

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSITION PLANNING AND
POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES

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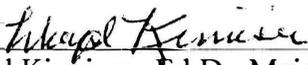
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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Valda R. Beasley Morgan entitled "Parents' and Students' Perspectives of Transition Planning and Post-secondary Outcomes." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Special Education.

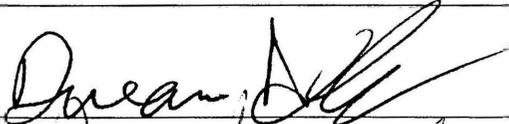


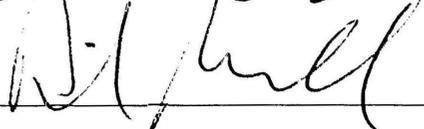
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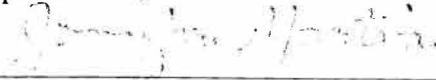




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ABSTRACT

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PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSITION PLANNING AND POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES

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One of many responsibilities for public schools concerning students with mental retardation is to assist students with the development of their individual transition plans. The purpose of this study was to evaluate if post-secondary outcomes identified for students with mental retardation while in public school were the actual outcomes in which they engaged since graduation from high school.

This study utilized a two part investigatory approach, (1) involvement of a focus group using the Metaplan process (Schnelle, 2008) and (2) a review of students' admission, review and dismissal (ARD)/individualized education program (IEP) team meeting minutes. Data from these processes were analyzed using a narrative of participants' responses to the research questions, and standard deviation to address the distribution of rating scores obtained when evaluating standards of evidence found in the review of the meeting minutes.

The participants were graduates of a North Texas area public school system. Two former students and two parents participated in the focus group session. Total participants in the focus group sessions N=4. Total records of former students reviewed, N=15.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of many milestones families experience is a child's graduation from high school. This event is the culmination of hard work, lots of planning, and relationship building over a period of years. Making the transition from high school to post-secondary endeavors involved more school personnel, community resources, and personnel from other agencies, for students with disabilities than for students without disabilities (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). When the celebration ends, families embark on the next steps for their newly graduated students. These next steps included post-secondary activities for individuals with disabilities like mental retardation or intellectual disabilities, that emphasized education, employment, and, as appropriate, independent living options (Nubert, Moon, & Grigal, 2002).

Parents of students with intellectual disabilities have the same expectations for their students as parents of students without disabilities (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). In response to their expectations and to comply with federal and state laws to assist parents in attaining these expectations, schools are finding ways to promote quality transition services (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). Until recently, discussions about the significance of transition planning were absent from the literature. For example, the National Council on Disability [NCD], (2000) collaborated with the

Social Security Administration to develop a report which chronicled the previous 25 years' legislation. This report indicated that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 amendments strengthened the requirement that school districts emphasized transition planning with identified students with disabilities beginning at age 14. These standards set out in IDEA (1997) helped put systems in place in such a way that parents could begin to plan their students' futures in a different context.

In addition, NCD reported that after graduation from high school, students with mental retardation had trouble obtaining services from agencies that serve adults with disabilities. Each agency has its own eligibility requirements, and this requirement may eliminate some students from consideration for services. Other agencies may have financial constraints that only allow for a specific number of individuals to participate at a given time.

Initiatives implemented to address transition and student success after high school included the formation of the National Transition Alliance (1990), which was established to help build capacity for involving youth with disabilities in school-to-work systems. The amendment of the Rehabilitation Act (1992) expanded access for persons with disabilities in the areas of employment and independent living. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) included students with disabilities. This act was designed to promote the creation of a high quality school-to-work transition system. This transition system included students with and without disabilities in programs such as work-based

learning, vocational education, academics and post-secondary education experiences.

The Workforce Investment Act (1998) established an environment which was viewed as a one-stop location to address the employment needs of dislocated workers, individuals with disabilities and youth. Later, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (1999), promoted changes in how individuals with disabilities would be able to accept employment without fear that federally covered insurance (e.g., Medicaid) would have to be forfeited.

Transition planning was emphasized as part of service delivery for students with disabilities since passage of the amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997). A definition for transition and transition services was provided through this reauthorization. Transition planning focused on post-school outcomes for students. It required input from students and their families about goals when these students left public school. Areas of emphasis in this policy included, but were not limited to, post-secondary education, community involvement, employment and independent living arrangements, transportation and other services available for individuals who have aged-out of eligibility for public school services.

Federal law requires that transition plans are ready for implementation on the day a student turns 16. The discussion of transition planning for school age students with disabilities, as a part of the public school's responsibility, dates as far back as the late 1970s. Increased interest at the federal level began in the late 1980s. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) provided funds for a longitudinal

study of students with disabilities and their transition from public school to post public school endeavors in 1989. The years of 1987-1993 were the focus of the OSERS study. The survey involved over 8,000 students with disabilities between the ages of 13-21.

Initiatives implemented to address transition and student success, after high school, included the formation of the National Transition Alliance (1996). Specific elements of transition services were introduced in IDEA (1990). The amendment of the Rehabilitation Act 1992 indicated the same definition for transition as IDEA. This amendment provided for the inclusion of all students in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994). Additional changes were included in the Workforce Investment Act (1998) and the Ticket to Work (1994) and Work Incentives Improvement Act (1999).

The biggest challenge in transition for students with disabilities is making transition work within the community. A follow-up study conducted by the state of Colorado indicated that students with intellectual disabilities participated in post-secondary activities at one-fourth the rate of their peers without disabilities (Mithaug, Horuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Halpern, 1991). In regard to transition planning and successful post-secondary outcomes, the report noted that the number of individuals with disabilities seeking employment was higher than the number of those employed (Brodsky, 1990). It was also noted that governmental policy makers were keenly interested in the transition of youth with disabilities from school to work (Brodsky, 1990). These issues brought a

new set of concerns to the public schools while planning for students and their families about post- school involvement.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 recognizes thirteen disability categories which receive entitlements to public education through 21 years of age. Youth identified with mental retardation or intellectual disabilities were considered the most difficult to facilitate post-secondary outcomes successfully. As early as the 1960s a joint report from the President's Committee on Mental Retardation (1969) and the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (1969) noted the limited success rate of persons with mental retardation in the work place. The Committees' combined reports cited socialization and adjustment to new settings as reasons for dismissal within 10 weeks of employment for participants with mental retardation (U S Government Printing Office [U S GPO], 1969).

The Committees' reports noted that employers had negative impressions of persons with mental retardation, thus preventing these individuals from being considered employable. A 1968 report which assessed employers' attitudes regarding persons with mental retardation, suggested that such individuals should be considered for employment in sheltered settings only (US Government Printing Office [U S GPO], 1969). A later study by the National Association for Retarded Children, of persons with mental retardation in the work place, reported that as these individuals overcame adjustment issues in the work place, their work records improved. The President's Committee on Mental Retardation noted that youth could be successful with post-secondary activities if

they were exposed to early training for work preparation, education and independent living experiences (US Government Printing Office [U S GPO], 1969).

Transition planning will require continuous and extensive student and parent input paired with overt planning in regard to behavior and social skills training (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). These authors suggested the higher the rate of parental involvement in student transition planning the higher the possibility of the student fulfilling post-secondary goals (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition [NCSET], (November 15, 2000)). Parent involvement is more than just sending newsletters; it should involve increased levels of communication and engagement between the teacher and the parent (NCSET). Zhang, Katsiyannis, Woodruff, and Dixon (2005) reported 60% of students with mental retardation had some level of transition planning initiated by age 14. However, they were less involved in follow through on post-secondary goals compared to youth with disabilities other than mental retardation. In the areas of education and independent living, researchers noted that few students identified with mental retardation had post-secondary goals that addressed education or independent living (Katsiyannis et al, 2005, Hart et al, 2006).

