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# Teacher Attitudes Toward Post-Secondary Transition Planning

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Teacher Attitudes and Transition Planning

**Teacher Attitudes Toward Post-Secondary Transition Planning**

**Research Paper**

**Submitted to the Special Education Faculty of Marshall University College of Education  
and Professional Development In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

**By**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to survey special education teachers in a rural high school in a rural Mid-Atlantic state. The survey collected data about attitudes and perceptions of the transition planning process and how these attitudes impact the amount of instructional time that is spent teaching self-determination skills to their students. Generally, the survey results indicated that although teachers feel that transition planning is important, they also find it difficult to incorporate self-determination instruction with the Common Core curriculum. Less than half of the respondents indicated that they feel as though the transition curriculum that they use effectively prepares students for postsecondary endeavors. Interestingly, the majority of the respondents feel that transition planning should be provided for all students with an IEP including middle school and high school students.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The school years can often seem as though there are transitions of varying levels: from preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school and high school to post-secondary endeavors (Test, 2012). These transitions often are accompanied by anxiety and stress which increases with each level of transition. With this in consideration, secondary transition was designed to provide services and supports to individuals with disabilities to help the transition to adulthood be as seamless as possible (Rusch & Braddock, 2004). Transition planning is intended to be an outcome oriented process with the goal of preparing students for their post-school lives (Kohler & Field, 2003). The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 mandates that measurable post-secondary goals should be established and updated on an annual basis in order to determine the progress that students are making toward transition planning (US Department of Education, 2004). These goals should be based on each student's strengths, weaknesses, preferences and individual interests in reference to how they intend to transition to adulthood.

When planning for transition services it is important for educators to assist students with developing self-determination skills. Self-determination is defined as skills that empower students to make their own decisions regarding the quality of life that they desire. It is important to promote self-determination while preparing the transition plan because this is when the students and their parents are actively involved in planning for the students' futures following school (Shogren, 2013). Teachers often have a difficult time instructing the core curriculum which includes; reading/language arts, math, science and social studies, while simultaneously preparing students to meet the transition goals identified and agreed upon during the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting (Thoma, Bartholomew & Scott, 2009). Teachers can create an

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atmosphere of learning by incorporating a variety of instructional approaches, utilizing technology and encouraging student involvement in community-based opportunities (Thoma, Bartholomew & Scott, 2009). Positive attitudes among educators regarding transition planning and self-determination instruction is paramount to the success of students transitioning to adulthood.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As previously stated, teachers often find it difficult to incorporate self-determination instruction with core curriculum instruction because they are unsure of the most meaningful way to accomplish this. Teachers often fail to incorporate self-determination instruction because they are not sure that this will lead to positive outcomes for students and those who do incorporate it often withdraw this instruction if they feel as though they are not making progress (Shogren, 2013). In addition, time constraints continue to be an obstacle for self-determination instruction mainly because teachers often feel as though they do not have enough time to focus on core curriculum instruction. Teachers are required to teach and master the core curriculum and due to this competing demand, it would be beneficial to provide training on the importance of self-determination (Shogren, 2013).

It is significant that teachers be active participants when learning about self-determination and it is suggested that teachers be provided with instruction on how to incorporate self-determination instruction with the core curriculum (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder & Algozzine, 2004). This can be accomplished by providing in-service training and professional development activities focusing on self-determination instruction. There are five suggested indicators of the self-determination skills of teachers including: 1) knowing themselves and their

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students, 2) valuing themselves, 3) putting their knowledge and beliefs into a plan, 4) putting their plan into action and 5) evaluating their efforts (Field & Hoffman, 2002a). Teachers who have self-awareness, self-management skills and goal-setting experience should be able to use these attributes to create a learning atmosphere that allows for effective instruction on self-determination (Field & Hoffman, 2002a). Teachers who are confident with their own self-determination skills can be excellent role models for students who lack self-determination.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher attitudes and perceptions regarding self-determination instruction as a component of transition planning during the IEP process. By utilizing surveys completed by teachers in a rural high school in an impoverished area of southern West Virginia, this study will address the question of how teacher attitudes and perceptions are directly related to their knowledge of transition planning. For the purpose of this research, self-determination will be defined as actions that are identified by four essential characteristics: (a) the student acts autonomously, (b) the behavior(s) are self-regulated, (c) the student initiates and responds to the event(s) in a socially appropriate manner and (d) the student acts in a self-realizing manner. These actions may include, but are not limited to, classroom assignments, extra-curricular activities and social interactions with peers and staff members.

### **Rational for the Study**

It is legally required to provide instruction to students with disabilities in accordance to the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 (US Department of Education, 2004), but it is also imperative to incorporate self-determination instruction with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards that are taught on a daily basis. This gives students the opportunity to learn functional skills that

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will become very important in their postsecondary environments. Transition planning is a legal requirement of the IEP process and educators are beginning to recognize the importance of transition planning as more than just a component of the IEP. Effective and appropriate transition planning during the IEP process often forges the future pathway for students receiving special education services and helps them become functional adults.

### **Research Question**

This survey research addresses how teachers incorporate self-determination instruction with daily classroom instruction. This will help identify the connection between teacher attitudes and the amount of time that they spend teaching or modeling self-determination as a component of transition planning.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

While the IEP legal requirements mandate the development of a transition plan, it is also important for post-secondary success for students with disabilities. Still, some educators do not understand how relevant it is to students receiving special education services. The purpose of this literature review is to define transition planning and examine how, when done appropriately, it can provide an array of services that will aid these students with a productive transition to postsecondary training and independent living.

The role of self-determination instruction and the impact that it has on students and their successful transition to adulthood will be addressed. This type of instruction assists students with improving their abilities to set attainable goals for themselves, to foster decision-making, problem solving and coping skills. Self-determination instruction also encourages students to improve their personal skills such as, hygiene, cleaning, basic cooking skills and household management skills.

Additionally, the attitudes of teachers regarding the integration of self-determination instruction with the core curriculum will be deliberated at length. It is important that teachers understand that while it is important to provide instruction based on the core curriculum, it is equally important to prepare students for adulthood by teaching them to utilize these skills in order to become functional adults.

