Childhood Epilepsy Awareness, Apraxia Kids, and City of Oakley—Leadership Academy Graduate and Volunteer.

The organizations and parent support groups may be different, but they all serve one central purpose for parents. Parents described the importance of being part of various support groups and organizations. They expressed that they had a sense of community and belonging. The general public will stare at their children with SEN, but when they are with each other at group functions, the feeling of being different/unique diminishes. The disabilities of each child may differ, but when parents are together, they have the opportunity to share about the challenges their children are facing in school and out of school. Parents consult each other about advice, and they refer each other to other resources that can help them. The community is tight knit, and they are able to keep their connections for many years.

Of the 20 participants, 10 had children in ninth grade; the remaining 10 had 10th-grade students enrolled in LUHSD. The children had IEPs at the time of the study and had a variety of diagnoses. In total, there were 11 different disabilities represented with

30 total diagnoses. Thirty percent of the children had a dual diagnosis, meaning they had more than one medical diagnosis. Ten percent of the children had multiple diagnoses. The disabilities included the following diagnoses: autism, intellectual disability (ID), hard of hearing, speech and language, Down's syndrome, Koolen deVries, other health impairment (OHI), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, specific learning disability (SLD), and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD; see Figure 2). The most prevalent condition was autism, with 40% of the participants' children diagnosed with autism. Twenty-five percent of the participants' children were identified as intellectually disabled, while 20% were identified as having SLD and speech and language disabilities. The parents of children with autism did not discuss their reasons for participating, but they expressed that they were eager to do so.
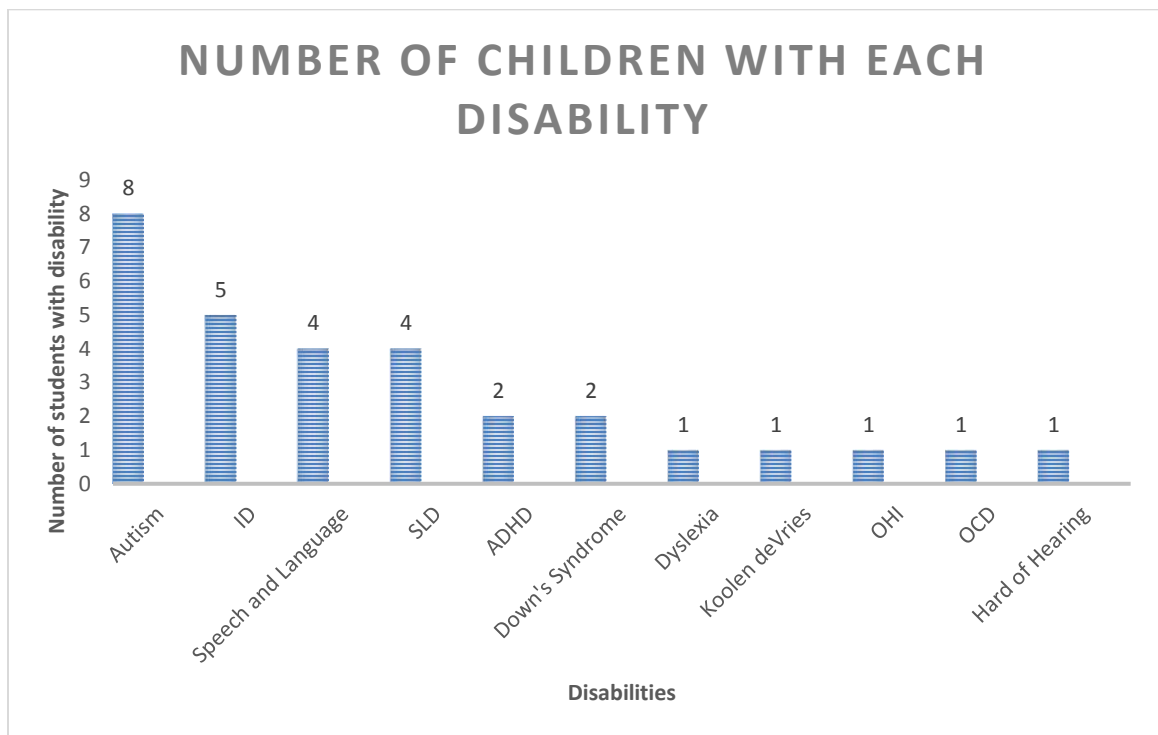
Figure 2. Frequency of disabilities among participants' children. ID = intellectual disability; SLD = specific learning disability; ADHD = attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; OHI = other health impairment; OCD = obsessive compulsive disorder.

The researcher compared the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview responses with the demographic data and found no relationships between the themes and specific demographic elements.

Presentation of Interview Observational Data

During the interviews, parents were very engaged and sat upright. The researcher and the participants sat face-to-face to make good eye contact. All of the participants answered all of the questions that were asked of them. Responses were detailed, concise, and straight to the point, and some were emotional. For responses that appeared to be vague, the researcher used the probing questions in the interview script to draw out more detail. In some cases, the researcher followed up to gain further insight into the participants' experiences.

One participant, Participant 11, broke down emotionally and cried during her interview when asked the question, "In terms of transition, which transition process (into middle school or into high school) was the most successful and why?" Participant 11 stated,

> Middle school was easier. In middle school she did really well until she got into eighth grade. She was bullied, and I didn't know it because she never . . . told me. I found out because a niece of mine told me. I didn't find out until her freshman year. My daughter tried to commit suicide three times. I had to put her into counseling during her ninth-grade year. She was hallucinating, and I think that she had a mental breakdown. I just wish the school would have told me about my daughter being bullied.

Participant 11's emotional response evoked memories from her past and stirred up present-day emotions. She shared that her father had recently passed away and she was still grieving his loss, and her three children were close to him. She stated, "I know that I need to be strong for my children because they need me now more than ever."

As the researcher conducted the one-on-one interview with Participant 6, emotion was also observed. The tone of her voice grew sterner in frustration as she fidgeted with the pen and paper in front of her. The participant wanted to ask the researcher about general education teachers attending her daughter's IEP after the interview was completed. Below is an excerpt from this discussion:

> My daughter is on a nondiploma track education, and all of education is focused around life skills and promoting independence. She is mainstreamed for a portion of the day, but I don't feel as if they [general education teachers] truly know my daughter. They just sit at my IEPs and don't have a lot to say unless I ask them questions. I understand they need to be there for compliance. It just seems like a waste of my time and theirs. (Participant 6)

Participant 6's frustration was clearly evident in her body language, as she crossed her arms and legs while letting out a huge sigh.

Participant 3 was also emotional as her voice cracked and her eyes began to tear up when she talked about the future of her daughter in school. Participant 3 emigrated from Peru 15 years ago and attended some college courses. In terms of her daughter's future, she stated, "I want her to have a better future than mine and to have a career and be paid better than myself. I don't want her to have a minimum wage job like her mother."

Presentation and Analysis of Interview Data

The analysis of the one-on-one interviews is organized and presented in relationship to the four research questions. Each research question is addressed through a discussion of themes that emerged from the data analysis. Additionally, examples related to the themes are presented to expand on and provide further understanding of each theme. To determine the level of agreement necessary to establish a theme, the researcher reviewed participant responses and grouped them into themes using the transcription and coding chart (Appendix F) and the visual chart (Appendix G).

In some cases, the answers given to a particular interview question also provided input relevant to the other research questions and themes. The researcher determined that for Research Questions 1, 2, and 4, the level of consensus necessary to establish a finding was that 33% of the participants gave similar responses to an interview question or probe from the researcher. For Research Question 3, it was determined that the level of agreement required was three similar answers from the respondents to be recognized as a support or barrier. This section presents the findings and supporting data for each of the research questions. The researcher also compared the themes with existing research to confirm the findings for each research question.

Research Question 1

What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?

Finding 1: Communication and collaboration between staff and parents. Nineteen participants stated that they expected communication and collaboration between staff and parents during their children's transition process. Participants indicated that

communication and collaboration assist in setting realistic goals for students and help with keeping the IEP team stakeholders on the same page. Participant 4 stated,

> I think of preparation and practice with the students. Establishing relationships with the families in order to help them become aware of the next natural steps. Communication is a vital piece when it comes to transition because everyone needs to be on the same page.

Participant 17 was detailed in what her expectations were:

> Personally, I expect the educators to take a vested interest in planning well for my child's future school experience and move towards the graduation track. I expect the educators to communicate with me, the parent, and not wait or hope for me to ask about issues or what's coming up next. I expect them to take my word as the parent as highly considerable. I expect them to collaborate with me to come [up] with resources and solutions for my child.

Eighteen parents relied on having communication with the IEP team and school administration. Fifteen parents reported that having a collaborative process with the educators was important. Exemplary quotes and excerpts are as follows:

> Participant 3 stated,

> Just communication and working with the IEP team helped my family out. It was stressful moving onto a larger environment as she [her child] got older. I didn't want my daughter to know how concerned I was because it might make her scared of the unknown.

Participant 8 believed, "They [educators] should be setting realistic goals for the student and communicating with the team and parent what is best for them [students]."

Participant 13 stated, "They [educators] should facilitate the transition of the student from placement to placement by thoroughly educating the parent on the possibilities of what the district has to offer their child." Participant 20 stated,

> The classroom teacher met with me one-on-one to review goals, transition plans, accommodations, etc. This was done informally in the spirit of collaboration and collecting information. No guarantees were given, but instead a healthy discussion was had about what would work with my student.

Participants in this study noted the importance of communication and collaboration. Some transitions may be smoother than others, so it is vital that the collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community is strong in order to assist children in the most effective manner possible (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Epstein (2001) stated, "Four decades of research have demonstrated that parent/family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes" (p. 261).

Finding 2: Understanding the individual needs of each child. Twelve participants identified that parents and IEP team members need to understand the individual needs of each child. Parents reported that having good teachers would make or break the transition experience and that it is the role of the parents to explain to the team what their children's needs are. Participant 7 said, "I knew my child way more than they [IEP team] did. I was treated by administration as 'I hold the degree and you don't.' I am the one with the master's degree when it comes to what my child needs." Participant 17 believed "that as a parent we know our kids more than anyone else; therefore, our input should be recognized as most valuable, I think." Exemplary quotes and excerpts from interviews are as follows:

Participant 15 stated,

I think that schools need the best teachers in the transition phase because it can

make or break a good experience. My daughter's first year at the high school

wasn't really wonderful. When she got to the ninth grade, within a matter of a

month, they wound up changing her schedule to accommodate her needs.

Participant 5 expressed her thoughts, stating,

I learned that it was my job to make sure they [IEP team] learned all about my

child, and it's their job to tell me what my child needs. I am here to work with

you and not make excuses for my child. You need to know my knowledge, and I

need to know what I can do to help my child succeed. I have two children with

special needs, and their needs are very different.

Participant 1 echoed some of the previous participant's responses:

Making sure the teachers and administrators understand my child and the unique

needs that he has. I know what my child needs, and it is up to me to convey what

his needs are. Every child is different, and it's up to the entire team to help my

child succeed. My son has a difficult time with schedule changes and transitions,

and it's important that if you change his schedule you at least give him time to

adjust, or he will have a tantrum.

Participant 16 further stated,

The problem is most teachers/IEP team members attempt to paint the child in a

better light or claim the child is achieving much more accomplishments than they

really have. Teachers *have* to be realistic with parents so the child can achieve.

You cannot lump these kids in *any* category; they must each be addressed

individually, which is difficult, but that is the only way to help them succeed.