Hart et al (2006) reported that students with mental retardation often did not access post-secondary education in a traditional manner. Therefore, the need for extensive planning and overt collaboration is an expectation and is hugely important. Warger (2003) suggested that over the years it appeared that much had been accomplished for identifying post-secondary successes in the areas of independent living and employment,

thus paving the way for better wages, as well as assisting these youth with an enhanced quality of adult life. Posny, (n.d.) suggested strategies which often lead to opportunities for competitive pay for comparable work. These include: (a) the implementation of a strong vocational curriculum before students enter high school, (b) involvement in general education classes, (c) expansion of secondary transition services for 18 to 22 year olds that occurred on college campuses and (d) student involvement in self-determination training. Students will have input on their goals, share their desires for the future with other stakeholders and inform others about their needs in either the educational or work environment. These options shared by students will have impact on post-secondary choices and outcomes.

The requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004, present a few caveats that may have significant impact on how students with disabilities are: (a) evaluated, (b) considered for graduation and (c) what type of completion document or diploma is provided by a state's education department for the student. This conceptual process encouraged those working with students with mental retardation to begin the transition planning process early and in collaboration with those agencies that provide post-secondary education opportunities (Hart et al, 2006). Thus, the significance of transition planning is dependent on how each student's school team addresses transition planning and how early they begin the process among themselves [school teams] and eventually by including outside agencies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify relationships between transition planning and students' post-secondary outcomes. Some expected outcomes included those addressed in Public Law 108-446, 2004; transition planning must address employment, post-secondary education, and, when appropriate, independent living. Other expected outcomes included whether adult agencies provided needed supports. In some situations, recreation and leisure were also included among post-secondary outcomes.

Transition plans that were developed by students and public school educators to determine whether a student's quality of life could be enhanced through collaborative planning between agencies and planning teams. Halpern, (1993) stated quality of life concepts is one of the key factors to indicate if the transition process was successful. Improved levels of independence in transition activities are essential to promoting a better quality of life for youth with disabilities as they leave public school settings (Warger, 2003).

The identification and implementation of appropriate services and supports for students with disabilities is an arduous task. Groups working with students and their families must have a solid understanding of the capacity of the student and his or her family to follow-through with recommendations. When considering the range and level of severity of mental retardation addressed in public schools, all stakeholders must begin conversations early and investigate with the student and his or her family available resources within the community.

In some communities, the questionable availability of resources paired locally with the possibility that employment opportunities may be equally limited. Therefore, local school districts must document that early transition planning has yielded positive results for students.

Statement of the Problem

The greatest challenge is making transition planning work in the community (Mithaug, Horuchi, & Fanning, 198 Halpern, 1991). Likewise local education agencies are faced with the challenge of aligning transition planning in a way that outcomes are realized. Transition planning involved collaborative efforts of parents, educators, students and agencies that offered services for students with intellectual disabilities. These stakeholders need to know the student's strengths and desires for future activities. Students with mental retardation were noted as participating in post-secondary activities at less than half the rate of their peers without disabilities (Mithaug, et al, 1985). Transition planning and successful post-secondary involvement are important and require thoughtful focus. The number of individuals with transition plans who sought employment was actually higher than the number of the total group that attained employment (Brodsky, 1990). These issues are problematic for local education agencies as they plan with students and their families for post-secondary involvements.

Definition of Terms

Definitions of terms as they relate to this study are as follows:

Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Meeting: A meeting held in public schools for students with disabilities designed to discuss a student's eligibility as a child with a disability, his or her progress toward attainment of goals that involves a group of stakeholders. (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004): A United States Federal law that governs how states implement services to persons with disabilities.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A meeting that is required at least annually for students with disabilities which is designed to discuss a student's eligibility as a student with a disability, his or her progress toward attainment of goals that involves a group of stakeholders. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004)

Intellectual disability: Is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical skills. This disability originates before age 18 (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2010). Intellectual disability is also referred to as mental retardation in this paper.

Mental retardation: Substantial limitations in present cognitive functioning. Characterized by significantly sub-average intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the following adaptive skill areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-determination,

health and safety, functional academics and leisure and work (Accardo, Whitman, Laszewski, Hooke, & Morrow, 1996, p. 194).

Post-secondary outcomes: The identification of activities such as education, employment, recreation and living arrangements that students will engage in after graduation from high school (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997).

Transition (IDEIA 2004): A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, promoting movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment as well as supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, recreation and community participation. Student preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, and the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004).

Research Questions

The intent of this investigation was to gain information from parents and former students about their perceptions of transition planning and their post-secondary outcomes. The development of research questions encompasses clarity, consistency and tact (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 11). Based on this intent, the following research questions were designed in a way to facilitate open communication between the participants and the investigator.

1. To what extent did the components of transition planning (post-secondary education, employment, and independent living) benefit the participants after graduation from high school?
2. To what extent did students accomplish post-secondary goals after graduation from high school?
3. To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning? Did they lead their own IEP meetings; inform committee members of their preferred goals after graduation from high school?
4. To what extent were parents involved in transition planning for their students? Did parents share with the committee the types of activities their student participated in during non-school hours and days?
5. To what extent did community agencies, such as social security administration, mental health mental retardation, and Texas Workforce Commission, provide support for the student?
6. To what extent did transition plans indicate commonalities between plans developed while students were in public school and their actual outcomes?

Assumptions

Because students and families are empowered to make decisions about the transition process, the perception is that families may choose other options after graduation in addition to what was planned to facilitate transition. Other situations may occur which

impact the family in a way that the student is not able to continue with the transition plan.

Other assumptions of this study are:

1. Transition planning conducted in the school made transition easier for the student.
2. Securing work for students with disabilities was dependent on the state of the economy and the assistance of others.
3. Locating former students was dependent on information made available to school systems when students exited public school.
4. Transition activities identified during school-based transition planning were implemented once the student left public school.
5. Students and parents demonstrated a keen understanding about the purpose of transition planning.

Limitations

This study engaged a focus group consisting of former students of an area public school district and their parents. In addition, the researcher conducted a review of ARD/IEP minutes. Therefore, limitations with this study were:

1. The availability of former high school youth with mental retardation, from an area school district, to respond to questions related to their transition planning and post-secondary outcomes.
2. Some students may lack the capacity to fully participate.

3. Some parents' may have reservations or apprehension about participating in the focus group;
4. The participants will need to recall their experiences from as far back as five (5) years, thus presenting some compromise for the results based on how respondents remember the process of transition planning while they (students) were in public school, or how parents remember when their children were in high school.
5. The researcher's reliance on the structure of the Metaplan focus group model that information generated will yield information that is beneficial to the body of research and future students.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study were:

1. The size of the study group; no more than 25 participants.
2. The geographic location of the study.
3. Involvement of students who graduated from high school between 2004 and 2008.
4. Involvement of former students whose disability while in public school was mental retardation.