### **Transition Planning**

According to the US Department of Education, transition services consist of a coordinated set of activities for children with disabilities that focus on improving the academic and functional

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achievement of these students (The US Department of Education, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires that transition planning begin at the earliest appropriate age and no later than age sixteen, (US Department of Education, 2004).

Transition planning is a very significant component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) because it encourages the IEP team to assist students with identification of their strengths and weaknesses with regard to educational core components; as well as, vocational or functional life skills. Legally, the IEP team must include the parent, the student (if he or she is aged sixteen), an administrator, a guidance counselor or social worker, at least one general education teacher and one special education teacher (The National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2013). The IEP team may also consist of vocational counselors and rehabilitation specialists to advise students of programs that are available and may be beneficial to them as they make the transition to adulthood. Transition planning is a life-long endeavor for students with disabilities and their families to establish long-term goals for their adult life.

There are several types of programs and interventions that schools can implement that can make the transition from secondary to postsecondary education a more positive and successful experience. According to the IDEA of 2004, schools are required to make efforts to ensure that students have access to post school activities that address independent living skills, postsecondary employment and job skills (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Transition planning is an integral part of the education of students with disabilities in that it assists these students with planning and preparing for the future.

It is important for students with disabilities to have a foundation of knowledge, communication skills and functional life skills in order to successfully transition to

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postsecondary life. Functional life skills are skills that contribute to successful independent living as an adult such as, self-care, communication skills, socialization skills and any (Cronin, 1996) (Peterson, 2013) other skill that aids in positive interactions in a community (Cronin, 1996). The IDEA mandates that transition planning should prepare students for adulthood by providing education on functional life-skills and ensuring that it is a goal-oriented process (Peterson, Burden, Sedaghat, Gothberg, Kohler & Coyle 2013).

By establishing attainable long-term goals, students become better prepared for their future outside of school and this will have a positive impact on their quality of life. These goals should clearly define the student's strengths, weaknesses and desires regarding academic and functional educational needs. The starting point of transition planning is transition assessment, which is an on-going process that uses data collected from students based on their interests, needs and preferences based on current and future living, working, educational and social environments (Sitlington & Payne, 2004). The transition assessment measures self-determination, self-advocacy, vocational and overall transition skills (Field & Hoffman, 2007; Neubert, 2003). Self-determination is the process of learning about oneself including, self-interests, likes, dislikes and skills. Self-advocacy is the ability to effectively communicate one's wants and needs, make independent decisions and have confidence and self-esteem.

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) has completed a systematic review in order to determine predictors that are associated with positive post-school outcomes in the areas of employment, education and independent living for students with disabilities (Test, Mazotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering & Kohler, 2009). The goal was to collect and document successful transition practices and predictors of success after school. The researchers received 134 tips from 39 states including teachers, professionals and parents who

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work with students with disabilities. The following is a list of the predictors that identify positive post-school outcomes,

- Career Awareness
- Community experiences
- Exit exam requirements/high school diploma status
- Inclusion in general education
- Interagency collaboration
- Occupational courses
- Paid employment/work experience
- Parental involvement
- Program of study
- Self- advocacy/self-determination
- Self-care/independent living skills
- Social skills
- Student support
- Transition program
- Vocational education
- Work Study (Test, et al., 2009).

One recent study, which examined the importance of transition from school to adult life, is the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto & Knokey, 2009). Its ten-year objective was to study the experiences of youth with disabilities following the transition

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process. The goal was to observe students with disabilities who received special education services in order to determine the progress made by the students participating in the study.

The participants were chosen from a representative sample of students between the ages of 13 and 17 who received special education services. Due to the length of the study, researchers chose a sample of approximately 13,000 students because they felt this number was a sufficient size and representation of all participants. The sample was then divided with 1250 participants representing each disability, with the exception of 1,012 students with autism, 599 with traumatic brain injuries and 122 students who were deaf or blind (Newman, et al., 2009). The results identified that 53% of these students were less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs than their peers. It also indicated that 66% of these individuals were less likely than their peers to be employed after leaving secondary school. Furthermore, the study revealed that 68% of these students were less likely to have a checking account and 50% were less likely to have a credit card (Newman, et al., 2009).

Another study examined the benefits of career development for young adults with disabilities (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson & Zane, 2007). This study used case studies to investigate the post-school career development and employment for a sample of individuals with disabilities who had occupations seven to ten years after graduating from high school. Case study research can use evidence from one case or it can include data from multiple sources, which increases the reliability of the findings (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach & Richardson, 2005; Patton, 2002). By gathering information from multiple sources, researchers are able to obtain data that is representative of all participants.

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The participants of this study included eight young adults who had a documented disability, received special education services, participated in school-to-work programs and graduated high school between 1996 and 2001 (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). The participants included four males and four females with age ranges from twenty-five to twenty-nine years and reported annual earnings of more than \$20,000 per year (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). Researchers utilized interviews with employers and vocational rehabilitation counselors in order to verify employment status, job titles and length of employment. According to the researchers, the participants in the study worked an average of four different jobs between six and thirty hours per week (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). The topics addressed during the interviews included: (a) individual characteristics and personal attributes, (b) family support and expectations, (c) high school and post school services and supports, (d) work-place experiences and (e) other post school training or education (Lindstrom, et al., 2007).

The findings of this research indicated that the three key elements that influenced the post-secondary success were work experiences, transition or support services and family support (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). Each participant stated that prior work experience had an influence on his or her work experience such as, teamwork, responsibility and work ethic (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). All participants indicated that they had received some type of transition service throughout high school and this helped better prepare them for employment. They identified these services as resume preparation, interviewing skills, job finding and shadowing prospective employers (Lindstrom, et al., 2007). The researchers also concluded that families play a significant role in assisting students achieve success in adulthood. There were major differences in the way in which families were involved with the men and the women who participated in the study. Most parents of the men were not as involved and had lower expectations, while the

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families of the females were more active and supportive of their daughters' success following high school (Lindstrom, et al., 2007).