Participants in this study noted the need for individualization during transitions

because each child is unique. Research has shown that in the disability field, there is an

increasing awareness of the need to begin with the perspective of each individual rather

than defining one style of life as standard for all people (Blue-Banning, Turnbull, &

Pereira, 2000).

Finding 3: Teachers must adhere to the IEP accommodations. Eight

participants identified the importance of the IEP and adhering to the IEP accommodations

established for each student. They believed that in order to have smooth transitions, the

receiving schools needed to adhere to the accommodations to help the children become

successful in their new environment. Participant 7 stated,

I need to make sure that all of their accommodations are met. The

accommodations are the most important for me because it lets me know that the

IEP team understands what the expectations are and that they need to follow

them.

Participant 18 indicated, "If teachers did not meet the accommodations for my child, I

would require them to meet informally, or I would hold an IEP so that the team could be

on the same page." Participant 10 believed, "I think hand holding the child and parent of

what to expect is important. What will the modifications and accommodations . . . look

like in a different environment?" Participant 5 stated,

My son has ADHD, and it is difficult for him to focus, and he tends to miss out on

class notes, which is why his accommodations are so important to him. He is able

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to learn and see, but the accommodations are extremely important for him to be successful in school. I have taught him to carry his accommodations in a clear-view binder so that he can advocate for himself and show his teachers the accommodations he needs in the classroom setting.

Author Burns (2007) stated,

The IEP requirement for IDEA is to include "any individual appropriate accommodations" to measure achievement of functional performance. The concept of an appropriate or reasonable accommodation must be given more than passing consideration. If an accommodation is excessive, or if an accommodation is not provided, a child's ability to receive an appropriate education could be impacted. (p. 215)

Parents in this study described three expectations regarding the middle school transition process as (a) the expectation for communication and collaboration between staff and parents, (b) the expectation that parents and IEP teams understand the individual needs of each child, and (c) the expectation that teachers will adhere to the IEP accommodations. Figure 3 displays the level of agreement between participants for the three noted expectations.

Research Question 2

What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?

Finding 1: Parental involvement/advocacy. All 20 of the participants believed that parental involvement/advocacy is important during the transition process. Parents and IEP team members have input in the process. Parental advocacy was identified as
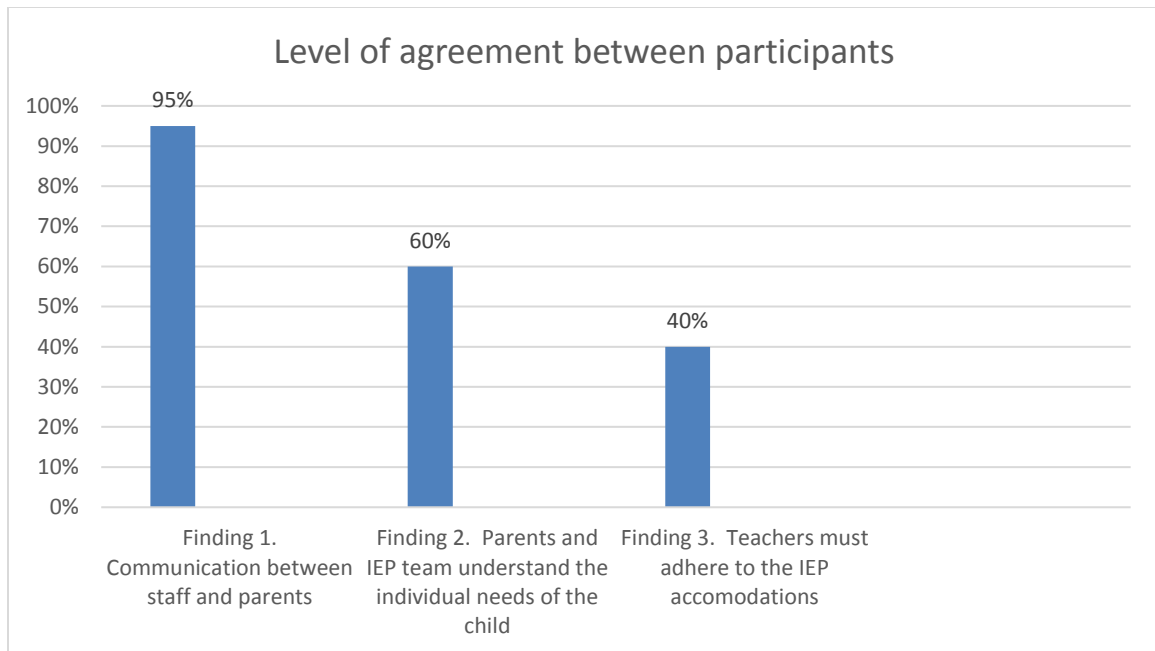
Figure 3. Level of agreement between participants for findings for Research Question 1.

necessary to ensure that each individualized need of children is addressed. Participants

believed that if they were not involved in the process, decisions would have been made

without them. Participant 20 stated, "I was not left out of the transition process, but that

is only because I asserted myself *into* the transition process. I'm a team member too."

Participant 1 said, "If I wasn't proactive, nothing would have ever gotten done."

Participant 6 also said, "I have been involved with my daughter's IEPs, but not without a

lot of speaking up on my part. They [IEP team] would have made decisions without me,

and I had to stand up and say, 'Hey, wait a minute.'" Participant 13 made sure that her

voice was heard, stating, "I have been included in *all* aspects, but I am also a very verbal

advocate for my son, and this is known to school staff." Participant 10 said,

> I think the parent has to be the advocate and put the pressure on. Sometimes you
>
> have to ask for things; you don't have to be ugly about it. The parent initiates the

conversation, making sure that there are checks-and-balances systems in place to make sure the IEP is followed.

All parents can and should participate meaningfully in their children's education, including those whose children receive special education services (Hedeen, Moses, & Peter, 2012). Participation has been recognized under law since 1975, most recently in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; Coots, 2007). Research by Perkins and Gelfer (1995) indicated that parental support during transitions is imperative to help students adjust and be successful in the new school environment.

Finding 2: Preplanning and explaining the entire transition. Seventeen parents expressed that preplanning and explaining the transition is important when transitioning to a new environment. Parents expressed the need to explain the transition process to prepare their children for what to expect in moving forward in a new environment. Some suggestions included visiting the new school environment, learning new expectations, preparing for high school/middle school by utilizing social stories, meeting new teachers, providing a map of the new campus, and attending new student orientations. Participant 8 said, "I think that the school is doing a good job offering orientations and meetings with the teacher ahead of time and explain[ing] the next steps in the transition." Participant 12 suggested "visiting the school, meeting teachers, being able to spend time in the classroom. For high school transition, understanding how teacher expectations are different and learning how to advocate for himself [the student]."

Participant 1 stated,

Make sure they [students] are ready. Take them to visit the school and show them on the Internet how the school is like, and tell them how things will be different.

Plan at least 3 months in advance. Take them to meet their future teachers in advance.

Participant 14 elaborated on preplanning the entire transition:

I called the school and arranged a time for us to visit. Visit with a camera, taking pictures of the campus layout, classroom walls, staff, signs on campus (restrooms, cafeteria, and gym). Download pictures at home, and help students create a social story. We then send the story to Shutterfly for printing. Review the social story all summer long. The social story then goes to school with my student the first month or so and is used as an icebreaker for student/staff interaction. Accompany my student to back-to-school registration. Buying the necessary PE [physical education] clothes, planner, spirit wear, PTSA [Parent Teacher Student Association] membership, filling out necessary paperwork, work with Lifetouch staff for school picture and ID card, picking up textbooks. The week before school starts, we took medication to the office with signed doctors' forms and introduced my student to office staff. I attended student orientation in place of my student and relayed important information to her. We also obtained a campus map and bell schedule from the Internet for our use.

Participant 6 indicated,

I will talk to her [the child] about a transition, but she really doesn't understand. She doesn't know when a transition is coming even when I tried to prepare her for one. I think my role with her is to try to explain everything after the fact because she doesn't understand. "Oh, wow, you have a new teacher and new friends." Show her and explain to her that the transition is a good thing and that she's all

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grown up and a big girl now. I wish I would have made social stories, but they just didn't work for me and my child. Social stories are more for kids that can communicate and you can have a conversation with them. It's not that I don't try, because I do try everything.

Finding 3: Collaboration between sending and receiving schools. Twelve parents indicated that collaboration between sending and receiving schools was important to them. They believed that both schools should be able to answer any questions or concerns regarding the parents' children. The information shared between sending and receiving schools was perceived as vital to the success of the students and to ensure a smooth transition. Parents expressed that during the transition planning process, the important factors needed to understand their children included exchanging information from sending and receiving schools, medical information, and an interest inventory of their children's likes and dislikes, and the important factors to ensure a smooth transition included a bell schedule, a campus map, and a forum for questions and answers throughout the process. Participant 19 stated, "Communicating/sharing as much information available in advance about the new school, classroom, and teacher, and by getting to know as much [as possible] about the needs of children prior to transition, will make a smooth transition."

Participant 4 indicated the importance of communication and collaboration with both teachers—the previous one and the one that they [students] are going to. Prepare the teachers with enough information regarding my son so that they know what to expect. This is important because we are all key players that serve an equal purpose.

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Participant 18 also indicated,

> The two schools should work together to ensure a smooth transition. The teachers should pass on vital information about what the students' interests are, dislikes, and medical information. They also need to be ready to field any questions or concerns a parent may have.

Participant 20 stated,

> The schools need to collaborate with each other. During transition time, they should automatically arrange site visits for each student (with or without parent), scheduled both during the school day and after hours. Offer tours of the office, the campus lunch area. Utilize a parent liaison to communicate campus life. Outside of the IEP process, solicit questions or concerns the parent may have, the student may have. . . . Help the student and the parent envision what life will be like on campus. If they see themselves fitting in—more than likely they will *and* they will thrive.

Schools commonly involve parents through communication, consultation before decision making, family opportunities in school, and support for home-based learning (Epstein, 2001). Friend and Bursuck (2006) stated, "With additional collaboration, everyone's comfort level increases, honesty and trust must grow, and a sense of community develops" (p. 78).

Parents in this study described three important perceptions regarding the middle school transition process as (a) the importance of parental involvement/advocacy, (b) the importance of preplanning the transition, and (c) the importance of collaboration between

sending and receiving schools. Figure 4 displays the level of agreement between participants for the three noted parental perceptions.
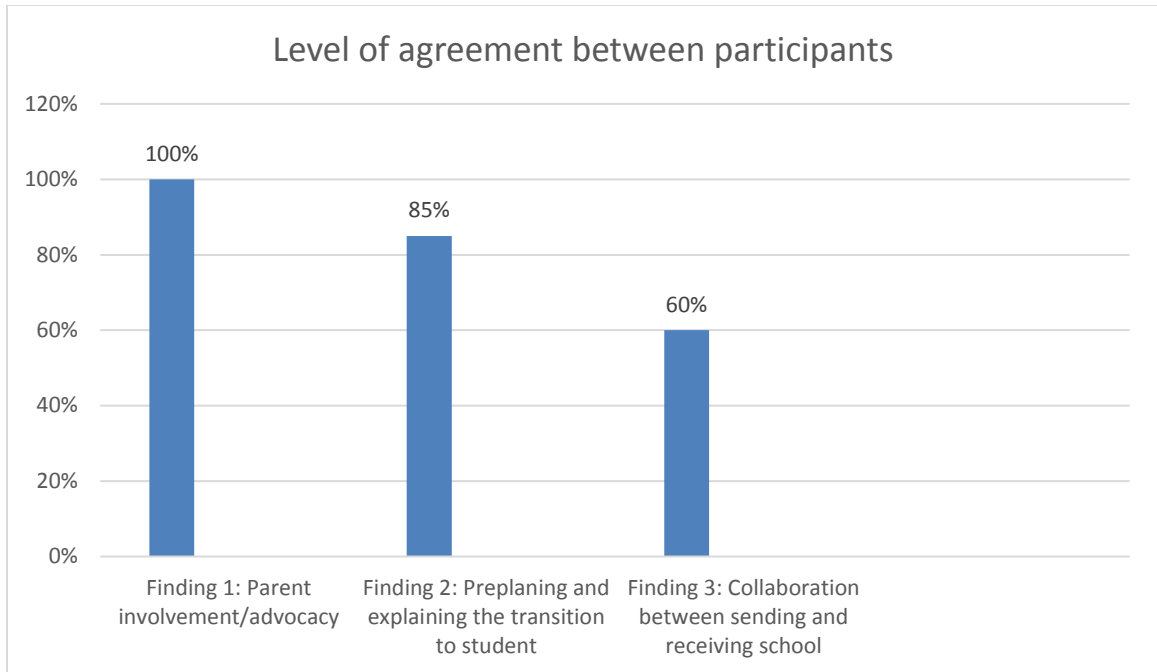
Figure 4. Level of agreement between participants for findings for Research Question 2.