Significance of the Study

The process of transition planning is of major importance for all personnel involved with the education of students with mental retardation. The examination of students' post-secondary outcomes yields significance for legislators. The significance of this study includes the expansion of current research by including a component of face-to-

face interviews with both former students and their parents as compared to other studies that only involved telephone or mail surveys. This study will also address an evaluation of minutes taken during meetings for students before they graduated from high school. The evaluation of the minutes will focus on the level of involvement of the student and the parent during the meeting, the involvement of adult agencies, as well as the types of student assessment discussed during the meeting as documented in each student's meeting deliberations.

The research conducted will determine if changes need to occur, with transition planning in the public schools to assure improved outcomes for students. Finally, the results of this study will inform public school special education administrators about the relationship between transition planning and students' post-secondary outcomes, as well as, identify ways that schools can offer better supports for students and their families for life after high school. The results of this study will also identify ways to develop strategies, for use by schools, which are based on the opinions and direct input of individuals with whom schools have worked with to develop real and functional transition plans.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The involvement of students, their families, public school personnel and adult agencies in the development of transition plans for students with disabilities addresses the essence of transition planning. This process outlines steps toward positive post-secondary outcomes. It is a viable part of helping youth with disabilities, specifically mental retardation, to find their niche for life after high school. This journey is a requirement of the IDEA (1997) and IDEIA (2004). This review of the literature will offer insight on the chronology of transition planning and legislation that supports transition of students with disabilities from high school to post-secondary activities paired with studies conducted throughout the United States to evaluate the effectiveness of the high school planning. Finally, this literature review will include a review of standards for public schools in relation to the IDEA (1997) and IDEIA (2004). This discussion will begin with a timeline that reflects how legislation evolved so that young persons with mental retardation would be able to pursue employment after graduation from high school. A review of studies commissioned by the states of Colorado and Wisconsin, as well as a national study will be summarized followed by a discussion related to parent and student involvement, and local education agency responsibilities.

Historical Perspective

The path of transition planning from concept to implementation has been varied and involved many legislative initiatives. A chronological perspective of transition initiatives designed to support students with disabilities, as they proceed to post-secondary settings using collaboration among organizations and other entities and advocacy through the leadership of the state and national legislative supporters are paraphrased in Table 1 (Johnson, 2002).

Table 1

Legislative History of Transition

Date	Organization/Entity/Advocacy	Policy/Initiative/Legislation
1973	Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Civil rights protections for persons with disabilities
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975	Addressed improved educational services for individuals with exceptional needs; ground-breaking legislation from which future initiatives such as transition evolved.
1977	Rehabilitation Act of 1973-Amended	Implementation of Section 504 requiring federal grant recipients to make jobs and programs accessible for persons with disabilities
1989	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services	Allocated funds to conduct the National Longitudinal Transition Study (1987-1993)
1990	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Included provisions for transition services

Continued

Table 1 continued

1991	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services	Established systems change in transition paired with funds for transition activities
1992	School-to-Work Opportunities Act	Required involvement of all students in options for work and to be prepared to perform work after exiting high school
1992	The Rehabilitation Act amended	Used the same definition for transition as found in IDEA
1996	National Transition Alliance	Allocated funds to provide technical assistance to states involved in School-to-Work grants
1997	IDEA-1997	Included a legal definition for transition services, required an introduction to transition planning for students by 14 years of age
1998	Workforce Investment Act	Applies to the amendments of the Rehabilitation Act of 1992, emphasizing employment services
1999	Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act	Paved the way for persons who received supports through social service systems to return to work without fear of losing medical benefits such as Medicaid
2000	Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act	Focused on the developmentally disabled and their families and promoted their inclusion in all sectors of society (e.g.), economic, political, education, cultural, social and religion

Johnson, 2002

This chronological path is a just a sample of how the Federal legislators and organizations have emphasized the significance and importance of appropriate transition planning activities for students with disabilities. The IDEIA as amended in 2004 emphasized more specific and global transition activities for students. These activities included the development of post-secondary goals based on student strengths and interests in the domains of education, employment and as appropriate, independent living.

In 1977, it became apparent that personnel working with students with disabilities needed training to address services after students exited high school programs. Continued emphasis focused on the qualifications of teachers. Phelps and Clark, (1977) addressed a heightened concern for potential educational and employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities. The concern for post-secondary options for youth with disabilities was the focus of federal funds (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1991) for conferences at the national, regional and state levels that emphasized training for staffs working with the target population (Phelps & Clark, 1977).

Kagaari (2007) stated that after 30 years reports continued to indicate the need for training of teachers to work with students with disabilities in curriculum development. Teachers made proposals to committees related to transition planning. Kagaari (2007) reported that students were not prepared for the challenges of employment. This fact was directly attributable to limited skills of educators. If persons with disabilities, as referenced in IDEA (1997) were to experience success in the work place, some basic academic skills were necessary. Teachers must teach students basic academic content

and offer on-site vocational training experiences which facilitate the generalization of skills from the school to the work environment.

Parent and Student Involvement

To address students' transition plans, local school districts must have various activities implemented and monitored. Through post-secondary training opportunities, plans for youth will guide their future and assure that parents are informed what their children will need to know and what is expected of them as adults when they graduate from high school. Effective transition planning holds significance in regard to students' receipt of appropriate educational and support services (Zhang, Ivester, Chen, & Katsiyannis, 2005). It is imperative that the transition planning process be collaborative and encompasses the student's hopes for the future (Zhang et al., 2005).

Typically, before students exit high school, plans for post-secondary expectations begin at home. Schools become involved when educators share with parents, information (e.g., requirements for admittance to college and possibly guidance with course selection) while in high school (Kosine, 2005). School counselors are prepared to assist all students with information needed for steps after high school. However, too often students with disabilities and their parents do not seek information from high school counselors (Kosine, 2005). Kosine (2005) noted that school counselors are reasonably prepared to provide additional services for students with disabilities, yet many students and families are not seeking those services. School counselors can provide transition planning, career exploration, and educational interventions. Therefore, the student's planning team must

have access to these services for students with mental retardation. Another aspect of preparation of individuals with mental retardation for the work environment is through the professional development for the educators and on-site training for the students (Kohler, 1995). Professional development for educators promoted the establishment of natural supports in the work environment. Natural supports (e.g., are systems that are consistent in the work environment such as a fellow employee), assist the individual to maintain employment in an environment and the career of choice (PACER Center: Champions for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). Thus, employees who provide natural supports are allies for youth with mental retardation in the work place.

Phelps and Clark (1977) reported the importance of personnel working with students with disabilities in both the educational and vocational arenas. They emphasized that cross training allowed those who know the student best to target student strengths and promote generalization of skills in a seamless manner. Their recommendation suggested that teachers (special and vocational educators) possess certification in both fields. Therefore, professional preparation required for personnel working with identified youth with disabilities were specified and based on the certification requirements of each state. Early considerations about post-secondary needs of students with disabilities emphasized the need to prepare staff through professional development. School personnel (teachers and para-educators) should receive professional development on specific skills needed in the environments where students with intellectual disabilities may become employed or become involved in post-secondary education (Hart, et al., 2006).

Post-Secondary Options

Opportunities for individuals with mental retardation in post-secondary education settings are limited and rarely embrace persons with mental retardation (Neubert, Moon, Grigal, & Redd, 2001). Typically, post-secondary educational experiences are provided within two years of graduation from high school. Such training could be through an educational experience or vocational training that results in the acquisition of skills that can aid the individual in obtaining supportive or competitive employment. The provision of training that may lead to employability has yielded success for some students (Kagaari, 2007). Today, students with mental retardation are enrolling in community colleges, and thus have become a part of the post-secondary education environment (Hart, et al., 2006). Data suggested that most of the involvement in the college setting is through the auditing of classes and participation in activities like concerts and sporting events.