Transition planning plays a significant role in the lives of students with disabilities. It is important that families, educators, professionals and anyone involved in the student's life remain involved in the ongoing transition process. They need to realize that even though the student has a disability, he or she still has plans for what they want to do following high school (Test, Aspel & Everson, 2006). These plans may include finding employment, continuing education and acquiring the functional skills needed to live independently. If everyone involved in these students' lives work together consistently to ensure that they receive the skills and knowledge needed to attain their goals, this will increase the students' chances of leading a productive and independent adult life (Mazzotti, Rowe, Kelley, Test, Fowler, Kohler & Kortering, 2009).

### **Self-Determination**

Self-determination is the ability for one to make their own decisions in a specific and purposeful way in order to improve their quality of life (Wehmeyer, 1996). Wehmeyer (1996) conducted research that established a connection between self-determination and quality of life. Other research has demonstrated that enhanced self-determination is a major factor in improved post-secondary and quality-of-life outcomes for students with disabilities (McDougall, Evans & Baldwin, 2010). Promoting self-determination among students with disabilities has been a principle focus of policy, research and practice related to special education transition planning for nearly two decades (Ward, 2006).

Current research emphasizes the benefits of utilizing self-determination in acquiring positive outcomes for students with disabilities, both while they are in school and also with their post

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school endeavors (Cho, Wehmeyer & Kingston, 2012). This research suggests that improved self-determination helps students succeed in their post-secondary life in the areas of employment, independence and quality of life. Self-determination instruction assists students with learning how to establish achievable goals, make decisions, solve problems and advocate for themselves. Educators can implement self-determination instruction by allowing students to take a certain amount of responsibility for their learning and this may include teaching students effective ways to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a constructive and organized manner. It may also involve teaching leadership skills that will contribute to improved confidence levels that ultimately lead to more independence. This process helps students better understand their own strengths and weaknesses and improves their communication skills. It also empowers students to take control of their environment, which results in more enhanced socialization skills and independence (Sebag, 2010).

One of the primary elements of self-determination is the ability to communicate one's choices regarding decision-making, self-assertion, setting personal goals and evaluating personal behavior (Kleinert, Harrison, Fisher & Kleinert, 2010). Research has indicated that students with disabilities who have effective communication systems also have strong self-determination skills and experience more positive post-school experiences (Kleinert, et al., 2010). It is often very difficult to teach self-determination skills to students with significant disabilities and students who have difficulty with functional communication. This is difficult because many of the students cannot express their wants and needs vocally and often have to use gestures or signals to communicate. In addition, some of the students who can speak find it very difficult to express their wants or needs in a way in which the teacher understands. This is a very daunting task for

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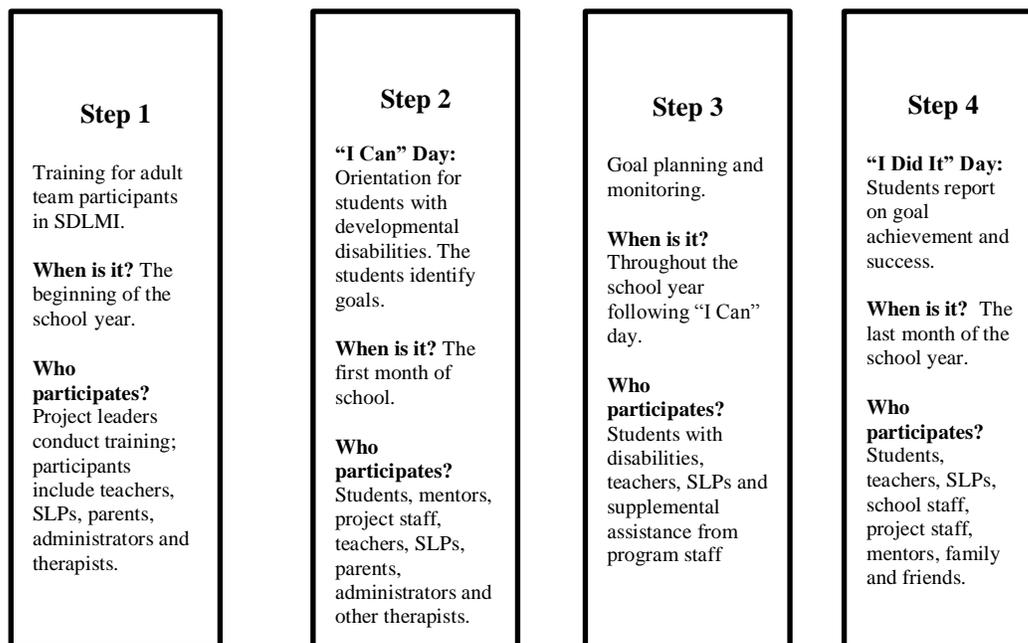
teachers, given the fact that self-determination skills are critical to the quality of life of their students (Kleinert, et al., 2010).

The Kentucky Youth Advocacy Project (KYAP) to address these challenges and to teach students ages seven to eighteen to develop self-advocacy skills (Kleinert, Harrison & Fleming, 2007). This model emphasizes the importance of a team approach including the teachers, Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs), administrators, therapists and parents to assist students with developing goals they feel will help them improve self-advocacy skills (Kleinert, et al., 2007). This model consists of four steps that are completed by students and the adult participants:

- The first step addresses orientation and training of adult participants to help them understand the importance of communication skills to support self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities.
- Step 2 is “I Can” day and students learn the significance of making choices and setting attainable goals for themselves. During this step, the students work with the adult participants to identify goals that they feel they can achieve.
- Step 3 involves goal planning and monitoring as the students work with the adult participants to discuss plans for achieving goals and address any barriers that may keep students from meeting their goals.
- Step 4 is “I Did It” day and students celebrate their accomplishments and discuss goals and progress made toward achievement of these goals (Kleinert, et al., 2007).

See figure 1, which outlines each step adapted from The Kentucky Youth Advocacy Project (KYAP) Model (Kleinert, et al., 2007).

**Figure 1. The Kentucky Youth Advocacy Project (KYAP) Model**



Note: SDLMI (Wehmeyer et al., 2012); SLPs = speech/language pathologists (Kleinert, Harrison & Fleming, 2007).