Research Question 3

What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?

The supports and barriers that parents experienced are explained to assist the reader in understanding how relevant they are to the success and/or failure of the transition planning process. Participants described four supports that they received during the middle school transition process but identified seven barriers they experienced.

Finding 1: Supports parents received during the transition process. Four supports were identified by the participants: communication, caring staff offering

advice/help, outside help/resources, and in-school support programs for students. The

frequency of participant responses for supports is exhibited in Figure 5.
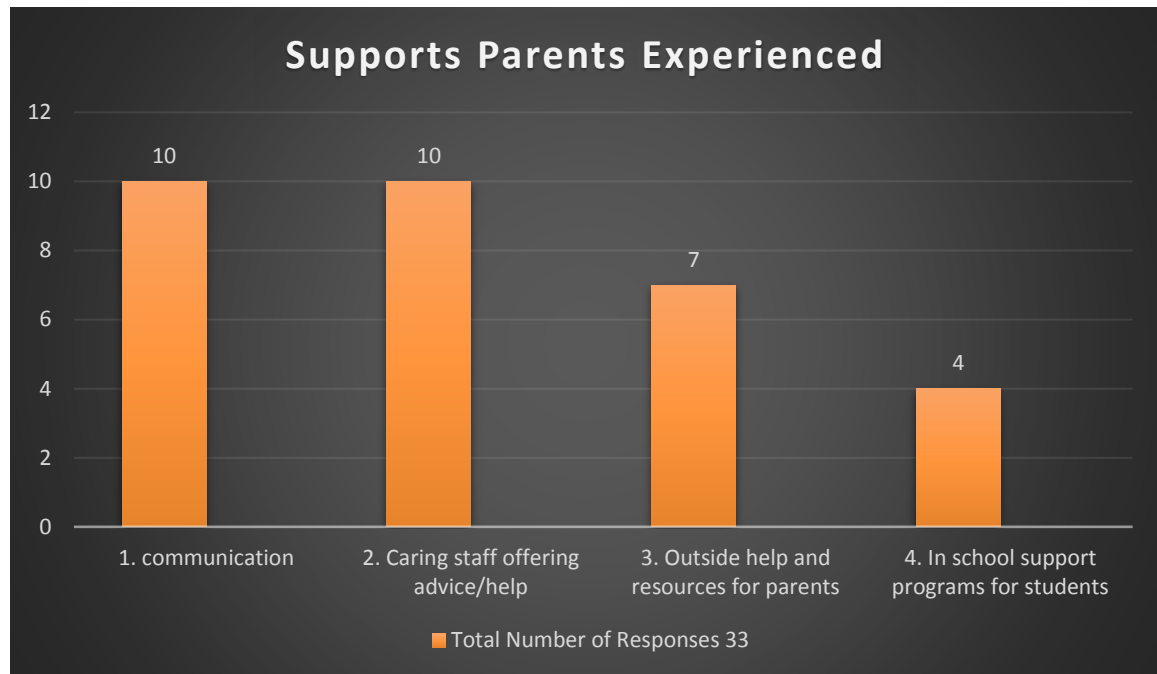
Figure 5. Supports parents experienced.

The following are the responses parents provided regarding the supports they

experienced during transition planning:

1. *Communication*: 10 participants indicated that they were supported during the

   transition process via communication. Participant 1 stated, "Successful transitions are

   dictated by communication, communication, and communication!" Participant 8

   reported,

   Transition has been amazing because of the staff. I know that my concerns are

   being heard and trust that my son's needs are being met. The most important

   thing for me is to be involved and help shape my son's future.

Participant 9 emphasized,

> I stay in contact with his [the child's] teachers. I have two IEP meetings a year to make sure that we are on track. I am letting them know what I see with him, and they are letting me know what they see in him at school, and if they match up, then we know that we are proactive about it. My son has an annual IEP, and I also call another IEP during the year to make sure that everything is running smoothly. We also discuss what's working and what we should change, if anything.

2. *Caring staff offering advice/help*: 10 participants indicated that they received advice/help from caring staff to assist during the transition period. Participant 7 stated, "As a favor, my former school district went ahead and tested my daughter for me. They were great, and I felt like I received the proper diagnosis for my child." Participant 12 expressed that she was supported by her IEP team: "We have been fortunate that my son's teachers, behaviorists, speech therapists from elementary school on genuinely cared and were open, honest, and available to offer their opinions as to what they thought was best for him." Participant 20 was given important advice from staff and shared,

> I was told never to allow services on Mondays because you lose a lot of service days due to holidays. I was also told if it's not in writing, it doesn't exist. So as much as possible, have everything written down.

Participant 5 indicated,

> I drove to meet a teacher 45 minutes away from home to chat about a situation that I had. The teacher and I didn't want anyone from our community to see us

talking because it would get back to the district. She told me, "You are doing the right thing, and don't let anyone tell you differently." After that talk, I felt a huge sigh of relief and knew that I wasn't crazy or overreacting.

3. *Outside help and resources for parents*: Seven participants stated that outside help and resources for parents offered support during transition planning. Participant 6 indicated, "My regional center person is great; if she doesn't know the answer, she will find the answer, and she does speak up during IEP meetings." Participant 9 stated, "His [the child's] special education teacher recommended a program where we could go for more testing at Sacramento State [University] for his dyslexia that I never received from his other school." Participant 11 received outside counseling and stated,

> When I was taking my daughter to counseling in Concord, the counselor has helped other students at Freedom, and she told me to be careful because they [the school] are going to avoid the issues because they do not want to provide more services.

4. *In-school support programs for students*: Four participants had in-school support programs provided to help their children. Participant 2 stated, "The tutorial support class helped me and my daughter out a lot. I couldn't help her with her math homework the way the teachers instruct students." Participant 3 indicated,

> For the kids that have resource class, they are the first to choose their classes. They do a big general meeting for students and teachers that have tutorial support; they introduce themselves to the families. The case manager filled out her

[student's] paperwork at the meeting. I knew what classes she would be taking, and I was happy.

Participant 8 stated,

My son's teacher suggested a special reading program for him. He has made a huge improvement in his reading comprehension and level. Staff members have come up with a plan to help my son access information on the computer, notes, and allow him more time on tests.

Finding 2: Barriers experienced during the transition process. Participants indicated experiencing seven different barriers during transition planning. The seven barriers included a lack of support during the IEP process, a lack of properly trained staff, communication, academic language, adversarial experiences with IEP team members, parents not being included in the transition, and English as a second language (ESL). Figure 6 displays the barriers and total responses from participants.

The following are the responses parents provided regarding the barriers they experienced:

1. *Lack of support during the IEP process*: Eight participants reported that IEP team members were not supportive during their children's IEPs. Participant 7 stated, "The school never advised me of my parent rights. It all comes down to dollars and cents; school districts are more interested in the money, not what will benefit their students." Participant 6 felt, "The IEPs have been difficult; I feel like it's everyone against me, and I try not to be adversarial because it gets you nowhere. They are one team, and I am myself." Participant 18 said, "I am sure any parent will tell you, 'It's me versus the IEP team.'"
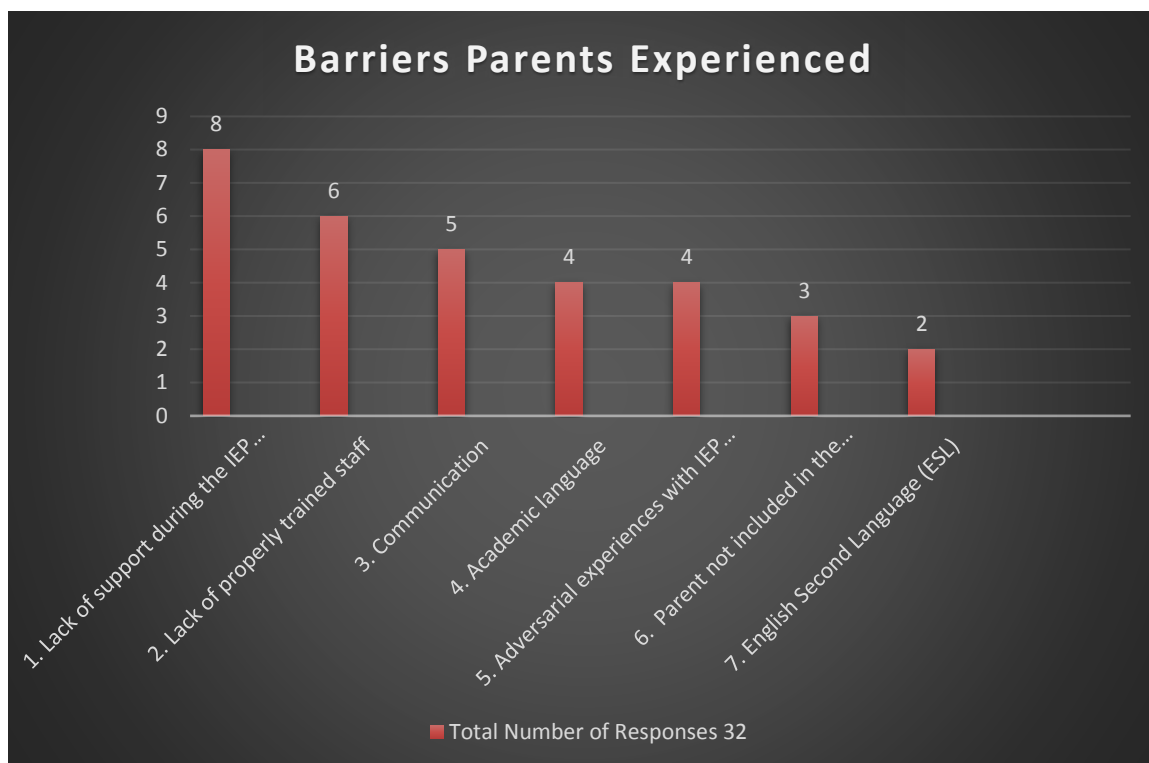
Figure 6. Barriers parents experienced.