The process of transition planning can be complicated and difficult for parents who are already trying to balance busy lives (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009). Discussions among parents of students with intellectual disabilities indicated that the most useful information related to transition planning is obtained from teachers of their students (Ankeny et al., 2009).

Legal Perspective

The federal and state governments through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)-2004, expect transition teams to develop educational goals for students. The teams consisted of the student, parents, schools and other stakeholders.

The process of transition planning requires a variety of strategies that may be addressed differently from one setting to the next. Students and their families are assisted with this process. The National Council on Disability [NCD], (2004) identified best practices to promote a successful transition. Students' must demonstrate competence in basic academic skills, engage in community activities, interact with others socially and demonstrate appropriate work behaviors. Students must demonstrate relevant strengths in vocational skills as may be required in employment settings, (e.g., following directions in order to complete a task paired with the ability to advocate for themselves). School programs must develop criteria in a way that insures students acquire such skills before they exit high school.

State and National Studies on Post-Secondary Outcomes

A review of studies commissioned by the states of Colorado and Wisconsin and two studies mandated by the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) was conducted. The USDE studies; the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS 2) focused on outcomes for students throughout the country.

These reviews outlined background information as to why the studies were conducted, the method of data collection, number of respondents, and key findings. When noted by each study, specific information related to individuals with mental retardation was addressed. Lastly, findings of each study are discussed.

Colorado

Colorado was among the first states to formally address the transition needs of students with disabilities through a statewide follow-up study. This study was designed to seek input from youth with disabilities who graduated high school between 1978 and 1979. This study was authorized in April 1982. The target participant group's graduation from high school ranged between three and four years. The state of Colorado commissioned a statewide follow-up survey of former students. Colorado's educational leaders had an interest in the success rate of disabled students after they exited public school. The purpose of the study was to gain information about how well students with disabilities have transitioned to life after high school.

The results of the Colorado follow-up study addressed outcomes of 234 students. One hundred were students with disabilities. Typical barriers such as incorrect contact information in relation to telephone numbers and mailing addresses was the rationale for the low number of participants. Overall, 37 of the respondents were identified as individuals with mental retardation. The survey instrument used consisted of five parts addressing areas as follows: (1) volunteers sought participant permission to conduct the interview, (2) completion of high school background information, (3) responses to high school course work, (4) information about job experiences, and (5) information about the respondents' economic status in the community. The data collection involved a two part process (1) a review of background information sheets and (2) telephone interviews. Gender of the participants was reported to be consistent with the overall population as

males 65% and females 35%. Eighty-five percent of the participants' were in the 21 to 23 year age range. Four disability groups were represented in the study, and students with mental retardation accounted for 37% of the participant group.

The data indicated 80% of the students were employed, however, they earned low wages and seventy-six percent of the students were still living with their parents (Mithaug et al., 1985). Further findings noted that school personnel provided a higher level of support in helping students obtain employment than parents. It was reported that participants transitioned well to adult settings. Respondents gave higher ratings to special education programs as compared to ratings for general education. Finally, the Colorado study indicated that students could benefit from more vocational training while in high school.

Wisconsin

The purpose of the Wisconsin survey of former students with disabilities was to document outcomes of the students. Information gained from the study was used to make programming decisions that helped to improve education and transition services for students with disabilities.

Wisconsin surveyed students who exited high school between December 1999 and December 2000, and subsequent years through December 2003, encompassing a five year period. The study included 5239 students representing 429 public schools. The report defined 'exit' as receipt of a diploma, certificate or reaching the maximum age criteria (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2001). The first year results suggested that

transition activities within the school system yielded positive outcomes. Similar results were reflected in the year five summary. Students' involvement in their IEP transition planning paired with early and continued involvement with adult agencies appeared to be a commonality associated with success for students regarding their post high school outcomes.

The State of Wisconsin's one-year survey results, involved a sample of 1048 students from 151 local education agencies. Respondents indicated that while in high school 44% had contact with adult service agencies. However, after high school graduation only 12% reported still working with an adult agency. Other topics of discussion during transition planning included post-secondary education, employment, and independent living. The state of Wisconsin reported students with mental retardation as students with cognitive disabilities (CD).

A summary of the outcomes for students in the Wisconsin study reported as cognitively disabled represented N=73, 19% of the total sample. Of that group four (4) were involved in post-secondary education, such as a community college. Eleven attended some form of technical or vocational education. Nine were in adult education settings, and 33 engaged in on-the-job training.

The Wisconsin study reported that nine percent of students with CD were living independently. A description of independent living as reported by survey respondents was not provided. The study further indicated 66% of all survey respondents were involved in some aspect of paid employment. In addition, 66% of respondents of the

survey indicated that post-secondary outcomes matched the post-secondary goals developed during their high school individualized education program (IEP) meeting. Among all respondents, 50% had participated in paid employment while in high school for at least 12 months and 5% of those responding were students with mental retardation. Finally, 86% of all respondents reported they had participated in their individualized education program (IEP) meeting. In regard to participation in their IEP meetings, 78% of youth with mental retardation affirmed they participated in their meetings.

National

With a plethora of laws (Federal and State) related to the transition planning process, stakeholder commitment and student self-determination must be practiced by each student. The best time to determine if the efforts, planning and commitment have yielded expected outcomes emerges after the student has been out of the high school setting for at least a year. In 1983, the United States Congress mandated the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). The focus of this study was to provide information to educators, policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders in the special education community about transition for youth with disabilities. This initial transition study was conducted between 1985 and 1993. It involved 8,000 students with disabilities.

Data were collected through telephone interviews with parents and youth, surveys completed by teachers and campus administrators, as well as information from student records. The findings yielded information about various outcomes including school performance and school completion, social integration, arrest rates, employment status

and quality, as well as independent functioning. There was limited focus on individual categories of disability. The first report was published in 2001.

In 2001, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) was conducted as a follow-up of the initial study. This study included the years beginning with 1999 through 2004. The second study involved 12,000 students with disabilities and their parents. A total of 427 of the sample were students with mental retardation. The NLTS-2 survey was designed to determine student success as related to post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The study is expected to end in 2010. Data was obtained via a mail-in survey, and parent and student interviews. School districts across the country facilitated participation by obtaining permissions from parents to participate in the survey. After contacts from the local education agency, all future communication was between the parent/adult student and the organization disseminating the survey. Data obtained from this study emphasized disability categories (e.g., mental retardation).

A focus of this second study (Cameto, Marder, Wagner, & Cardoso, 2003) was to compare the rate of employment of youth with disabilities in 2001 to the rate of employment for students with disabilities in 1987. The structures and expectations in the meeting. The standards established by law were to collect data as students transitioned from high school to post-secondary settings. Preliminary reports indicated that the experiences of students with disabilities and their post-secondary outcomes had improved when compared to results of the initial 1987 study (Cameto et al., 2003). One of these improvements was an increase by 50% of students with disabilities who were gainfully

employed within one year of graduating from high school. The rate of employment increased by four percentage points for students with mental retardation, from 14% in 1987 to 18% in 2000 (Cameto et al., 2003). Another finding indicated that persons with mental retardation obtained work employment at a rate of 30%. Of students with mental retardation 87% had transition plans, and 15% of parents did not attend the transition planning meeting, while 70% of the students with mental retardation were reported as participants in their transition planning meetings.