A major obstacle that teachers face when teaching self-determination, is that a majority of them are unsure of the most effective way of incorporating self-determination into the core curriculum. According to research, numerous teachers report that they are unaware of any type of curriculum that involves self-determination instruction and they do not formally teach it, (Thoma, Nathanson, Baker & Tamura, 2002). In response to these concerns, Konrad, Walker, Fowler, Test and Wood (2008) developed a model for aligning self-determination and general curriculum standards (Konrad, Walker, Fowler, Test & Wood, 2008).

The model is designed to help teachers become more comfortable with this process by making it easier to provide instruction on self-determination along with core curriculum subjects.

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The model consists of the following three steps: decide what to teach, decide how to teach it and evaluate and adjust teaching methods as needed (Konrad, et al., 2008).

During step one of this model, teachers are able to determine what they are going to teach based on the academic content standards and curriculum. Another crucial aspect of this step is for teachers to identify each student's academic needs. Teachers must also recognize which component of self-determination needs should be targeted for each student (Konrad, et al., 2008).

This can be achieved by utilizing teacher observations, parent or guardian feedback and self-determination assessments. The two most commonly used assessments for self-determination are The ARC's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) and the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug & Stolarski, 1994). The ARC's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) is a questionnaire completed by students regarding their perspectives on autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment and self-realization (Shogren, 2013). The AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) is available in three versions for students, parents and educators. The questionnaires are utilized to assess students according to their ability to exhibit self-determination skills and the opportunities that exist to help improve these skills (Shogren, 2013). After utilizing observations, parent feedback or self-determination assessments, this model permits teachers to develop a plan for instruction that will be beneficial to students and will assist teachers with developing measurable goals for the evaluation method.

Step two of this model consists of methods that aid teachers in identifying evidence-based instructional strategies, evaluation strategies and implementation strategies. This includes determining the most effective way to present information to students based on individual needs

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and achievement. Teachers also need to determine how to evaluate student performance in order to determine if progress is being made toward achievement of goals. The third step in this model provides information relevant to measuring student response to instruction and adjusting instructional methods to include supplemental intervention if goals are not met (Konrad et al., 2008).

Another study was completed in order to examine the differences of self-determination between adolescents with emotional disorders (ED) and learning disabilities (LD) by exploring the perspectives of the special educators, parents and the students who participated in the study (Carter, Lane, Pierson and Glaeser, 2006). The researchers selected 85 high school students who were divided into groups based on their diagnosis of emotional disorder, diagnosis of learning disability, ethnicity, gender and age. Special educators, parents and the students assessed the students in order to identify their self-determination skills (Carter, et al., 2006). The participants included thirty-nine students with emotional disorders and forty-six students diagnosed with learning disabilities. The ages of the students ranged between 14.1 to 19.2 years and the majority of the students, 64.7% were male (Carter, et al., 2006). Among the students who participated in the study, thirty-eight were Caucasian, thirty were Hispanic, nine were African American and eight were Asian American or represented other ethnicities (Carter, et al., 2006).

Researchers utilized the AIR Self-Determination Scale to assess and measure the students' capacity to use and develop self-determination skills (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). The findings of this study found that students who had emotional disorders had less knowledge about self-determination and lacked the self-confidence needed to incorporate it into their behaviors at home and at school (Carter, et al., 2006). The researchers determined that additional research is

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needed to determine what effects age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status have on the development of self-determination skills (Carter, et al., 2006).

Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm and Soukup (2010) conducted a study regarding the effect that self-determination instruction has on high school students with cognitive disabilities (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm and Soukup, 2010). The research utilized a treatment group and a control group in order to gather research data. The students in the treatment group received instructional support to assist them with learning effective ways to develop self-determination and increase involvement with educational meetings during a three-year period (Wehmeyer, et al., 2010). The control group received no training to help increase their self-determination skills. The researchers determined that the students who received instructional support over the three-year period showed significant growth with their self-determination skills compared to insignificant growth among students who were in the control group (Wehmeyer, et al., 2010).

Another recent study was conducted to determine if utilizing the Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) helped students develop self-determination in their lives. The researchers hypothesized that the students who were instructed using SDLMI would have more self-determination skills than students who were in the control group (Wehmeyer, Shogren, Palmer, Williams-Diehm, Little & Boulton, 2012).

The participants were 312 students in high school who had been diagnosed with a learning disability. The researchers chose students from twenty school districts in three states: Kansas 27%, Missouri 31% and Texas 42% (Wehmeyer, et al., 2012). The ages of the students ranged from 13.5 to 21.3 years and 44% of the participants were female while 56% were male. The

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majority (55%) of the participants were Caucasian; whereas, there were 22% Hispanics, 20% African Americans, 1% Native American, 1% Alaskan Native, 1% Asian American and 2% of other ethnicities (Wehmeyer, et al., 2012). The two groups were both exposed to SDLMI, although the treatment group was exposed during the first year of the study while it was introduced to the control group during the second year of the study. The researchers determined that SDLMI had the same impact on the intervention and control groups, even though their exposure to the SDLMI occurred in different years, (Wehmeyer, et al., 2012).

There was a study completed in order to determine what correlation demographic information and ecological factors have on students' capacity for self-determination (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Little, Garner & Lawrence, 2007). Ecological factors are positive or negative ways in which personal environments affect individuals. The participants consisted of 327 high school students receiving special education services across six states (Shogren, et al., 2007). The students were divided based upon the category that they were labeled under at school; 49% of the students were categorized as mentally retarded, while 35% were identified with specific learning disabilities. Females comprised 42% of the group with age ranges of 14.8 to 21.8 years of age. Male participants made up 58% of the group and their age ranges were 14.3 to 21.8 years of age. The majority of the participants were Caucasian making up 62% of the study group (Shogren, et al., 2007).

This five-year longitudinal study examined how much impact special interventions had on self-determination and post-school success of the participants (Shogren, et al., 2007). The researchers utilized three different types of measurement tools: The Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), The AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, et al., 1994) and The Transition Empowerment Scale (Powers, Turner, Westwood, Matuszewski, Wilson &

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Phillips, 2001). The researchers divided the participants into four groups based on personal and environmental characteristics and the groups were labeled as learning disabled, mild mental retardation, moderate mental retardation and other health impairments (Shogren, et al., 2007). The findings of the study suggest that most teachers measure students' self-determination skills based on their cognitive ability while the students' rating of self-determination did not vary significantly between the four groups (Shogren, et al., 2007) indicating that the students in the four groups felt as though they could all achieve some form of self-determination.