2. *Lack of properly trained staff*: Six participants stated that the school staff was poorly
   trained to handle the needs of their children. Participant 4 stated, "Teachers,
   programs, and classrooms are unprepared. Teacher and staff [are] unqualified to deal
   with safety issues when dealing with the needs of my son. Lazy staff [are] unwilling
   to make a family connection." Participant 6 expressed her feelings by stating,

   > My daughter only had a credentialed teacher for 1 month, and they [the school]
   > couldn't fill a teaching position at that time. The class at the time was too
   > academic for her and not a lot of structure and organization. They didn't cater to
   > all of the kids' needs; they had a few aides in the classroom and not enough help.

3. *Communication*: Five participants indicated that they experienced a lack of
   communication with teachers during the transition process. Participant 14 said, "I felt

like the transition planning was left up to me. I could make it as involved as my student needed. I had limited communication, and I think more communication would have benefited my child." One parent simply said, "I don't understand transition planning; I received no help" (Participant 16). Participant 11 stated, "I feel as if we are not on the same page because they [IEP team] tell me one thing and do something totally different."

4. *Academic language*: Four participants stated that they had a difficult time with academic language presented at the IEP meetings. Participant 5 stated, "Academic language was difficult for me to understand, and I have experienced the school district trying to take advantage of that." Participant 14 explained, "I was given my parent rights listed on a piece of paper; I am not sure how it applies to my student." Participant 17 summed up academic language by stating,

> The academic language is very difficult to understand, and even when I looked like I didn't understand, they [IEP team] didn't slow down to explain unless I asked and didn't ask questions or if it made sense. I had to get an advocate to help me through my IEP, to understand it and to process my thoughts and questions. She helped me understand the difficult terms and laws and situations.

5. *Adversarial experiences with IEP team members*: Four parents reported that they had adversarial experiences with IEP team members. Parents also shared some stories about when staff members were adversarial toward them. Participant 7 stated, "I wasn't going to accept someone from the school district telling me that I had a mediocre, average child and I need to accept it." Participant 5 encountered a new staff member who did not want to attend her son's IEP meeting. The staff member said, "I

didn't want to attend because I am supposed to be coaching a softball game now."

Participant 18 shared,

> When I walked into the school, I never walked into the front door; I would always use the side entrance because the alarm would sound (the office staff would let the principal know I was coming). The principal would run out the back door, and I would catch him leaving. I even sent them registered mail to show them that I meant business.

6. *Parents not included in the transition*: Three parents felt that they were not included in the transition planning process. Participant 2 stated, "The school helped my daughter transition plan, but I wasn't included. I felt like she knew more than I did, and I am the parent." Participant 1 explained in great detail,

> I really didn't want to call the assistant superintendent for help, but I thought that it was necessary because it was already May and we didn't even have a transition meeting or a plan in place for my son when he went to high school.

7. *ESL*: Two participants felt that because English was their second language, it made the transition planning process difficult. Participant 3 stated,

> Sometimes I worry about my communication skills because English is not my first language. When I arrived in this country, I made it a point to learn English. I still make mistakes and have an accent from my country. I sometimes think, "Did I say the right thing?"

Participant 11's experience was similar:

> I feel like I have experienced a lot of barriers because Spanish is my daughter's first language and it is my first language. I know some of my parent rights but not

a lot. The IEPs are difficult for me to understand. The IEP team does not help me understand the IEPs.

Research Question 4

In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

Fifteen participants indicated that they had positive transition experiences overall when their children were transitioning into middle school and out of middle school and that their needs were met. Fourteen participants indicated that the elementary-to-middle school transition was successful for their families, while eight participants indicated that they had positive middle-to-high school transition experiences.

Finding 1: Successful transitions. Most participants reported that they were grateful for having such wonderful IEP teams to help them cope with transitioning their children to a newer and larger environment. Much of the support that they received came from educators and service providers supplying pertinent information regarding their children's next steps through their educational journeys. The information supplied eased the parents' anxiety, which translated into successful transitions for parents and children. Participant 18 simply stated, "Both high school and middle school transitions seemed to go smoothly. My child was happy and so was I. We communicated and collaborated to meet the needs of my child." Participant 16 stated, "They [transitions] were equally successful because I spoke to parents, and we planned our children's transitions together." Participant 9 expressed,

The overall experience with transitioning was positive—just having the opportunity to talk to the teacher before he [the child] started school, him having

the opportunity to talk to teacher and to visit the school in middle school and in high school.

Finding 2: Positive elementary-to-middle school transitions. Fourteen parents indicated that they experienced positive middle school transitions. Parents felt that their needs were met by educators accommodating their children and the immediate services that were provided to them once they entered the new environment. Participant 19 indicated, "Middle school was a better transition, as he's [the child is] more mature and understands the process." Participant 12 said, "The transition from elementary to middle school went incredibly well because he [the child] was able to visit the school, meet his new teachers, and spent time in the classroom." Participant 8 stated,

> Fortunately, the transition into middle school was very successful. I felt the environment had a lot to do with it. The SDC [special day class] teacher made sure his [the child's] desk was near the bookshelves, which is a huge incentive for him since he loves books. He was excited to be at a new campus and adjusted well to his new teachers and friends.

Participant 9 expressed,

> Middle school was the most successful for him [the child] because it was a new school environment. They [educators] were able to service him right once he set foot on campus because that was one of the concerns that I had enrolling him into his new school.

Finding 3: Positive middle-to-high school transitions. Eight participants indicated that they experienced positive high school transitions. Despite transitioning from a smaller environment to a much larger one, the IEP teams made parents feel at ease

by letting parents express their concerns. Participant 3 indicated, "They did a great job helping her [the child] transition to high school. They communicated with me, and I had a wonderful experience. I think that I had more anxiety than my child." Participant 7 stated, "Transition with my son into high school was successful because I controlled the transition and set expectations and communicated all of my thoughts." Participant 13 said, "High school was the most successful transition because the middle school district was *amazing* and all about helping kids succeed." Participant 10 said, "The middle-to-high school transition was easier because my son was ready for it, and he was one step closer to his goals." Participant 1 expressed,

> My son has an awesome case manager. He bonded with my son and helped him succeed when he transitioned into high school. My son knows that he can go see him at any time if he needs help. He is caring and is professional at what he does.

Figure 7 displays the level of agreement between participants' transition experiences. Overall, participants indicated that they had a positive transition experience; in particular, the elementary-to-middle school transition was the most successful. The level of agreement changed during the middle-to-high school transition, indicating some dissatisfaction during this transition.

Participants reported a variety of reasons for the overall success of their children's transitions. The reasons identified for a positive transition experience included communication, services students received, helpful IEP team members, and parents' voices being heard. Having a successful transition experience alleviated some of the stress and anxiety parents faced as their children moved on to a larger environment.
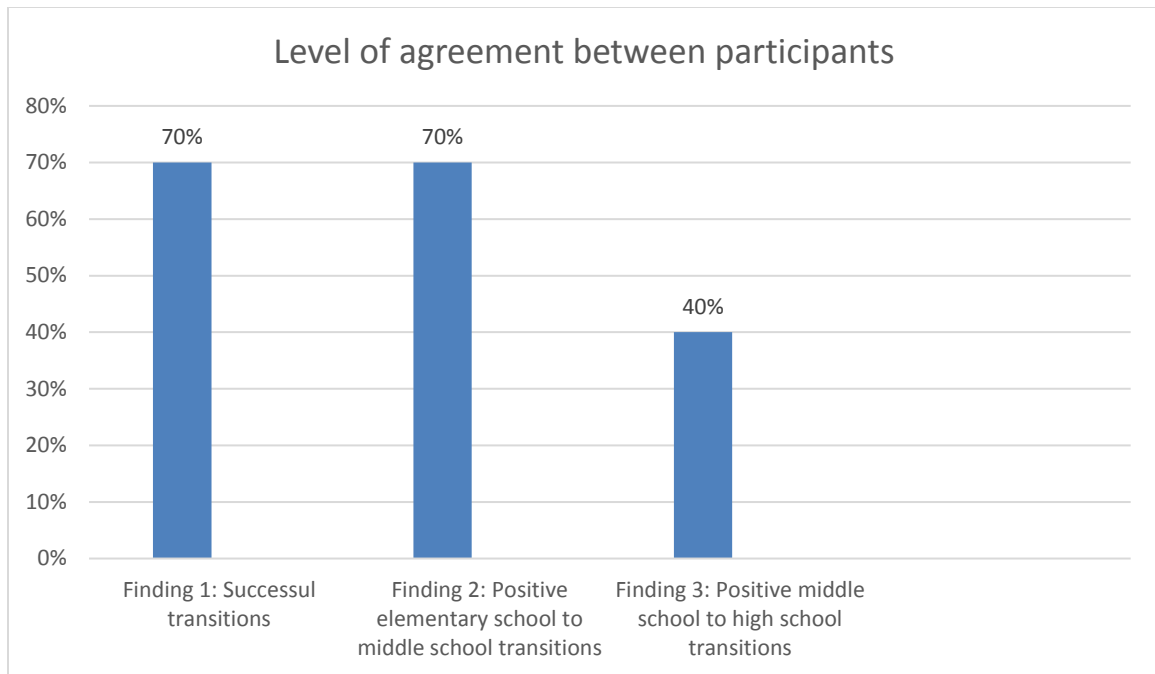
Figure 7. Level of agreement between participants for Research Question 4.

Fifteen participants had an overall positive experience with transition planning. Fourteen participants indicated having positive elementary-to-middle school transitions, while eight participants stated that they experienced positive middle-to-high school transitions.

The remaining five participants reported that the transition process was difficult for them. Some of the participants stated specific reasons for a difficult transition. Participant 5 stated, "All of the transitions were difficult for me because I have two children that have specific learning disabilities." Participant 18 said, "I am not a big fan of the transition experience because it's difficult for the child and the parent. Transition takes a lot of parental involvement, advocacy, and communication between IEP team members." One participant shared why she was displeased with the elementary-to-middle school transition: "The elementary school district was dysfunctional and apathetic, and was more of a hindrance than a help during transition to middle school"

(Participant 13). Participant 10 said, "Transition to middle school was difficult because of puberty and personal issues that he [the child] was going through."

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings and results of this study from the one-on-one interviews conducted. The data were analyzed to provide answers to the research questions. This collection of data and subsequent analysis developed a base of information regarding parental perspectives and expectations of the transition process for their middle school SEN children with developmental disabilities. Table 4 presents a summary of the research questions and findings and the level of agreement associated with the research questions.

From the interviews, three findings were identified related to each of Research Questions 1, 2, and 4, with four supports and seven barriers pertaining to the transition process described by the participants related to Research Question 3. According to the findings, there was a connection between Research Questions 1 and 2. The findings related to those research questions support the importance of communication related to transition planning. A barrier indicated in the findings for Research Question 3 relates to the lack of communication preventing a successful transition. The findings for Research Questions 1 and 2 also indicate that collaboration is not only an expectation but also a strong component needed for the success of the transition planning process. The findings for Research Question 4 reveal that overall, 70% of parents experienced a positive transition. Seventy percent experienced a positive elementary-to-middle school transition, and 40% experienced a positive middle-to-high school transition.