Between the 1987 and 2001 reports, the data raised concerns related to increased inappropriate behaviors for individuals with disabilities. The report indicated that such behavior had a negative impact as former students sought and attempted to maintain employment. Another area of significance was that student success is closely related to students' participation in four (4) or more semesters of vocational courses within the same skill area. Twenty-three percent of the survey respondents were students with mental retardation. Within three to five years of exiting public school only 12% of respondents in this disability group had enrolled in post-secondary education. Among the same group (mental retardation), 37% reported being competitively employed within three to five years of exiting high school. These employment rates are admirable when compared to 68% of the general education population competitively employed over the same timeframe of exit from public school.

Local Education Agency Perspective

The importance of preparing students with necessary skills was emphasized by Wagner and Blackorby, (1996). They pointed out that a limited number of students with disabilities were actually graduating from high school. Even fewer of these students were securing employment. The authors suggested that schools must develop good transition plans. Good transition plans require a deep understanding for his or her future. They indicated that many public schools did not offer students with disabilities the option of attending college. Therefore, public schools should make a concerted effort to discuss the possibility of college with all students very early in their academic career. Hart et al., (2006) suggested that students with disabilities can enhance some of their skills by participating in a post-secondary educational experience. They noted improvements in areas of self-esteem, independence through post-school experiences in traveling from point to point in a larger setting, developing friendships, etc. Involvement in post-secondary education was emphasized for several reasons: 1) students with mental retardation require more formal training to compete for employment in fields that require training beyond high school; 2) as a group, they also need involvement in formal post-secondary training programs to provide opportunities for apprenticeships and work-based learning.

Transition is a varied and layered process. Transition planning requires the engagement of many people from a variety of employment settings for students with mental retardation. The expectation of transition planning is to encourage thought

provoking activities that yield desired results for the student (U.S. GPO, 1969). There must be a high level of commitment from all individuals and agencies participating in the planning activity. The key to success that transition planning yields results that all stakeholders expected through collaborative planning.

The student is the most important member of the transition team. In addition, IDEIA (2004) requires the student, parents, teachers, and other individuals from adult agencies to fully participate in students' meetings that address transition. Adult agency participation should represent a field in which the student has indicated an interest.

Collaboration

One of the consistent themes throughout the literature (Halpern, 1991; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; National Council on Disability, 2004) is collaboration. Collaboration emphasizes that all people and agencies involved with assisting students in transition must work together to form a common plan. The intent of this collaboration is documented through the language of Public Law 108-446, (2004). Within the framework of what transition planning should include is that school staff and other stakeholders must place the individualized components of transition activities for students in the appropriate categories and proceed to implement the planned transition services.

The IDEIA (2004) dictates that the collaborative process is essential to transition for all students. Team members assemble for the purpose of discussion and implementation of a student's transition plan. Members and their roles are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Membership Roster for Transition Planning Meeting

Position	Role
Student:	the most important member of the team, whose voice and desires must be heard. According to Federal statutes the student is expected to inform the committee what he or she is interested in doing and identify how the school or other entities may help bring that plan to fruition, therefore being more involved in decisions that will impact their lives.
Parent:	the parent, depending on the age of the student will, for a minor child, help articulate the student's plans for after high school, and on behalf of their adult student may assume a different role.
General education teacher:	this teacher will identify how to support the student through curriculum, course selection and other activities to help the student achieve his or her goal.
Special education teacher:	this educator will address supports and accommodations, vocational assessment, interest surveys and questionnaires
Assessment professional:	is the expert to address the student's abilities as evidenced by standardized testing and impact of disability on educational experience
Adult agency personnel:	with parent/student consent, agency representatives are invited to attend the transition-planning meeting to discuss access to services, eligibility requirements, and how the agency will be able to support the student.
	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act-2004 [34 CFR 300.321(a) and (b) (1)] [20 U.S.C. 1414(d) (1) (B)] ct 2004

Self-Determination

Student involvement in the discussion of transition is highly emphasized in federal law. There are significant steps schools must address in preparing youth with disabilities to participate in their ARD meetings (19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 89). One of the key elements addressed is the student's self-determination (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) examined the impact of the self-determination status of students on their post-secondary outcomes. Students with disabilities who engage in self-determined activities are engaging in goal-setting which is a very important aspect of post-secondary outcomes (Agran & Wehmeyer, 2003). They suggested that even students with mental retardation gain an elevated sense of self-determination. Students indicated a desire to live away from their family and to have a higher level of independence. One of the most important aspects of self-determination was that students must be responsible and assume ownership of their transition plans instead of others who are involved in the discussion of transition.

The focus of transition planning is to empower first the student, then the family and ultimately the community (Szymanski, 1994). Therefore, the involvement of agencies from within the community becomes vital to the transition planning discussion. These agencies have resources and other established contacts which public schools may not have relationships established over time that adult agencies have nurtured. Examples of adult agencies identified by schools that students and families may want involved in the transition planning include (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996) but are not limited to:

- Community colleges or area universities,
- Employment or workforce agencies,
- Local mental health and mental retardation authorities,
- Area transportation services, and
- Other entities as identified by the parents/student.

Discussions with representatives from the agencies listed above and possibly others should begin before the student enters high school as a means of assuring that students can prepare educationally and socially for involvement with either or all of the agencies as well as getting on any waiting lists that may exist.

Summary

Possibly the results of self-determination and similar activities encouraged a call for attention to transition planning. Halpern, (1991) stated in a paper presented at the first transition conference held in Alabama, that many students with disabilities graduating from high school did not have the skills needed to seek competitive employment or to enter post-secondary educational settings. In essence, Halpern (1991) indicated that these students are caught between two worlds without supports or tools to transition successfully. He cited the work of a parent of a child with mental retardation in which Sandra Kaufman chronicled her daughter's journey in a book titled, "*Retarded Isn't Stupid, Mom!*" This revelation laid the groundwork noting a gap in student preparation that interfered with a smooth successful transition. President Clinton promoted legislation for the passage of the School-to-Work Opportunity Act (1992), and many saw

this as an opportunity to outline a set of criteria that would level the playing field for students with disabilities seeking involvement in this apprenticeship initiative. Finally, Halpren (1994), advocated specifics for transition planning in areas such as community settings, individualization, access, and problem solving vital to student success.

The reauthorization of IDEA (1997) emerged as a charge for state and local schools. IDEA (1997) requirements further stated that local education agencies must plan meetings designed especially for the discussion of transition planning emphasizing post-secondary outcomes. Students' future expectations must be discussed, from the student's perspective, and ideally, the student would lead the discussion and share his or her own vision for the future.

The major themes from the literature review indicated that students with mental retardation are poorly represented in the workforce, possibly because students identified as mentally retarded graduating from high school did not have the skills needed to seek competitive employment or to enter post-secondary educational settings (Halpern, 1991). State follow-up studies indicated that even though some students with mental retardation gain competitive employment, their employment is at half the rate of students without disabilities or with other disabilities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how the decisions made with students with mental retardation during their high school transition planning were fulfilled after these students graduated from high school. Obtaining input from former students and their parents is important for local education agencies as they facilitate post-secondary transition for students. This chapter will address the process used to identify participants, the utilization of the Metaplan as a focus group process as well as the collection and analysis of information from existing data such as students' individualized education program (IEP)/admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) minutes.