Self-determination is different for each individual with a disability. It is based on individual beliefs about what that person wants or needs in order to live a fulfilling life. It is important that educators understand that self-determination is influenced by numerous factors. Researchers identified several personal characteristics that influence self-determination, including culture, gender, age and cognitive ability (Wehmeyer, Abery, Zhang, Ward, Willis, Hossain & Walker, 2011). An individual's environment also plays an important role in the development of self-determination. It is important to utilize this information in order to develop appropriate interventions that best promote appropriate self-management and self-advocacy skills (Shogren, 2013). Educators can create an atmosphere of encouragement by using personal characteristics and environmental factors to develop effective strategies needed to teach self-determination skills to students with disabilities (Shogren, 2013).

### **Teacher Attitudes**

Teachers often question how they can effectively provide transition services when regulations require them to teach according to core curriculum standards. Some teachers feel that these rigorous standards leave minimal time to focus instructional time on transition

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services. Furthermore, teachers often have a difficult time incorporating transition instruction with their core curriculum lesson plans. To effectively plan and incorporate transition services in a classroom it is important for teachers to understand that these services are intended to supplement materials being instructed (Grossi & Cole, 2013). In order to provide quality instruction, teachers need to learn effective ways to balance instructional time on core curriculum standards while allowing time for instruction on transition skills. This will better prepare students for post school endeavors.

It is important for teachers to know their students and personalize the way in which each student is taught. It is helpful to have background knowledge of students because it helps to understand the needs of students and provides relevant information that indicates the most effective way to provide instruction. Teachers can utilize an array of strategies to get to know their students on a personal level. The information obtained from these strategies can be utilized as part of the transition assessment and student profile (Grossi & Cole, 2013). One of the instruments that provide relevant information is a learning profile that identifies preference for learning based on auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities (Grossi & Cole, 2013). Another way that teachers can get to know their students is to have students complete interest inventories that can provide information regarding student interests, hobbies, family background, likes and dislikes (Grossi & Cole, 2013). One of the simplest ways in which a teacher can learn about students is by observing their behaviors in the classroom and outside of the classroom. This can provide teachers with valuable information regarding student behaviors, socialization skills, ability to follow rules and communication skills. All of these skills should be considered when establishing the most effective way to teach students in preparation for transition to adulthood.

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One research was completed in order to gather information regarding the importance of promoting self-determination instruction (Carter, Lane, Pierson & Stang, 2008). The participants consisted of 340 educators who worked within eight ethnically and economically diverse high schools (Carter, et al., 2008). The majority of the participants were female (57.2%) and Caucasian (79.3%). The educators reported an average of 12.8 years of teaching experience with 57.7% possessing a graduate degree. Special education teachers who worked in a resource or self-contained classroom made up 16.2% of the participants. The other 8.8% worked with related services such as English language learner (ELL) teachers. Among the participants, 77.3% worked in academic classes (i.e., language arts, mathematics, science and social studies) while 19.8% taught elective courses and 12.9% taught both types of classes (Carter, et al., 2008).

Educators were asked to rate seven instructional domains that are related to self-determination. The domains consisted of choice making, decision making, goal setting, problem solving, self-advocacy skills, and self-awareness and management skills (Carter, et al., 2008). Teachers rated each domain according to its relevance to other instructional materials and priorities in the classroom. The researchers used a six point Likert Scale with scores ranging from low (1) to high (6). The other section of data included information pertaining to the frequency that teachers taught each skill. Ratings for this information were also scored using a six point Likert Scale with scores ranging from never (1) to often (6) (Carter, et al., 2008).

The findings of this study indicated that educators ranked all seven of the components of self-determination as having moderate to high importance. More than two thirds of the educators ranked problem solving, self-management, decision making and setting goals as being very important (Carter, et al., 2008). Educators also indicated that according to the range of the scale, they sometimes or often teach the components of self-determination in their classroom. The

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majority of the educators reported that they frequently teach problem-solving skills as a way to improve the self-determination skills of their students (Carter, et al., 2008). The overall findings of this study indicated a strong positive relationship existed between the way educators ranked the components and the amount of time that they spent covering these skills in the classroom (Carter, et al., 2008).

Another study researched the attitudes and instructional practices relating to self-determination instruction and student involvement in the IEP process. The researchers conducted an online survey over a six-week time span (Mason, Field and Sawilowsky, 2004). The survey consisted of four sections including 1) student involvement in the IEP, 2) self-determination instruction, 3) demographic information and 4) open ended comments. Items on the survey addressed participant's attitudes concerning student involvement in the IEP process, self-determination instruction, student feelings regarding the IEP process and self-determination and instruction involving self-determination (Mason, et al., 2004). Items on the survey included open-ended responses, Likert rankings and checking all that applied. This survey was to take five to ten minutes for participants to complete (Mason, et al., 2004).

The study consisted of 523 responses from all fifty states and the participants included special education teachers (77%), general education teachers (12%), administrators (8%), related service providers (3%), education students (1%) and staff from higher institutions (1%), (Mason, et al., 2004). The teachers were identified as 22% working at elementary and middle schools respectively, while 25% of them worked at high schools. Teachers participating in the survey reported that they completed an average of 24 IEPs per year (Mason, et al., 2004).

The results concluded that special educators believe that self-determination and student involvement in the IEP process is important and valuable. Furthermore, there are differences

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between middle/high school staff and preschool/elementary staff with the secondary staff placing more emphasis on self-determination instruction and student involvement in the IEP process (Mason, et al., 2004). The results also showed that self-determination instruction was not completed in a systematic way and it was primarily taught on an informal level. The teachers indicated that they feel as though they would benefit from training on how to incorporate self-determination instruction with core curriculum instruction.