Table 4

Summary of Research Questions, Findings, and Percentage of Agreement

Research question	Finding	% of agreement and barriers
1. What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?	Finding 1: Communication and collaboration between staff and parents	95%
	Finding 2: Understanding the individual needs of each child	60%
	Finding 3: Teachers must adhere to IEP accommodations	40%
2. What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?	Finding 1: Parental involvement/ advocacy	100%
	Finding 2: Preplanning and explaining the entire transition process	85%
	Finding 3: Collaboration between sending and receiving schools	60%
3. What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?	Finding 1: Supports parents received during the transition process	a. Communication b. Caring staff offering advice/help c. Outside help and resources for parents d. In-school support programs for students
	Finding 2: Barriers experienced during the transition process	a. Lack of support during for IEP process b. Lack of properly trained staff c. Communication d. Academic language e. Adversarial experiences with IEP team members f. Parent not included in the transition g. English as a second language (ESL)
4. In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs?	Finding 1: Successful transitions	70%
	Finding 2: Positive elementary-to-middle school transitions	70%
	Finding 3: Positive middle-to-high school transitions	40%

Demographic data that were also collected in this study indicated that all of the parent participants graduated from high school, and some had college education. Most participants were employed, and for those who were married, all of their spouses were employed. It is unknown whether a different subset of less educated or unemployed parents would provide similar responses. There was one relationship detected between the demographic information and the findings related to the research questions. The demographic data showed that 45% of parents were part of organizations/parent support groups. This supports findings for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. The support groups assisted parents with involvement/advocacy and collaboration in making the right decisions for their children during the transition planning process.

Observational data were also recorded during the interview process. The researcher used an observational journal to take down notes during the semistructured, one-to-one interviews. Some of the participants expressed emotions of fear, anxiety, and stress. These emotions led to some tearful interviews, and the researcher was able to obtain data that were rich in detail. The researcher reminded some of the participants that they could stop the interview at any time. However, the participants did not want to stop the interview; instead, they decided to finish the interview. The researcher had to use the probing questions from the interview script to draw out more detail and understand where their frustrations were coming from. All of the participants were able to answer all of the questions that were asked of them.

Chapter V presents a summary of the major findings from the analysis in Chapter IV, conclusions resulting from the findings, implications for action (recommendations for

further action), recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and

reflections from the researcher.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Prior to 1975, public schools either entirely excluded or provided limited services to millions of children with disabilities (Burke, 2013). Recent federal mandates set more specific goals for transition services and require transition services to be an integral part of a student's individualized education plan (IEP; Landmark et al., 2012). Parental involvement impacts students' academic achievement both directly and indirectly (Burke, 2013). According to Friend and Bursuck (2006), the main characteristics of collaboration are that "collaboration is voluntary, collaboration is based on parity, collaboration requires a shared goal, and collaboration includes shared responsibility for key decisions" (pp. 75-77). The classroom should be the starting point for the development of a successful transition plan (Burns, 2007).

Chapter I introduced the preliminary literature for this study. Chapter II contained a review of literature that pertains to the purpose of this study. Chapter III presented the methodology and the procedural components used to conduct the research in this study. Chapter IV presented the themes from the data that were collected during one-to-one, semistructured interviews and data analysis.

Chapter V analyzes and summarizes the data related to parental expectations and perceptions of the transition process that families with developmentally delayed children with special education needs (SEN) face. Additionally, in this chapter, the purpose of the study is restated along with the research questions, research methodology, and data collection methods utilized. The population and sample are outlined, followed by the presentation of the themes and data analysis. The major findings for each research

question are summarized. The major findings are followed by the conclusions,

implications for action, and recommendations for further research. Lastly, the chapter

concludes with remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the expectations

of parents of developmentally delayed special education needs (SEN) middle school

children regarding their children's transition into and out of public middle school. In

addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify the extent to which schools are

meeting the needs of their students during the transition process as perceived by parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the

   transition process into and out of middle school?

2. What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of

   middle school?

3. What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience

   during the transition process into and out of middle school?

4. In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is

   meeting their needs during the transition process?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research method used for this study was a qualitative approach. Qualitative

research is a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a

phenomenon within a particular context (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The method chosen

for this study was a collective case study. A collective case study is research that takes place at multiple sites or includes personalized stories of several similar (or distinctive) individuals (Brantlinger et al., 2005). For the purpose of this qualitative study, the five phases of data collection and analysis shown in Figure 1 (in Chapter III) were implemented. The instrumentation chosen was a semistructured interview. Semistructured interviews are by far the most widely used type of measure for collecting data for qualitative research (Patten, 2012). The semistructured questions were fairly specific interview questions that allowed for individual, open-ended responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The semistructured interview questions were created by the thematic dissertation team after a review of literature was conducted. The semistructured interview questions were field tested with parents who had SEN high school children from different special education local plan areas (SELPAs)/local education agencies (LEAs) who were not from the identified target population. Questions were field tested to ensure reliability and validity. Parents were asked to review the interview questions to determine whether the questions were clear, if they believed a parent could understand the questions, what answer they would give to each question, if they believed the interview could be finished within an hour, if they had suggestions for improving any questions, and whether they could provide any additional feedback regarding the instrument. The feedback from the field-test participants was reviewed by the researcher.

Interviews were scheduled with parents based on their consent at the location of their choice and on the date of their choice. A 1-month time frame was allotted for data collection. Interviews were conducted in person during March and April 2015. Prior to

the interviews, parents were asked to fill out a demographic information form. During

interviews, the researcher took observational field notes. The researcher asked each

participant the interview questions in the same order. The interview protocol consisted of

written directions for conducting the interview as well as a standard set of predetermined

questions to be asked of all participants (Patton, 2002). During the interview process, the

researcher asked participants to elaborate and go into further detail on some questions for

which they had additional information to share. Participants were given the option of

taking a break at any point during the interview or stopping the interview entirely if

needed.

Each interview was audio recorded upon participant consent in order to transcribe

upon completion. The participants sat directly in front of the researcher to make eye

contact. A total of 12 interview questions were asked of each participant, and additional

probing questions were asked if the researcher wanted more elaboration on a particular

question. After each interview, the researcher thanked the participant for participation in

the study and reiterated that all data would be kept confidential and anonymous.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the data word for word using

Microsoft Word, printed multiple hard copies that were used to fill in a precoded chart,

and uploaded the interview into NVivo, a computer-based data collection tool (Appendix

F). To ensure coder reliability and accuracy, 15% of the data were coded by another

member of the thematic dissertation team. Each copy was highlighted for common

themes and repetition of words/phrases in the margins. In addition, the researcher took

notes within the margins to color code, code, tag, and analyze for common themes. Upon

the identification of common themes, the researcher created a visual chart, cutting each of

the answers to the interviews to find exemplary quotes that were used to answer the research questions (Appendix G).

Population

A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which researchers intend to generalize the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The Contra Costa SELPA contains 16 different LEAs that were considered for this collective case study. The Contra Costa SELPA consists of the Contra Costa County Office of Education and 15 school districts: Acalanes, Antioch, Brentwood, Byron, Canyon, John Swett, Knightson, Lafayette, Liberty, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pittsburg, and Walnut Creek (Contra Costa SELPA, n.d.). As of 2013-2014, Contra Costa County had a total of 261 schools serving 173,020 students in Grades K-12. The special needs population of the county totaled 19,937 (Contra Costa County Office of Education, 2014). The Contra Costa SELPA had a total of 1,445 students enrolled in ninth and 10th grades (California Department of Education, 2014b). The researcher identified a total of 20 middle schools in the Contra Costa SELPA.

The Liberty Union High School District (LUHSD) was the focus of this study. LUHSD has three comprehensive high schools: Freedom High School, Liberty High School, and Heritage High School; it is the only high school district within Contra Costa County and comprises the largest geographic area within the county. LUHSD receives ninth-grade students transitioning from seven middle schools within the Oakley, Brentwood, Byron, and Knightson elementary school districts. The middle schools had a combined total of 1,917 ninth-grade students who transitioned to one of the three high

schools in 2013. In 2012, the number of ninth graders transitioning was 1,930 (California Department of Education, 2014b). In 2013-2014, LUHSD had a total of 327 students in ninth and 10th grade who had identified disabilities (California Department of Education, 2014b).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "The target population is often different from the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected, which is termed the survey population or sampling frame" (p. 129). The target population for this study was recommended by the SELPA program specialist as having students with a variety of disabilities, as having parents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and as being logistically accessible. The researcher worked with the SELPA program specialist to distribute letters to the superintendent and other administrative staff within LEAs and to parents indicating the nature of the study in order to gain their support (Appendix B).

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals, as it "allows small groups of individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 489). The sample size for the study was 10% of the 200 identified parents of ninth- and 10th-grade developmentally delayed students enrolled in the LUHSD who were receiving special education services at the time of this study to avoid saturation of data. Twenty-five participants agreed to participate in the study. The Research Randomizer program was used to narrow the sample to 20 participants.

Major Findings

A summary of key findings that emerged from the data analysis in Chapter IV is presented in the following sections. The findings resulted from the interview data and are organized by the four research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, "What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the transition process into and out of middle school?" Parents in this study described three expectations regarding the middle school transition process:

1. *Parents expect that there will be communication/collaboration between staff and parents.* Nineteen total participants stated that they expected communication and collaboration between staff and parents during their children's transition process. Eighteen parents relied on having communication with the IEP team and school administration. Fifteen parents reported that having a collaborative process with the educators was important. The participant responses in this study indicated that collaboration and communication are expected and important, as these factors assist in setting realistic goals for students and help with keeping the IEP team stakeholders on the same page.

2. *Parents expect that the IEP team will understand the individual needs of each child.* Twelve participants identified that parents and IEP team members need to understand the individual needs of each child. Parents reported that having teachers and staff members who are properly trained would make or break the transition experience and

that it is the role of the parents to explain to the team what their children's needs are because they are the experts.

3. *Parents expect that teachers must adhere to the IEP accommodations.* Eight participants identified the importance of the IEP and schools adhering to the IEP accommodations established for each student. They believed that in order to have smooth transitions, the receiving schools needed to adhere to the accommodations to help the children become successful in their new environment.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, "What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and out of middle school?" Three themes emerged regarding factors that participants described as influencing their children's transition process:

1. *Parents perceive that parental involvement/advocacy is important.* All 20 of the participants believed that parental involvement/advocacy is important during the transition process. Parents and IEP team members have input in the process. Parental advocacy was identified as necessary to ensure that each individualized need of children is addressed. Participants believed that if they were not involved in the process, decisions would have been made without their input or agreement.

2. *Parents perceive that preplanning and explaining the entire transition process is important.* Seventeen parents expressed that preplanning and explaining the transition is important when transitioning to a new environment. Parents expressed the need to explain the transition process to prepare their children for what to expect in moving forward in a new environment. Some suggestions included visiting the new school

environment, learning new expectations, preparing for high school/middle school by utilizing social stories, meeting new teachers, providing a map of the new campus for navigation, and attending new student orientations.

3. *Parents perceive that collaboration between sending and receiving schools is important.* Twelve parents indicated that collaboration between sending and receiving schools was important to them. They believed that both schools should be able to answer any questions or concerns regarding the parents' children. The information shared between sending and receiving schools was perceived as vital to the success of the students and to ensure a smooth transition.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked, "What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?" Participants described four supports that they received during the middle school transition process but identified seven barriers they experienced. The four supports identified by the participants were communication, caring staff offering advice/help, outside help/resources, and in-school support programs for students. The frequency of participant responses for supports is exhibited in Figure 5 (repeated here for ease of reference).