This study utilized a two part investigatory process, (1) a focus group using the Metaplan and (2) a review of students' admission, review, and dismissal (ARD)/individualized education program (IEP) committee meeting deliberations or minutes. Part one of the study involved focus group sessions that used the Metaplan process. The Metaplan was used to gather information from former students and their parents about their understanding of and involvement in the transition planning process, the level of their involvement in transition planning and how those plans were implemented after the student graduated from high school. The review of ARD/IEP minutes comprised the second part of the study. The existing data consisted of the

deliberations documented during each student's ARD/IEP meeting. This review was an evaluation of the deliberations for evidence of the purpose of the meeting, recommendations and level of student and parent involvement in the meeting. Inner-rater reliability was used during the review of ARD/IEP minutes to address continued objectivity in the review process.

Specific input from the study's participants was obtained through their responses to research questions as listed below. Also, information obtained through a review of the records used a rubric to evaluate the deliberations documented during each student's ARD/IEP meeting.

Research Questions

The focus group phase of the study attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. To what extent did the components of transition planning (post-secondary education, employment, and independent living) benefit the participants after graduation from high school?
2. To what extent did students accomplish post-secondary goals after graduation from high school?
3. To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning? Did they lead their own ARD/IEP meetings; inform committee members of their preferred goals after graduation from high school?

4. To what extent were parents involved in transition planning for their students?
Did parents share with the committee the types of activities their student participated in during non-school hours and days? .
5. To what extent did community agencies, such as social security administration, mental health mental retardation, and Texas Workforce Commission, provide support for the student?
6. To what extent do transition plans indicate commonalities between plans developed while students were in public school and their actual outcomes?

Participants

The first step for the research portion of this study was to identify the target population and obtain their participation in the study. A research assistant was employed to obtain all requested names and records of participants. The research assistant generated a list of potential participants using existing records. The first step was to develop a list of potential participants. A request for individual student records was sent to the local education agency's records management staff and next to secure access to the local education agency's historical database. The research assistant ran a query to identify students who graduated from the local education agency. The search strands criteria were (1) students who graduated from high school between 2004 and 2008, (2) students who had a primary disability of mental retardation, (3) demographic information including student's mailing address and telephone numbers, and (4) the campus from which the student graduated.

This query yielded 19 students who met the stated criteria for the five year period. These former students' records provided supporting demographic information such as telephone numbers and mailing addresses.

The research assistant entered information in an excel spread sheet and assigned a code for each student. Coding involved using the research assistant's initials paired with a number beginning with one (1).

Personal information used to identify the potential participants was withheld from the researcher based on the desire to maintain confidentiality of former students and their parents. The information was entered on the spread sheet and included the student's name, his or her assigned research code, address, and telephone number, year of graduation, campus name, and willingness to participate in the study. The spread sheet also included a column to indicate if the mail was returned and the reason for the return. Participants' names were not included on the information provided to the researcher.

The query for potential participants yielded 19 former students based on the criteria used for the search. The research assistant made telephonic contacts with each person in the potential pool. The research assistant used a written script to confirm contact information and individual's interest in participating in the study. An example of the script is in the Table 3.

Table 3

Script Used by Research Assistant

Step	Commentary
1.	Greeting, caller identified self via name, agency affiliation
2.	Requested to speak with former student
3.	Indicated purpose of call, described study and offered name of researcher
4.	If former student did not answer the telephone, the research assistant confirmed the name and relationship to the former student, of the person who answered the phone
5.	When the person who answered the telephone was not the student, the research assistant inquired as to a good time to call back
6.	Confirmed that the former student graduated high school between 2004 and 2008, if the answer was 'yes' the discussion continued.
7.	Requested if the former student was interested in participating in the focus group session. Inquired if there were questions.
8.	Requested mailing address information
9.	Provided a name and telephone number of the research assistant in case there are questions after receipt of the information mailed about the study
10.	Asked if there are questions. Thanked the potential participant for agreeing to participate in the study

Seven of the 19 (36%) potential participants, maintained the same telephone number since graduation. Telephone numbers for the remaining 12 were reported as out of order. During the telephone contacts the research assistant confirmed the former student was still in the area and described the purpose of the telephone call by following the script described above in Table 3.

The research assistant then proceeded to mail Metaplan focus study information to the 19 potential participants. Eight (2.37%) of the 19 letters mailed were returned as undeliverable. The contents of the packets mailed included an explanation of the research study (Appendix A), information about the date, time and location of the focus session

and contact information for the research assistant if the potential participants had questions or needed more information. It was anticipated that after the potential participants received their packet in the mail, some of them would have questions or would want more information. Instead, return calls from potential participants were not received by the research assistant.

Of the seven (7) successful telephone contacts, three individuals agreed to participate. On the day of the focus session, no potential participants were available. Therefore, a future Metaplan focus session would be needed. The research assistant, on the next business day, then made telephone calls to the participants who did not attend to inquire about their absence from the session. One of the three participants indicated that the date and time was not good. Another participant indicated a change of mind and was no longer interested in participating, because it would be uncomfortable talking about her student with special education needs in front of others. The third individual, who previously agreed to attend, indicated that transportation was problematic.

A second session was scheduled. Two participants agreed to attend. No one arrived for the session. On the next business day, the research assistant made telephone calls to the remaining potential participants for whom telephone numbers were available. These potential participants extended apologies and stated a desire not to participate. No specific reasons were provided as to why they elected not to participate.

A third session was scheduled. The research assistant made additional telephone calls and located an additional participant from the original pool. The parent agreed to

participate but did not want the former student to participate. The parent stated that the former student may not understand the discussion. This focus session was held.

A fourth session was scheduled, when one participant/parent agreed to participate. The parent had two adult children who also agreed to participate. They met the criteria of the target population group.

The total participants in the Metaplan focus sessions were two parents and two former students. Therefore, the Metaplan focus group included information about three former students; data from the parent was included. The data obtained during the Metaplan focus sessions are reflective of 15% of the total participant pool.

Design

This study engaged a mixed method design. The qualitative data was obtained through a series of four focus sessions using a process called Metaplan. The qualitative data will be reported using a reporting process known as sensitization (Knafl & Howard, 1984). Sensitization (Knafl & Howard, 1984) fosters the reporting of data with the participants' or groups' point of view. Both direct quotes from the participants will be emphasized along with common statements from multiple participants.

Quantitative data was obtained through the analysis of ARD/IEP minutes. A rubric was developed to evaluate levels of evidence criteria ranging in value from one to five and contained eight areas of evaluation. In this study the questions used for the focus sessions were the research questions. Participants responded to six (6) questions designed to acquire information about the transition planning process for students while

they were in high school. The researcher used this qualitative technique as a means of gaining insight about the participants' impressions of post-secondary opportunities for individuals with mental retardation.

An ex post facto design was used to address the rating of the minutes of students' transition planning meetings that discussed post-secondary outcomes for the years 2004-2008. Data was generated through the assignment of values to standards of evidence applied to a rubric. These data were analyzed using standard deviation (SD).

Quantitative data were obtained from ratings assigned for standards of evidence. The evaluation of the review of minutes taken during each student's ARD/IEP meeting that discussed transition and post-secondary outcomes was applied to a rubric.

Metaplan

The researcher attended a dissertation seminar with professors and doctoral students from the Department of Teacher Education at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this seminar was to identify various research models for consideration by the doctoral students. Among the models discussed was the Metaplan.