Another study was conducted to examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals regarding self-determination instruction. The researchers asked paraprofessionals to explain the importance of the seven components of self-determination including choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting, self-management, self-advocacy and self-awareness. The study addressed four questions regarding this topic:

- 1) How paraprofessionals view the importance of providing instruction in each of the seven self-determination do components?
- 2) How much time do paraprofessionals report teaching these skills?
- 3) What is the relationship between the importance and instructional time spent on each component?
- 4) What paraprofessional characteristics contribute to the ratings of self-determination? (Lane, Carter & Sisco, 2012).

Participants in the study consisted of 223 paraprofessionals from 115 randomly selected high schools. The majority of the paraprofessionals was female and had not completed a college degree. Paraprofessionals reported working in this position on an average of 10.10 years. The

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participants reported working with students in both general and special education settings (39%) while others reported working in a complete general education setting (35%).

Participants were asked to complete a two-page survey consisting of 2 sections and 23 questions. In the first section, paraprofessionals were asked to rate the previously identified seven components of self-determination instruction and then they rated how often they taught these skills. The researchers used Likert scales for each of these areas (one=low, six=high) and (one=never, six=often) in order to determine the importance placed on self-determination instruction (Lane, Carter & Sisco, 2012). The second section consisted of demographic information, information about their current position and the descriptions of student disabilities with whom they worked. The participants were also asked about their familiarity with self-determination using a Likert scale (not at all familiar, somewhat familiar and very familiar). The researchers also asked how frequently self-determination strategies were addressed during in-service activities using a Likert scale (never, sometimes, and frequently).

The results of the study concluded that paraprofessionals rated the significance of each component of self-determination as high with overall ratings of five or six on the scale. The paraprofessionals reported that they sometimes or often provide instruction on the components of self-determination. Paraprofessionals reported that they were somewhat familiar with self-determination instruction and few indicated that this was due to the lack of in-service activities (Lane, Carter & Sisco, 2012). Paraprofessional roles are becoming more significant in the education of students with disabilities and it is important to determine the attitudes they have pertaining to self-determination instruction as part of the transition plan.

### Summary

Transition planning and self-determination are significant because they provide goal-oriented skills that help students with disabilities transition to adulthood. It allows students to have input on the strategies that will be used to assist them with achieving goals that will improve their quality of life in adulthood. Educators need to learn effective ways to teach self-determination skills while allowing students to practice these skills. This is often difficult for teachers to do because they feel as though they do not have the time to teach core curriculum classes in addition to providing instruction on self-determination.

Transition planning and self-determination instruction are crucial aspects needed to help students with disabilities prepare for life following their school years. Students with disabilities can lead full adult lives with the guidance and support of everyone involved in their lives. That is why it is important for teachers to allow students to participate in the development of transition plans and to educate students on self-determination. My research hypothesis for this study is that there is a difference in self-determination instruction and transition planning based on teachers' perceptions or attitudes regarding the process of developing transition plans.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this study explores whether teacher attitudes have an impact on transition planning and self-determination instruction. This chapter provides a description of the methods used to examine this topic. It also includes the research questions, a description of the research design and an explanation about how data was collected.

#### ***Research Questions***

Research focused on special education teachers and their students to address the following question: How do teachers incorporate self-determination instruction with daily classroom instruction? This will help identify the connection between teacher attitudes and the amount of time that they spend teaching or modeling self-determination as a component of transition planning. As previously stated, my research hypothesis for this study is that there is a difference in self-determination instruction and transition planning based on teachers' perceptions or attitudes regarding post-secondary transition planning.

#### ***Research Design***

##### ***Setting and Participants***

Participants for this research project were high school special education teachers in a small, rural county in a Mid-Atlantic state. The school is located in a rural school district in West Virginia and has a total enrollment of 799 students comprising grades 6 through 12. The number of students receiving free or reduced lunch is 78.7%. The ethnic make-up of the school consists of 613 white students (76.7%), 181 African American students (22.7%), 2 Asian students (0.3%), 2 students belonging to two different races (0.3%) and less than 1% Hispanic students. The

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student/teacher ratio at the selected high school is 13.7 and the school employs 58 full-time teachers.

### *Procedures*

The principal at the selected high school was contacted in order to obtain permission to gather information from special education teachers by means of an online survey. A message was sent to special education teachers via e-mail explaining my research topic and asking for their cooperation by completing the brief online survey that had been developed. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey completed by the participants of this study and Appendix B for a copy of the message sent to teachers.

### *Teacher Questionnaire*

Teachers were asked to complete a survey consisting of 25 questions that consisted of Likert type questions, open-ended questions and demographic questions. The Likert questions were based on a four-point scale format. They were asked questions that encompassed their personal feelings regarding the importance of transition planning and how much time they spend teaching self-determination skills according to individual student transition plans. Teachers were also asked about the availability of resources needed to teach transition skills. Other questions addressed teacher attitudes regarding student participation when developing transition plans during the IEP process, whether the curriculum effectively prepares students for the future and the significance of utilizing available community resources and outside agencies to coordinate transition services for students. The demographic section addressed categorical data; such as, the gender of the teachers, how long they have been teaching and their level of education.

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The survey was based on a Likert scale that measures ordinal variables that describe rank order from highest to lowest. The survey also consisted of nominal variables that include gender, number of years of experience and level of education. For the purpose of this research, the survey presented to teachers is the independent variable (x) and teacher attitudes toward transition planning makeup the dependent variable (y). The population (p) consists of teachers in a rural high school in a southern region of a Mid-Atlantic state.

### **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

Transition planning is a required component of the Individual Education Program (IEP) for students beginning at the age of fifteen and if done correctly, it can provide students with a goal oriented foundation for their post-secondary life and endeavors. Although this is a requirement for all special education teachers, teachers employ varying techniques when developing transition plans and incorporating self-determination instruction into student curriculum. This study was completed in order to determine whether teacher attitudes have an impact on transition planning and self-determination instruction. This chapter details the data analysis techniques that were utilized and the results of this analysis.

A survey consisting of 25 questions was sent to special education teachers at Mount View High School using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. The questions were based on a four-point Likert scale format, open-ended questions and demographic questions. The survey was sent to twenty special education teachers and twelve teachers responded to the survey providing a 60% response rate for the study. Limitations in this study included severe weather conditions that prompted the closing of public school systems for several days at a time. Also, the inclement weather caused delays in IEP planning which impeded the completion of this survey by the chosen pool of participants. In order to generalize the findings of this study to special education teachers, it would be necessary to have a larger pool of participants.