Participants indicated experiencing seven different barriers during transition planning. Figure 6 (repeated here for ease of reference) displays the barriers and total responses from participants. The seven barriers included a lack of support during the IEP process, a lack of properly trained staff, communication, academic language, adversarial

experiences with IEP team members, parents not being included in the transition, and

English as a second language (ESL).
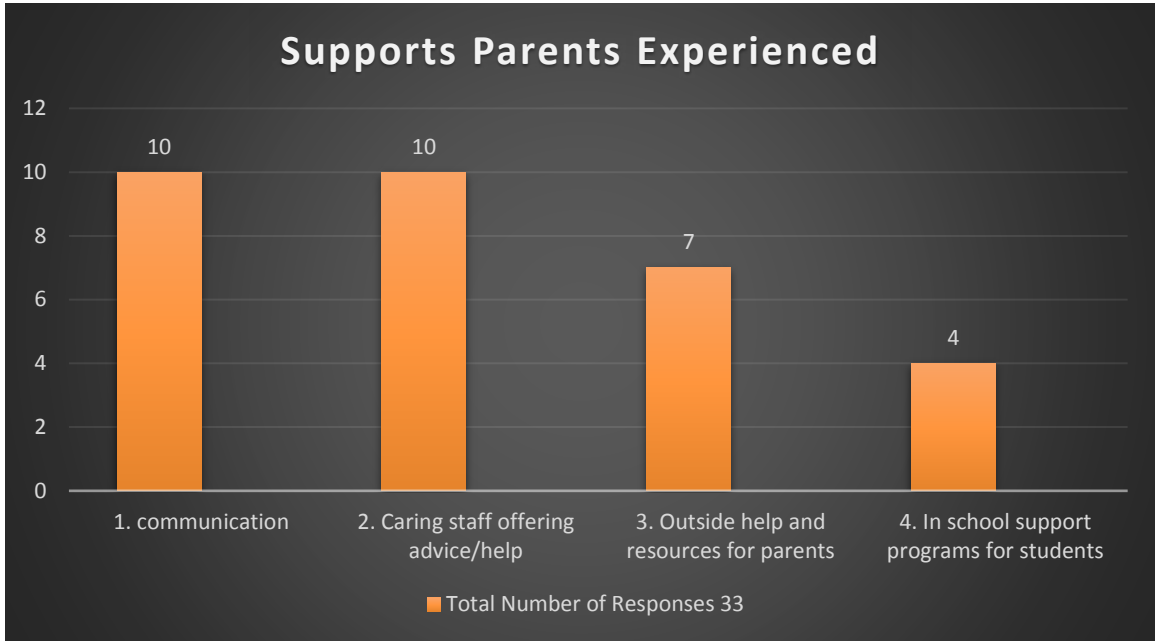
Figure 5. Supports parents experienced.
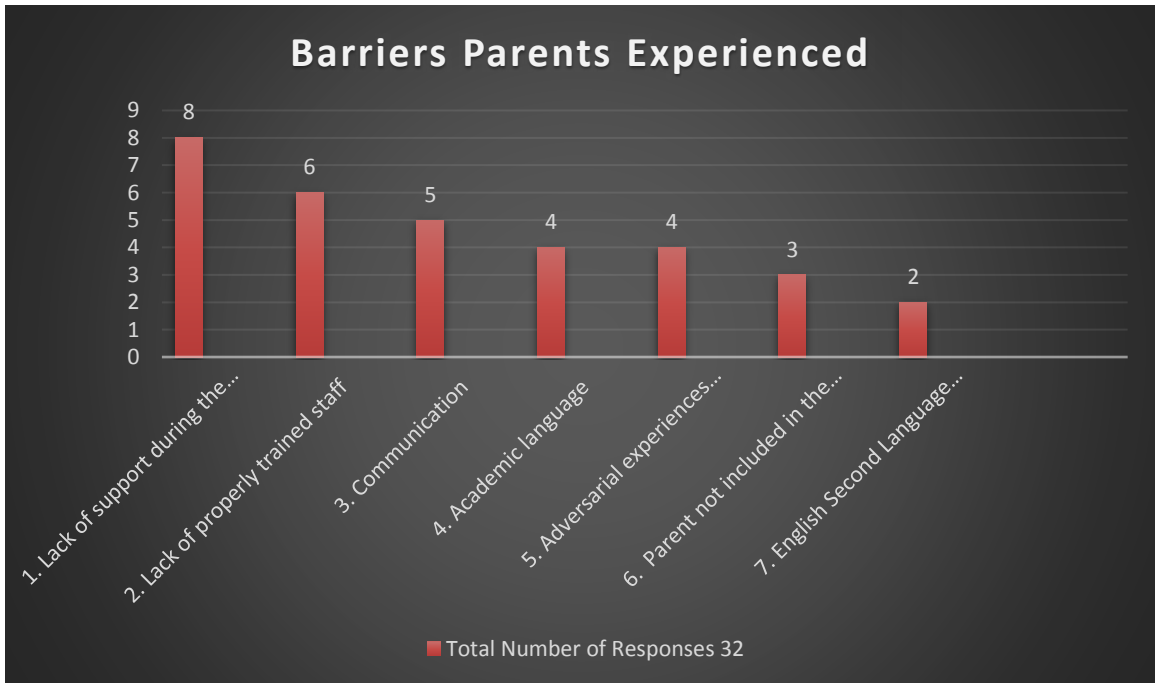
Figure 6. Barriers parents experienced.

Research Question 4

 The fourth research question asked, "In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?" Fifteen participants indicated that they had positive transition experiences overall when their children were transitioning into middle school and out of middle school and that their needs were met. Fourteen participants indicated that the elementary-to-middle school transition was successful for their children, while eight participants indicated that they had positive middle-to-high school transition experiences.

Demographic Data

 Demographic data that were also collected in this study indicated that all of the parent participants graduated from high school, and some had college education. Most participants were employed, and for those who were married, all of their spouses were employed. It is unknown whether a different subset of less educated or unemployed parents would provide similar responses. There was one relationship detected between the demographic information and the findings related to the research questions. The demographic data showed that 45% of parents were part of organizations/parent support groups. This supports findings for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. The support groups assisted parents with involvement/advocacy and collaboration in making the right decisions for their children during the transition planning process. Observational data were also recorded regarding emotional responses in the form of tears and frustration based on the tone of participants' voices. Participants who became emotional were asked if they wanted to stop the interview, but they declined and proceeded to answer all of the interview/probing questions that were asked of them.

Conclusions

The focus of this study was to describe parental expectations and perspectives as they related to their developmentally delayed children with SEN during transitions into middle school and out of middle school. In addition, this study was designed to determine the ways in which parents perceived schools as supporting them during the transition planning process. A variety of perceptions and expectations were expressed by the 20 participants in the study, which resulted in findings relevant to the transition planning process. The following conclusions can be made regarding the findings of this study:

1. If IEP stakeholders provided communication/collaboration between the school and families, then parents perceived the transition planning experience as successful. Parents expect that schools will provide them with consistent and relevant communication regarding their children. Communication can consist of in-person conversations, e-mails, phone calls, and notes home. Communication and collaboration help parents understand the IEP and what is expected as their children transition to a larger school environment. According to deFur (2012), "Transition service providers seek to create collaborative partnerships over time with families" (p. 64). In a true partnership, each partner has both choice and voice (deFur, 2012).

2. SEN children are unique, and IEP stakeholders must understand the uniqueness of each child. Parents expect IEP team members to understand the individual needs of each student. Parents are the experts when it comes to their children's individual needs, and IEP team members must value their opinions. SEN transitions are unique to each individual and the disability/disabilities the individual has. SEN students are

not a homogeneous group, and interindividual differences will always occur, both in terms of difficulties and preferences for support (Maras & Aveling, 2006). Transition services are highly individualized, and what might work for one student may not be appropriate for another (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

3. When communication and collaboration are not present, parents rely on the IEP accommodations to hold the district accountable. IEP accommodations are vital and expected by parents during transition planning. The accommodations let staff members know what each individual student's needs are in order to be successful in a new, larger environment. If the accommodations are met, students are likely to have a high success rate and parents perceive that their needs have also been met. Burns (2007) stated,

> The IEP requirement for IDEA is to include "any individual appropriate accommodations" to measure achievement of functional performance. The concept of an appropriate or reasonable accommodation must be given more than passing consideration. If an accommodation is excessive, or if an accommodation is not provided, a child's ability to receive an appropriate education could be impacted. (p. 215)

4. When parents are excluded from and not involved in the transition planning process for their children, their voices are not heard. Students with disabilities and their parents value involvement in the transition process (Landmark et al., 2007). Trust and communication break down between the IEP team and parents. As a result, parents resort to outside resources (e.g., SELPAs, regional centers, advocates, and lawyers) to facilitate the transition planning process. The IEP meetings become more contentious,

resulting in due process and costly legal actions that the school district must pay for. Parental involvement/advocacy is an essential component to transition planning. Parental involvement is mandated by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but the level of involvement and advocacy varies.

5. If educators helped parents preplan and explain a transition, then parents perceived less stress during transition planning. Preplanning and explaining the entire transition is perceived as important. Some parents took extra measures to ensure the needs of their children were met by creating social stories, driving by the receiving schools, meeting new staff members, attending school orientations, scheduling visits, and asking as many questions as possible while providing explanations to their children before and after the transition. Participants described that the more information they could obtain and share with their children, the more they could help with the overall transition.

6. Parents who are supported by the school during the transition process are more likely to be satisfied with the decisions reached during the IEP process. Parents indicated four levels of support received during transition planning from teachers, IEP team members, and outside resources when compared to other school personnel. Parents received the following supports: communication, caring staff offering advice/ help, outside help/resources, and in-school support programs for students. The supports received helped parents make the best decisions for their children and helped with their overall satisfaction with the transition planning experience. Van Haren and Fiedler (2008) stated, "When families with disabilities are supported through the educational system the benefits are endless" (p. 235).

7. Parents who experienced barriers perceived being left out of the transition planning process. Parents experienced several barriers to their involvement in the transition planning process: a lack of support during the IEP process, a lack of properly trained staff, communication, academic language, adversarial experiences with IEP team members, parents not being included in the transition, and ESL. Mueller et al. (2009) stated, "One hallmark of the IDEA (2004) is the inclusion of families as active partners on their child's education team" (p. 113). In order to overcome these barriers, outside resources were called in to assist parents in creating a suitable transition plan for their children. In addition, these barriers created a greater need for parental involvement/advocacy.

8. Schools that provided support to parents during the transition planning experience eased the parents' anxiety and stress, and increased their involvement. Underwood and University (2010) stated, "Schools can engage parents through empowering parent voice and creating a welcoming environment in which diverse perspectives are accepted" (p. 33). The most successful transition experiences were from elementary to middle school, followed by the middle-to-high school transition. The elementary-to-middle school transition was most successful due to high parental involvement and collaboration between all IEP stakeholders, which helped facilitate the transition process from beginning to end. The elementary IEP transition teams appeared to be more invested in the transition planning process and made the effort to hear the parents' voices and were more willing to communicate and collaborate.

9. Parents who participated in support groups and organizations serving special needs students developed relationships that helped them gain insight, information, and

strategies to more effectively contribute to their children's educational plans.

According to demographic data, 45% of participants were involved in either a special

needs support group or an organization. Participants described a strong sense of

community where they were able to consult with other members if they needed advice.

These groups provided a safe haven for families to be themselves without the

undesired attention of the outside world. They also had an established community

where their connections would last many years. Van Haren and Fiedler (2008) stated

that in order to support and empower families of children with disabilities, schools

must involve families in community collaboration, as "families' lives can be greatly

enhanced through community resources and services that are available for assistance.

Schools can serve as conduits between families and the numerous services offered"

(p. 235).