The Metaplan model involved face-to-face interactions with study participants and the researcher. By design, the Metaplan model lends itself to large groups of 50 or more as well as smaller mini-groups of four to six participants. This study involved the smaller mini-groups. The Metaplan (Schnelle, 2008) is a method for evaluating outcomes of projects, activities or events. For the purpose of this study, the Metaplan process was used to evaluate transition planning for youth with mental retardation.

The Metaplan process has been used in educational settings to address educational care and training for individuals with various illnesses or diseases such as sleep apnea syndrome, when patients are leaving medical facilities and are charged with the responsibilities of self care (Godlay, Girad, Groudin, Metrailler, Lebos, & Ybarra, 2006). The Metaplan encouraged the patient to identify what is important and what is not important regarding self-care in the home. The Metaplan has been used to address the effectiveness of teacher training programs on teaching and learning activities in primary school settings (Garcia, 2004). In addition, the Metaplan method was used to obtain grandparents' perspectives about the rearing of grandchildren. This process helped to place levels of value on information grandparents believed educators needed to know when working with their grandchildren (Pemberton, Rademacher, & Anderson, 2006).

The Metaplan model required the involvement of more than one researcher. In this study, two research assistants were used to assist the researcher during Metaplan focus sessions. According to the standards of the institutional review board (IRB) for Texas Woman's University, the research assistants successfully completed the web-based training on "Protecting Human Research Participants." This requirement provided an added measure of protection for the participants in regard to discussions and comments of the participants being held as confidential. Upon approval of the IRB, the assistants were trained on the Metaplan process. The training session was one hour. Training involved an overview of the Metaplan. Each research assistant was given a one hour training session that included an overview of the Metaplan, and each step required to collect

participants' views. The research assistants were introduced to the materials used in a Metaplan session and a description as to the function of the materials. Finally, the roles of each assistant were discussed. Role playing ensued and focused on how to approach the participants when it appears assistance is needed, so as not to bring attention to the participant. The researcher identified the research questions and the prompts used as a discussion starter for each research question. After training and questions were answered, a mock session was held among the researcher and the two assistants.

The Metaplan facilitated a discussion-based approach for groups to communicate thoughts and impressions about a variety of topics. It promotes communication and is an excellent tool in gaining resolve in a timely manner about student and parent perceptions of transition planning for and with students with mental retardation.

In this study the Metaplan process was followed and involved categorizing participants' responses to the research questions by placing responses into groups of 'very important' to the process (transition planning and post-secondary outcomes) and 'not very important' to the process of transition planning and post-secondary outcomes. The first step in getting to the focus planning was gaining involvement from the targeted participants.

The Metaplan process was used to generate responses to the research questions about transition planning. Each research question was prefaced with a prompt designed to offer additional information for the participants. See Appendix B for examples of the discussion prompts and the questions. The Metaplan dictated specific multiple steps for

each question. Participants provided input through written responses on color-coded note cards for each question. For example, question one (1) and materials (paper the question was written on, note cards, and poster boards on which to post the response cards, rating and voting sheets) associated with question one, were yellow. Other questions, two through six, had specific colors as well. The response cards for each question were categorized by consensus of the group. Due to the small group size verbal responses were recorded by the scribe (principal researcher) during the session. As participants completed their note cards the cards were mounted on the poster representing the question being discussed. Participants were encouraged to continue to write down additional thoughts related to each specific question while the cards were being posted on the poster boards.

The Metaplan protocol was used to address the opinions of former students and their parents regarding the school's transition planning for post-secondary outcomes and the effectiveness of the plan after the students graduated from high school. The Metaplan model engages a process that avoids inappropriate use of time when working in groups to facilitate change, or evaluate an issue (Schnelle, 2008). The structure of the Metaplan process encouraged, participants to address questions using short written phrases. The Metaplan process promoted a direct action oriented approach. Participants summarized information rather than being engaged in unstructured discussions. Discussion occurred while determining categories for each comment. The session facilitator was responsible

for fidelity in the way the Metaplan model was implemented. A structured discussion ensued during the process of categorizing the participants' responses to the questions.

The Metaplan dictated a refined process involving multiple steps for each question asked. Participants provided input through written responses on note cards color coded by question. As the response cards were read aloud by the focus group leader and displayed on the poster for the corresponding question, the participants continued to write down thoughts related to the question discussed.

After note cards were posted by the researcher, participants worked as a group to identify a category for each response. The researcher brought the participants' attention to the rating and voting sheet see (Appendix C). The rating and voting sheet was numbered one through seven. The researcher reviewed categories with participants. Participants were instructed to write one category on each numbered line on the rating and voting sheet. Next to each numbered row on the rating and voting sheet were numbered one through seven which represent values of not very important (one through three) to very important (six through seven). Participants were instructed by the researcher to indicate by circle the number that best represented the level of importance for that category. As the participants completed the assignment of a value for each category, the researcher then instructed participants to select the category receiving the highest value in the number one spot located at the bottom of the rating and voting sheet. Participants were asked to identify up to four categories as the most important category based on their ratings.

The category with the highest rating on each participant's rating and voting sheet was voted by that participant as the first most important category on his/her rating and voting card, and so on with each subsequent highest rating category.

After each focus session, the rating and voting sheets were collected by the researcher. The researcher combined the results of the rating and voting sheets from all focus sessions.

Setting

The first of the four Metaplan focus sessions planned was held in a meeting room on the property of a local education agency. The room was designed to accommodate 25 individuals.

The tables were arranged in a square so all participants were at the same level in regard to seating arrangement. There was one window and the blinds were open. Refreshments were available in the same room. The procedures of the Metaplan were followed providing a view of materials mounted on the wall. Other materials needed for the Metaplan process (such as note cards, voting-rating sheets, research questions with discussion prompts) were arranged on a table in the rear of the room. Pens and pencils were also available.

The second Metaplan focus sessions was held in the fellowship hall of a local church. The room was arranged with a table for participants, and an adjacent work table for the materials specific to the Metaplan as noted above. Refreshments were available in the kitchen. Posters were mounted on the bulletin board in the fellowship hall.

The third Metaplan focus sessions was held in a parent's home, at the parent's request. This session was held in the family room of the parent's home. Materials related to the Metaplan were arranged on the coffee table. The posters were aligned on the floor. The atmosphere was welcoming and appeared to make the parent very comfortable. Refreshments were brought in a goody bag of treats for the former student and soft drink for the parent.

The fourth session was held in the fellowship hall of a local church. The fellowship hall was arranged with a table for the participants and a table for the materials. The posters were arranged on the bulletin board. Refreshments were available in the kitchen. The participants seemed to be very comfortable in the setting as well as enjoying the refreshments.