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When asked how important transition planning is, 50% of the respondents reported that it is very important, 42% reported that it is moderately important while 8% considered it extremely important.

The participants were asked how much time they spend teaching self-determination skills in their classroom and 58% reported that they spend a moderate amount of time teaching these skills, 33% reported spending a limited time teaching self-determination skills and 8% reported spending a great deal of time teaching these skills.

Participants were asked how much time is spent in the classroom discussing post-secondary goals. Among the respondents, 67% of the participants reported spending a moderate amount of time doing this, 17% reported discussing goals with students and 8% of respectively reported spending a great amount of time and very little time discussing post-secondary goals with students during class time

When the respondents were asked if the transition curriculum that they use is effective in preparing students for future endeavors, 42% of them respectively agreed or were neutral regarding this statement, 8% of the participants strongly agreed with this statement and 8% strongly disagreed with this statement. The participants were asked if they believed that all high school students with disabilities should always participate in the development of their transition plan. Among the participants, 50% agreed with this statement, 42% strongly agreed and 8% were neutral regarding this principle.

The participants were asked if they think that transition planning should be provided for all students with an IEP in middle school and high school. According to the responses, 83% of the teachers surveyed agreed with this statement while 17% were neutral regarding this statement.

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These numbers indicate that this is a concept that could possibly benefit from continued research studies.

The participants were asked how often they incorporate teaching activities of daily living skills into their regular teaching routine. Figure 4 indicates that 33% of the teachers stated that they seldom did this or they did this on a weekly basis. Among the participants, 17% respectively reported doing this on a daily or monthly basis.

Other questions pertained to the participants' knowledge of community resources available in their area with 50% of the participants being familiar, 33% being somewhat familiar and 17% being very familiar. They were also asked how important they believed community services are to their students' education. Among the participants, 67% believed that this is an important aspect to education while 33% felt that it is very important. In addition, 75% of the respondents feel that it is important to collaborate with outside agencies to coordinate plans and services for special education students.

There were also questions that addressed the importance of communication with students and parents/guardians regarding post-secondary goals. Of the teachers surveyed, 83% believe that it is very important to establish effective channels of communication with their students and 50% contacted parents/guardians on a monthly basis, 25% made contact every three months and 25% of the teachers rarely made contact with parents/guardians.

Among the teachers who participated in the survey, 58% had five or more years of experience, 38% had 3 to 5 years of experience and 8% had 1 to 3 years of teaching experience. When asked about their level of education, 50% reported having a Master's Degree and 50% reported having a Bachelor's Degree. Nine of the teachers completing the survey were female

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and three were male. The participants were asked if they felt that additional training on the process of transition planning would be beneficial to them as an educator and 58% reported that it would be beneficial, 33% felt that it would be extremely beneficial and 8% were neutral regarding this idea.

The participants were asked open-ended questions to identify ways in which they feel that they could improve the transition planning process for their students. Several of the teachers stated that they believe that maintaining open channels of communication with students and guardians is very important regarding post-secondary goals. They also felt as though it is important to educate students on how to access community resources that are available to them. Another aspect that they identified is the importance of students learning to establish attainable goals for themselves. When asked what techniques they utilize when teaching self-determination skills, the participants identified several techniques. These techniques included teaching effective life skills, communication skills and leadership skills. They also reported that they teach their students effective ways to manage money, linkage to community resources and how to prepare for job interviews. The respondents were also asked to identify continuing education classes that could help improve the transition planning process. A large majority of them thought that it would be beneficial to have a workshop that taught them effective ways to incorporate transition planning into the core curriculum of education. Another idea included workshops with other area service providers to establish collaborative relationships that will provide a more holistic approach to developing transition plans for students.

The data acquired during this research study indicated that teachers have difficulty incorporating self-determination instruction with daily classroom instruction. When asked if their transition education curriculum is effective for preparing students for post-secondary

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endeavors, 42% of the participants agreed with this statement or were neutral regarding this statement and 8% of the participants strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

The data also supports the hypothesis that there is a difference in self-determination instruction and transition planning based on teachers' perceptions or attitudes regarding post-secondary transition planning.

Figure 1

Statements	Respondents	Extremely Important		Very Important		Moderately Important		Slightly Important	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Q1. How important is transition planning	12	1	8.33	6	50	5	41.67	0	-
Q12. How important are community services to education	12	4	33.33	8	66.67	0	-	0	-
Q13. How important is it to coordinate with outside agencies	12	0	-	3	25	9	75	0	-
Q15. How important is it to teach students ways to improve leadership skills	11	0	-	3	27.27	5	45.45	3	27.27
Q16. How important is it to establish effective channels of communication with students	12	10	83.33	2	16.67	0	-	0	-

Figure 2

Statements	Respondents	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Q6. The transition curriculum that I use is effective	11	1	8.33	5	42	5	42	0	-
Q8. Transition planning should be provided for all middle/high school students with IEPs	12	10	88.33	0	-	2	16.67	0	-
Q9. A high school student with disabilities should always participate in development of transition plan	12	5	41.67	6	50	1	8.33	0	-
Q10. Should school districts have accessible transition education materials	12	6	50	6	50	0	-	0	-

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Figure 3

Statements	Respondents	Great Deal of Time		Moderate Amount of Time		Limited Time		No Time	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Q2. How much time do you spend teaching self-determination skills	12	1	8.33	7	58.33	4	33.33	0	-
Q5. How much class time is spent discussing student goals following high school	12	3	25	8	66.67	1	8.33	0	-
Q7. How often do you help students engage in extracurricular activities	12	2	16.67	3	25	7	58.33	0	-

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to investigate teacher attitudes and perceptions regarding self-determination instruction as a component of transition planning during the IEP process. The results of this study indicated that the teachers who participated in the research study have difficulty incorporating self-determination instruction with daily classroom instruction. Among the respondents, 50% reported that they believe that transition planning is a very important component of the IEP process. This supports the hypothesis that teacher perceptions regarding post-secondary transition planning affects the amount of time that they spend teaching self-determination instruction.