Implications for Action

The following are implications for action to fulfill parental perspectives and

expectations of the transition process. Programs and school districts have a legal and

ethical responsibility to meet the needs of families and children with SEN during the

transition planning process for transitions into and out of middle school. Commitment to

the implementation of well-defined and quality transition planning services can eliminate

the possibility of school districts falling short and failing the children they serve as these

students move into and out of middle school.

The following are recommendations for action:

1. School districts must involve parents as stakeholders in shaping parental involvement

    strategies so that they have ownership and input as to how the school can effectively

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communicate/collaborate with them. The Epstein model of parental involvement strategies can provide a solid framework for school districts to adopt to improve parental participation in the transition process:

a. Parenting—helping all families understand child and adolescent development and establishing home environments that support children as well as students.

b. Communicating—designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication about school programs and children's progress.

c. Volunteering—recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or other locations to support the school and students' activities.

d. Involvement in learning activities at home—providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities.

e. Involvement in decision making—having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees and, with their leadership, obtaining input from all parents on school decisions.

f. Collaborating with the community—identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families, and organizing activities to benefit the community and increase students' learning opportunities (Epstein, 2004; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

2. The school districts must provide professional learning opportunities for parents, teachers, and administrators with training on strategies for successful involvement. Team-building activities and icebreakers can be emphasized as means to get to know

one another. The training can be offered during staff development days that are preplanned and written in on the school calendar. This will help to ensure that all stakeholders will attend and benefit from the training.

3. School districts must create a uniform transition checklist for the receiving schools. An effective transition checklist includes the following:

   a. students' strengths,

   b. students' weaknesses,

   c. student interest survey detailing their likes versus dislikes,

   d. preferred learning style,

   e. ESL and the native language that they speak,

   f. parents' goals for transition,

   g. students' goals for transition, and

   h. important medical information.

4. School districts must have a formal communication model that can be implemented at all school sites. The communication model should incorporate the following components: daily (e.g., communication journals, call home, and attendance calls), weekly (e.g., classroom newsletters and interpretive communication for those whose speak a second language, translated school newsletter, memos, and informal communication with parents in their native language), monthly (e.g., homework calendar with embedded strategies used at school and informal meetings/calls home for student updates), and quarterly (e.g., report cards) communication. When communication is established with parents, it fosters collaboration to build a trusting relationship.

5. District service providers (i.e., behaviorists, psychologists, general education teachers, special education teachers, occupational therapists, adaptive physical education [PE] teachers, instructional assistants, physical therapists, nurses, speech and language pathologists, administrators, and counselors) must be required to attend training that will help them understand the parents who have children with special needs and the uniqueness of each child. They need to be trained on person-first language, cultural awareness, communication strategies, and sensitivity.

6. School districts must provide bridges to outside resources and support groups with which parents are affiliated. They should work together to provide uniform comprehensive services for each student. The outside resources and parent groups will supplement services received in the school setting and help families to be better equipped to make seamless transitions. Schools and outside agencies must initiate contact with the families instead of waiting for families to make requests and file complaints to get the supports that they need.

7. School districts must encourage parents to become involved with support groups or organizations by implementing/hiring a parent liaison. The parent liaison will have access to support groups and various organizations within the county. Parents will find companionship and reassurance that parental advocacy is important, and parents will feel more connected to the school.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings from this study suggest the following recommendations to expand further research:

1. Conduct a replication study in a different county, city, or state to determine if the same parental sentiment is shared regarding middle school special education transitions.

2. Conduct a replication study of nonpublic school (NPS) SEN students with developmental disabilities during the middle school special education transitions to determine if some of the same concerns are identified.

3. Conduct further research to study SEN students with developmental disabilities enrolled in a county program to determine if the same parental sentiment is shared regarding middle school special education transitions.

4. Conduct a study to determine if special education educators would benefit from more professional development opportunities in order to better serve families in their programs.

5. Conduct a further research of fathers of students with SEN who have developmental disabilities to determine if the same parental sentiment is shared regarding middle school special education transitions.

6. Conduct a study to determine how supports and barriers affect the transition planning process.

7. Conduct a study on newly hired special education staff members regarding their knowledge of the transition planning process for SEN students.

8. Conduct further research to determine how outside resources (e.g., regional centers, advocacy groups, SELPAs, and parent groups) impact the transition planning process.

9. Conduct an ethnographic study to compare the barriers and supports parents experienced during transition planning.

10. Conduct a study to determine if there is a difference in findings from parents in a higher socioeconomic status bracket whose children are enrolled in private school programs.

11. Conduct further research to determine if there is a difference in findings from parents with lower educational levels and who are unemployed.

12. Conduct a study to determine if the size of the school district affects the communication/collaboration component between parents and the IEP team.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

For the past decade, I have worked with families of students who have moderate/severe disabilities. My role as an educator has encompassed the elementary and middle school environments. I have a unique perspective regarding transition planning because I have transitioned SEN students into middle school and out of middle school. All parents have hopes and dreams for their children, and the hopes and dreams for SEN children are similar. Parents want their children to be independent, hold down a job, attend college, and be productive citizens. It hurts when I have to tell a parent, "I am sorry, but your child is not eligible for a high school diploma; instead, he/she will have a certificate of completion on a nondiploma education track." Parents are often crushed by this news, and the denial of their children's SEN limitations becomes a new frustrating reality.

A relationship begins when the SEN students and their families walk into my classroom, and it develops further as I teach these students over 3 or more years. I am invited to family gatherings and sporting events to meet siblings and other family members. It is my duty to build a relationship based on trust and collaboration. In the school setting, I am the children's advocate. I find myself advocating for the children

based on the children's needs and the expectations the parents have. Anyone in special education will confirm that the goals drive student placement; the goals set forth by the IEP teams help place the SEN students in the appropriate special education programs that they need. The needs and goals must align for the SEN children to maximize growth and development in the educational setting. It is as important to know the students as it is to know the parents.

All families have expectations for their children's future. As I listened to every parent interviewed for this study, I could feel their passion and concern for their children. They are the people most invested in their children's future and want to fully participate in the planning process. While parental involvement is required under the legislative mandate for transition planning, the role of the parents should be embraced by schools beyond the minimum level required by law. Children with disabilities are unique individuals and should be treated as such. Each transition plan is unique to each child, just like the student's IEP. The IEP stakeholders must collaborate and communicate effectively with the parents to provide positive outcomes and create high-quality transition experiences for families. Parents must have a voice, but when that voice is not heard, parents turn to outside agencies/resources (e.g., SELPAs, regional centers, lawyers, and advocacy groups) for help. A high percentage of parents in the study were involved with support groups and outside resources that they used as outlets to voice their concerns. Findings showed that parental involvement/advocacy is important, but communication and collaboration are equally important. If the suggestions presented in this study are implemented, the satisfaction rate among parents will begin to increase, and

school districts will find less contentious IEP meetings and legal actions occurring at these schools.

This study provided findings and recommendations for improved practices to support the perceptions and expectations of parents of developmentally delayed SEN children regarding the transitions into middle school and out of middle school. It is my hope that this study adds to the existing body of research regarding transition planning and assists in building new approaches and practices that will lead to seamless transitions for students and their families. Parents are the experts when it comes to the needs of their children. Parents are also often afraid of the unknowns of the transition planning process, which have increased through the lack of assistance from schools. There is simply no valid reason for continuing to minimize parents' involvement in determining their children's future. Schools must find ways to embrace, involve, and partner with parents to increase opportunities for SEN children to learn and excel.

As one parent stated,

Transparency, transparency, transparency. This is education people, *not* government secrets. Parents' rights, transition plan options/solutions, site visits— none of these should be secrets. Parents are already freaked out; don't add to it. Go the extra mile; it will pay off in *spades* in the end.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrices

Table A1

Parental Involvement and the Strategies Needed for Parents to Become Successful During Transition Planning

Authors/Sources	Communication with SEN families	Collaboration between school service providers and family	Cultural barriers that affect parental involvement	Definition of parental involvement	Strategies to involve parents during transition planning	Law and policy associated with special education transition
Watson et al. (2012)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Henrich (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wagner et al. (2012)		✓		✓		✓
Bower & Griffin (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Epstein (2008)	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Epstein (2004)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Epstein & Dauber (1991)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Epstein & Van Voorhis (2010)	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Bronfenbrenner (1979)				✓		
Swick & Williams (2006)				✓		
Kellems & Morningstar (2010)	✓	✓			✓	✓
Landmark et al. (2007)	✓		✓			✓
Geenen et al. (2005)			✓			✓
Ankeny et al. (2009)		✓			✓	✓
Van Haren & Fiedler (2008)					✓	
Staples & Diliberto (2010)	✓	✓			✓	✓
Geenen & Powers (2001)		✓	✓		✓	✓

Table A2

SEN Transition

Authors/Sources	Self-determination	PCP planning	Specific to SEN needs	Collaborative relationships with school and family	Preplanning creating a timeline prior to a transition	Strategies to empower families	Stakeholder involvement in transition IEPs	Family and student stress and anxiety related to transition	Adjusting to new school environment
Stang et al. (2009)	✓		✓						
Thoma et al. (2002)	✓								
Kellems & Morningstar (2010)	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Wagner et al. (2012)			✓	✓	✓		✓		
Friend & Bursuck (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Meadan et al. (2010)		✓		✓	✓				
deFur (2012)				✓		✓			
Wood et al. (2004)	✓			✓					
Hagner et al. (2014)		✓	✓	✓					
Carter et al. (2005)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Trach (2012)			✓	✓	✓		✓		
Laudan & Loprest (2012)			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Larson (2010)			✓	✓					✓
L. Hughes et al. (2013)			✓	✓				✓	✓
Landmark et al. (2007)				✓			✓	✓	
Perkins & Gelfer (1995)				✓	✓		✓		✓
Maras & Aveling (2006)			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Detwiler (2008)					✓				
Frasier (2007)					✓				
Dorman (2012)				✓	✓	✓			
Ankeny et al. (2009)			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

Table A3

Barriers Affecting Transition Planning for SEN Students

Authors/Sources	Lack of planning that needs to take place for a smooth transition	Lack of parental involvement	Lack of knowledge SEN parents have about transition	Lack of communication between SEN families	Emotions of parents and students during transition planning	Collaboration amongst stakeholders	Understanding cultural norms and traditions
Black et al. (2003)						✓	✓
Underwood & University (2010)		✓	✓	✓		✓	
deFur (2012)	✓	✓				✓	✓
Van Haren & Fiedler (2008)			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Chiang & Hadadian (2007)							✓
Lubbers et al. (2008)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Landmark et al. (2007)	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Geenen et al. (2005)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Geenen & Powers (2001)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Russell (2003)		✓	✓		✓	✓	

Table A4

Understanding the Impact of Culture on the Transition Planning Process

Authors/Sources	Family values that CLD families have	Poor transition outcomes for students	Understanding the IEP transition process	Academic language used in transition planning	Strategies to support CLD families and educators	Stress and anxiety associated with transition planning	Strategies to enhance cultural awareness	Shared transition goals amongst all stakeholders	Proper translated documents sent to CLD families from the school district
Geenen et al. (2005)		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Mueller et al. (2009)				✓	✓				
Kim et al. (2007)				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baer & Daviso (2011)		✓							
M. T. Hughes et al. (2008)	✓							✓	✓
Bower & Griffin (2011)	✓	✓							
Landmark et al. (2007)		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Black et al. (2003)	✓				✓			✓	
Cote et al. (2012)	✓					✓	✓	✓	
Kim & Morningstar (2005)		✓	✓		✓		✓		

Introduction Letter

September 7, 2014

Dear Participating Agency/Program:

As a doctoral student at Brandman University, I am currently involved in the data collection portion of my dissertation. This letter is of Intent has been presented to obtain permission to sample your parent population. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe parental expectations and perspectives as they relate to their children with Special Education Needs during transition into middle school and out of middle school, the cultural and linguistic barriers experienced during transition planning, and how well they believe schools support them during and through the transition process. This study will use a qualitative case study approach to investigate this population. All responses will be kept confidential, and the participants will not be identified by name. Participants will be referenced according to their child's special needs status and the meeting of the eligibility criteria. Only the members of my dissertation committee and I will have access to the records of information obtained directly from the focus group interviews. The benefit from participating in this study will be to gain a greater understanding of the needs, perspectives, and expectations of parents during the transition planning process of their child with special needs.