The information obtained is similar to the findings of the study completed by Carter, et al. (2008) in which educators indicated that they sometimes or often teach self-determination in their classrooms. This was a much larger study in that there were 340 respondents and it was not limited to special educators. In addition, this study asked the respondents to rate seven instructional domains related to self-determination instruction. The time limitations placed upon this survey made it difficult to address all the domains of self-determination instruction. This is something that could be explored through additional research and it would provide a greater understanding of how transition planning is impacted by teacher perceptions.

There was one particular area of this study in which teachers were asked if they believe that transition planning should be provided for all students with an IEP including middle school students. This question elicited the largest area of agreement among the respondents. An overwhelming 83% of the teachers agreed that transition plans should be completed for students in middle school. This information differs from one of the studies discussed in the literature

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review. Mason, et al. (2004) completed an online study that encompassed a six-week time span. Once again, this was a very large study and consisted of 523 respondents from all fifty states and the respondents were not limited to special educators. The results concluded that self-determination and student involvement is a valuable aspect to the IEP process. The results showed that secondary school staff placed a greater amount of emphasis on self-determination instruction and transition planning. The results also indicated that self-determination instruction was not completed in a systematic way and it was primarily taught on an informal level. This also differs somewhat from the study conducted in that 58% of the respondents reported that they spend a moderate amount of time in their classroom teaching self-determination skills. In addition, the results of this study are similar to the study by Mason, et al. (2004) in that respondents of both studies indicated that it would be beneficial to receive training on the process of transition planning and how to incorporate self-determination instruction with core curriculum instruction.

Participants of the study were asked to identify techniques they utilize when teaching self-determination skills. These techniques included teaching effective life skills, communication skills and leadership skills. The teachers also reported that they feel that it is very important to educate students on the community resources that are available to them and to help students learn money management and independent living skills.

### ***Limitations to the Study***

Although the results of this study indicate that teacher attitudes affect the amount of time they spend teaching self-determination skills in their classrooms, the limitations of the study impede the findings. For more generality, it would be necessary to have a larger number of participants,

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a significantly longer time frame in which to complete research and a more detailed questionnaire for the participants to complete. The limitations to this study included severe weather conditions that prompted school closures for several days at a time. In addition, the inclement weather caused delays in IEP planning and since the respondents were special education teachers, this impeded the completion of the questionnaire.

### **Conclusion**

Self-determination instruction plays a significant role in assisting students with successful transition to adulthood. Transition planning is an important component of the IEP process and although it is becoming more relevant, teachers often find it difficult to incorporate self-determination instruction with the core curriculum instruction. This is often dependent upon the teachers' perceptions of the relevancy of self-determination instruction and the process of transition planning. Further research is needed in order to identify the connection between teacher attitudes and the amount of time that they spend teaching or modeling self-determination skills. Also, the findings of teachers' feelings regarding transition planning for middle school students could serve as a precursor for additional studies on that area alone.

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**Appendix A**

**Transition Planning and Self-Determination Survey**

**1. How important is transition planning to you?**

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Moderately Important
- Slightly Important

Other (please specify)

**2. How much time do you spend teaching self-determination skills according to the transition plan?**

- A Great Deal of Time
- A Moderate Amount of Time
- A Limited Amount of Time
- Little to No time

Other (please specify)

**3. How easy is it to get the resources you need to teach transition skills at this school?**

- Extremely easy
- Very easy
- Moderately easy
- Slightly easy

**4. How well do teachers at this school collaborate with each other to deliver effective and appropriate transition skills?**

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Moderately well
- Slightly well

## Teacher Attitudes and Transition Planning

### **5. How much class time is spent discussing student goals following high school?**

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- Very little

### **6. The transition education curriculum that I use is effective and helps students prepare for their future.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly Disagree

### **7. How often do you help students engage in extracurricular activities that help prepare students for post school experiences?**

- Once in a while
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Almost all the time

### **8. Transition planning should be provided for all students with an IEP in middle school and high school.**

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Teacher Attitudes and Transition Planning

**9. A high school student with disabilities should always participate in the development of their transition plan.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly Disagree

**10. School districts should have available and accessible transition education materials for teachers.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly Disagree

**11. How familiar are you with the community services available in your area?**

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar

**12. How important do you think community service is to student education?**

- Very important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

**13. How important is it to work with outside agencies to coordinate plans and services for students?**

- Very important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

**14. How often do you encourage students to make choices regarding their education?**

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Seldom

**15. How important is it to you to teach your students ways to improve their leadership skills?**

- Very Important
- Important
- Slightly Important
- Not Important

**16. How important is it to establish effective channels of communication with your students?**

- Very Important
- Important
- Slightly Important
- Not Important

Teacher Attitudes and Transition Planning

**17. How often do you teach activities of daily living to your students?**

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Seldom

**18. How often do you contact parents regarding student post-secondary goals?**

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every three months
- Rarely

**19. How beneficial do you think that additional training on the transition planning process would be for your role as an educator?**

- Extremely Beneficial
- Beneficial
- Neutral
- Not Beneficial

**20. In what ways do you feel you can improve the transition planning process for your students?**



**21. What techniques do you utilize when teaching self-determination skills to your students?**



Teacher Attitudes and Transition Planning

**22. Please identify any types of continuing education that you feel would help improve the transition planning process.**



**23. How many years have you been teaching?**

- 5 or more years
- 3 to 5 years
- 1 to 3 years
- Less than 1 year

**24. What is your level of education?**

- Doctorate
- Master's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree

**25. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**Appendix B**

You are invited to participate in a research project regarding Teacher Attitudes Toward Post-Secondary Transition Planning. This project is designed to analyze the implementation of transition education. The research is being conducted as part of the Masters in Special Education for Vicki Wallen and has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This survey consists of 25 questions and it should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not type your name anywhere on the form. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation in the research is voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose not to participate, just discard the summary from your email account. You may choose not to answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Once you complete the survey, you can delete your browsing history for added confidentiality. Completing the on-line survey indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact Vicki Wallen at 304-888-2058.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By completing this survey and returning it you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.