Participants may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. No information that identifies the participant will be released without participant's separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed the participant will be so informed and consent obtained by participant. If your agency/program or the participant has any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, you may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

The one on one interviews will also be documented using audio and video recording devices. These recordings will only be reviewed by the researcher. Thank you so much for accepting this proposal and allowing me access to your demographic.

If you have any further questions regarding this request, you may contact me at (415) 734-0215.

Sincerely,

Areza Enea
Brandman University Ed.D Doctoral Candidate

Purpose

Organizational Leadership Ed.D. Program, Brandman University Interview Consent form for a parent's expectation of children that have Special Education Needs that are developmentally delayed when transitioning into and out of the public middle school environment

Dear Parent Participant:

As a doctoral student at Brandman University, I am currently involved in the data collection portion of my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe parental expectations and perspectives as they relate to their children with Special Education Needs during transition into middle school and into high school, the cultural and linguistic barriers experienced during transition planning, and how well they believe schools support them during and through the transition process. This study will use a qualitative case study approach to investigate this population. All responses will be kept confidential, and the participants will not be identified by name. Participants will be referenced according to their child's special needs status. Only the members of my dissertation committee and I will have access to the records of information obtained directly from the focus group interviews. The benefit from participating in this study will be to gain a greater understanding of the needs, perspectives, and expectations of parents during the transition planning process of their child with special needs. The study presented has minimal risks to the parent participants involved, they will not experience any harm or discomfort and no interruption of their daily routine.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments,

or concerns about the study of the informed consent process, you should ask the researcher to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Research Participant's Bill of Rights
Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:
1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

The one on one interviews will also be documented using audio and video recording devices and field/observational notes. These recordings will only be reviewed by the researcher. Signing below signifies that you have read and understood the above and that you agree to participate in this study. Thank you for volunteering your time to participate in this study.

I, _____ consent to participate in the research study conducted by Areza Enea

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

I hereby agree to abide by the participants' instructions.

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Demographic Questionnaire

Welcome! I hope to paint an accurate picture of the transition experience through the parent lens. Below are a pre-interview questionnaire and the one on one interview questions. There may be additional follow up questions asked of the participants for clarity.

Interview Script

Interviewer: Areza Enea

Interview time planned: Approximately 30 minutes

Interview place: Venue of Choice

Recording: Digital voice and video recorder

Written: Field and Observational Notes

Opening Comments: Based on the email or flyer you received you understand that this study is to explore the parent perspective and expectation of the transition planning process regarding your child with special education needs. I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. Information from this pre survey and one-on one interview will be included in my dissertation. For privacy concerns, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. Although you have signed the consent form to participate in this study, you may choose to withdraw your consent at any time. Do you have any concerns or questions before we begin?

Please fill out this pre-interview questionnaire to the best of your ability in the space below the questions. If you have any questions about what is being asked please feel free to ask your interviewer for clarification prior to the one-to-interview.

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. What city do you live in?

2. What is your highest degree of education?

3. What do you do for a living?

4. Are you single, partnered, married, separated, divorced, or foster parent?

Please circle one

Single   Partnered   Married   Separated

          Divorced   Foster Parent

5. What does your partner or spouse do for a living?

6. What do you consider to be your ethnicity?

7. How many individuals are in your household?

8. How many children do you have?

9. What is the age and gender of your child (children)?

We will be talking about your experience as a parent of a child in special education. Please answer the questions below about your child/ children currently in special education programs:

10. What is the age of your child (children)? _____

11. What is the gender of your child (children)? _____

12. What is the nature of your child's disability/special education classification?

13. At what age and grade was he/she first classified for special education services?
Age: Grade:

14. In what grade level is your child in currently enrolled?

15. Are you a part of any local parent support groups or organizations and if so could you please name them?

Interview Protocol

Welcome! I hope to paint a accurate picture of the transition experience through the parent lens. There may be additional follow up questions asked of the participants for clarity.

Interview Script
Interviewer: Areza Enea
Interview time planned: Approximately 30 minutes
Interview place: Venue of Choice
Recording: Digital voice and video recorder
Written: Field and Observational Notes

Opening Comments: Based on the email or flyer your received you understand that this study is to explore the parent perspective and expectation of the transition planning process regarding their child with special needs. For these interview questions we will primarily be focusing on the processes of transition into middle school and transition out of the middle school environment. I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. Information from this one-on one interview will be included in my dissertation. For privacy concerns, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. Although you have signed the consent form to participate in this study, you may choose to withdraw your consent at any time. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked please ask for more of an explanation to clarify the question. Do you have any concerns or questions before we begin?

1. What roles should educators (teachers, principals, vice principals, IEP team members etc.) play in helping children succeed in school transitions?

2. As a parent, what role do you play in helping your child succeed in school transitions?

   a. How do you think these roles are connected?

3. What are the important things that you do to help your child with school transitions?

(Probing Questions: Do you promote independence? Did you discuss the transition in advance? Was your child able to visit the school before being enrolled? How many times did you have to visit the new school environment?)

4. In what ways have you been included in your child's transition planning? (probing questions: Have you attended the IEP meetings? Did the IEP team include you in on the decision making process)

5. What supports have you received during your child's transition planning? Please describe.
(Probing Questions: Were school staff members helpful during the transition planning process? Did the offer any advice or words of wisdom as your child moved on?)

6. Describe any barriers you have encountered during your child's transition planning.
(Probing Questions: Do you feel like you have been left out of the transition planning process? Was academic language difficult for your to understand? Did you know all of your parent rights?)

7. How can schools/programs better serve families during transition times?

   a. Were there things that you would have hoped went differently?

8. What expectations do you have for your child's future?
(Probing Questions: Do you foresee your child attending college? What types of jobs would be appropriate for your child? Do you feel like your child will be ready to live independently? What is most important to you?)

9. In terms of transition, which transition was process (into middle school or into high school) was the most successful and why?

10. Do you have any other perspectives on the transitions process that you would like to share?
(Probing questions: What could the schools improve on regarding the transition process? What was your overall experience for transition planning?)

Closing Comments: Again I would like to thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Before we conclude are there any additional comments of thoughts you would like to add to this discussion?

APPENDIX F

Coding Chart

What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the

transition process into and out of middle school?

(Expectation-What should schools do)

Pre-coding   Possible codes

During transitioning, parents expect: _____. (code)	• Constant and ongoing communication. • Their child to receive a diploma and not a certificate. • Being prepared to deal with the future. • Their child to be educated in the least restrictive environment.

What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and

out of middle school?

(Factors-What helps facilitate transition process, perceive-How do parents feel

about the transition process)

Pre-coding   Possible codes

During transitioning, parents feel that schools should: _____. (code)	• Provide constant and ongoing communication • Help them find resources to help their children • Begin the transition planning process earlier • Their child should be given the same opportunities as non-disabled peers

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What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience during the transition process into and out of middle school?

(Supports-Who supports the transition process, barriers-What prevents a seamless transition to the next educational)

Pre-coding   Possible codes

During transitioning, parents need supports that: _____	• Will ease their anxiety • Will provide reassurance for the future • Will help their children become more independent

In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

(Extent-Parental satisfaction)

Pre-coding   Possible codes

During transitioning, parents feel a degree of satisfaction when: _____. (code)	• Their children are transition properly • Their children have been given enough time to transition • Their views of transition are also taken into consideration

Visual Chart

What expectations do parents of middle school SEN children have regarding the

transition process into and out of middle school?

Exemplary quotes:

Codes   Common Themes

What factors do parents perceive as important to the transition process into and

out of middle school?

Exemplary quotes:

Codes   Common Themes

What supports and barriers do parents of middle school SEN children experience

during the transition process into and out of middle school?

Exemplary quotes:

Codes   Common Themes

In what ways do parents of middle school SEN children perceive the middle

school is meeting their needs during the transition process?

Exemplary quotes:

Codes   Common Themes

IRB Approval

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Application Action – Approval

Date: 2/15/15

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Areza Enea

Faculty or Student ID Number: B00175968

Title of Research Project:

Parents Expectations of Developmentally Delayed Children With Special Education Needs (SEN) When Transitioning Into and Out of the Public Middle School Environment

Project Type: ✔ New ☐ Continuation ☐ Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:

✔	Doctoral Dissertation EdD
	DNP Clinical Project
	Masters' Thesis
	Course Project
	Faculty Professional/Academic Research
	Other:

Funded: ✔ No ☐ Yes _____
(Funding Agency; Type of Funding; Grant Number)

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): _____

Principal Investigator's Address: 3030 E 18th Street Antioch, CA 94509

Email Address: princessreese@comcast.net   Telephone Number: 415-734-0215

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Patrick Ainsworth

Email Address: painswor@brandman.edu   Telephone Number: 530-368-9542

Category of Review:

☐ Exempt Review   ✔ Expedited Review   ☐ Standard Review

Brandman University IRB Rev, 11.14.14   Adopted   November 2014

✓	I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal
☐	NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office

Signature of Principal Investigator: **Areza Enea** Digitally signed by Areza Enea
DN: cn=Areza Enea, o, ou,
email=princessreese@comcast.net, c=US
Date: 2014.11.27 13:16:36 -08'00'   Date: **2-15-15**

Signature of Faculty Advisor/
Sponsor/Dissertation Chair: **Patrick Ainsworth** Digitally signed by Patrick Ainsworth
DN: cn=Patrick Ainsworth, o=Brandman
University, ou=Ed.D.,
email=painswor@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2015.02.14 19:54:48 -08'00'   Date: **2-14-15**

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

<u>**IRB ACTION/APPROVAL**</u>

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Areza Enea

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.

☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.

☐ Approved as submitted.

☑ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)

☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)

☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: ☐ No Risk   ☐ Minimal Risk   ☐ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

> 1) Please use Brandman email, not personal email.
> 2) Recommend changing to minimal risk (from less than minimal risk) and identifying possible risks associated with this project.
> 3) Please clarify "Other special populations targeted in the study protocol". Thank you!

IRB Reviewer: Jody Orfield, DNP, CNP

*Digitally signed by Jody Orfield, DNP, CNP
DN: cn=Jody Orfield, DNP, CNP, o=Brandman University, ou=Associate Dean School of Nursing and Health Professions, email=jorfield@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2015.02.20 12:32:56 -08'00'*

Telephone: 949-341-7650   Email: jorfield@brandman.edu

BUIRB Chair: _____   Date: _____

<u>REVISED IRB Application</u>   ☑ Approved   ☐ Returned

Name: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____ Date: _____

BUIRB Chair: Keith Larick

*Digitally signed by Keith Larick
DN: cn=Keith Larick, o=Ed.D, ou=SOE, email=larick@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2015.02.26 09:06:59 -08'00'*

Brandman University IRB Rev, 11.14.14   Adopted   November 2014