Review of ARD/IEP Minutes

A review of ARD/IEP minutes was the second part of the research component of this study. Existing data were minutes documented during the ARD/IEP meeting that discussed transition for student participants before their graduation from high school. The process used to obtain these records was similar to the process engaged for the focus session. In fact, the same participant pool was used for phase two of this study. The research assistant made a written request to the local education agency for access to the archived original paper files for the students listed on the data base developed when identifying participants for the focus session. The local education agency granted the research assistant's request for access to the archived original paper files for identified

students. Records were located for 15 of the 19 students on the research assistant's data base. The total files available reflected 78% of eligible participants' records for review. The research assistant prepared the files for the researcher by first assigning a code for each file. Photo copies of the records were made, and lastly, all personally identifiable information was removed from each record. Demographic information included the student's name, campus, and date of birth, address and telephone number. The file for each student was coded using the same coding system used by the research assistant when the data base was developed for participants in the Metaplan focus session. After the activities were completed, the research assistant delivered the files to the researcher. No participant's name was included on the information provided to the researcher.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria consisted of eight areas of standards that were embedded within the contents of the minutes, yet not documented identically from one set of data to the next. The standards of evaluation are elements that will allow non meeting participants to glean the essence of the meeting. The committee's expectations along with comments from the parent and the student are documented. In addition, if the student should transfer to another district or even another campus within a district, those involved with the student's educational program will be able to implement the plans documented through the ARD/IEP meeting minutes. Those specific standards are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Rubric Standards

Evaluation Standards for ARD/IEP Minutes

1. The minutes indicated the reason or reasons for recommendations
 2. The minutes indicated the purpose of the meeting
 3. The minutes indicated the student/family accepted the recommendations
 4. The minutes indicated the recommendations were based on specific assessment
 5. The minutes indicated the student/parent was actively engaged in the meeting
 6. The minutes indicated post-secondary goals were discussed with an outside agency
 7. The minutes indicated the student identified his/her own post-secondary goals
 8. The minutes indicated the type of vocational assessment administered
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Rubric

The minutes of each student's ARD/IEP meeting were organized differently in each student's records; therefore the researcher needed a system of uniformity for reviewing the information. In most educational settings educators use a rubric to evaluate data that are organized differently but have the same components. The minutes were organized using a rubric developed by the state of Colorado Education Department and the

Chicago Public schools provide sets of online scoring rubrics for use by educators (Moskal, 2000). A set of evaluative criteria was identified that reflected standards for minutes or deliberations of meetings that were established by the local education agency from which the students graduated. The criteria from the minutes that would be reviewed were applied within the rubric see (Appendix D). The rubric utilized values ranging from one (low) to five (high). The ratings applied to the rubric were associated with levels of evidence found in the existing data. The criteria in the rubric were aligned with standards of evidence found in participants' minutes. Therefore, the standards used were observable to the reader of the minutes document.

The rubric for the review of the minutes pages from ARD/IEP meetings is addressed as a specific set of criteria that utilized a uniform and objective process for documenting the content of individualized deliberations. A rubric permitted the researcher to identify what was important and how to assess a value based on the level of evidence provided. Educators utilize rubrics as an impartial method of evaluation especially when the product being evaluated has specific elements that can be presented in a variety of ways (Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993).

Inter-rater Reliability

To maintain continued objectivity in the review of the students' records, inter-rater reliability was utilized. The inter-rater reliability was provided by one of the members of the research team. An independent rater was trained by the researcher on the specifics of

the rubric with values that ranged from one (1) through five (5). A sample document was used to identify the areas of emphasis from the minutes.

Using an additional rater in the review of the existing data provided a range of agreement between the two raters and suggests a level of fidelity applied to the review when using the rubric. Inter-rater reliability demonstrates the extent to which two or more individuals agree, as well as addressing the consistency of the implementation of the rating system. The range of agreement between the two raters on one (1) of the 15 records reflected a nine (9) point difference between the overall scores. The difference in the scores could have been influenced by each rater's level of understanding of the criteria and experience with the tool that was evaluated.

Before the rating was initiated by the second rater, the researcher provided training. The two raters trained for thirty minutes. Training, education and monitoring skills can enhance inter-rater reliability (Colorado State University, 1993). The training involved an overview of the purpose of documenting the transition planning meeting via minutes or deliberations. Also an explanation about who comprises the committee, as well as the purpose of each individual's role in the meeting was provided. Other components of training involved a discussion of the rubric, and how to identify levels of evidence in the deliberations. After the training session, the additional rater made a random selection from among the available documents.

Ratings for the levels of evidence ranged from a low/negative of one (1) to a high/positive of five (5). The maximum points available on the rubric were 40.

Therefore, the overall rating of the minutes' review suggested that the higher the rating the higher the probability that the overall results of the ARD/IEP meeting minutes yielded excellent evidence of quality. The data indicated each student's immediate and future needs, level of involvement in the decision-making process, as well as identification of the basis on which recommendations were made regarding the student's post-secondary outcomes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The intent of this study was two-fold: (1) to gain information from parents and former students about their perceptions of transition planning for their post-secondary outcomes and (2) to review their Individual Education Program (IEP) minutes to determine the extent to which the minutes addressed the transition needs of students who were eligible to receive services under the category of mental retardation. Perceptions of the students and their parents were obtained through the use of the Metaplan focus group procedure. Next, each participant's admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) minutes were identified for review. Students' ARD/IEP school records were assessed and evaluated to determine which post-secondary goals were included.

Participants

The participants for the first phase of this research (Metaplan) were two former students who graduated in 2005, and two mothers of former students. The age of the participants was 27 years and the ages of the mothers were between 60-65 years. The total numbers of participants used in the Metaplan were four (4). The participants and their parents still lived in the community where they attend school and have graduated.

There were records for 15 of the 19 former students reviewed for the second phase of the study. The records of the two students who participated in the focus group sessions were part of this data. These were students who had graduated from an area high school

within the past two to six years. Their numbers are representative of only students with mental retardation. During the period between 2004 and 2008 the number of graduates with disabilities was 344. Students who graduated with a disability of mental retardation were .05% of the all graduates with disabilities. Table 5 below represents the number of students with a disability of mental retardation by gender and year of graduation who were in the study.

Table 5

Number and Gender of Graduates by Year of Graduation

Year of Graduation	Male	Female
2004	2	2
2005	1	3
2006	1	0
2007	2	3
2008	2	3
Total	8	11

Metaplan

Metaplan Focus Sessions

Four Metaplan focus sessions were held. Each question asked during each focus session was prefaced with a prompt designed to provide background knowledge for the participants. The discussion prompt for research question one included information about IDEIA (2004), and its requirements about transition planning while students with disabilities are in public school.

Participant responses to the research questions are below:

Research Questions

Research question (1). To what extent did the components of transition planning (post-secondary education, employment, and independent living) yield benefit for students after graduation from high school?

Participants were slow to respond after question one was asked. The researcher noticed hesitancy among the participants. It was not clear what caused their slowness to respond.

One of the students MB 15 responded first, “Community college;” followed by parent B addressing the student’s statement, and indicated that “community college may not be as safe as high school.” Other comments about the aspects of transition planning that were considered beneficial as discussed by the participants were captured as follows: Parents stated transition planning was beneficial as noted by parent B’s comment “available services” and parent A stated “information on benefits like Medicaid are good.” Parent A stated “insurance is needed” parent B commented “if my child works we could lose social security checks.” Parent A’s comment agreed with parent B’s position about the perception of risking social security if their students gained employment. Next, parent A stated “we do not want our student to work.” There was limited elaboration on why the family did not want the student to work. Parent A commented “getting help on the job could help.” Again, the first student (M 15) to speak mentioned “transition talked about different places to live.” The discussion on research

question one, came to a halt with the final comment from student MB 15 “I want to make some money, but I gotta to get a job.”

A repeating theme for question one was concern about benefits such as social security and healthcare from the parents’ perspective. The majority of responses to research question one were generated by the parent participants. The student participant identified as MB 15 offered input. A summation of responses to question one, indicated that at least one parent did not want the student to seek employment after graduation from high school. Benefits such as medical support (insurance) and social security are important to parents. At least one student was aware of opportunities for post-secondary education at the community college level, and was aware of housing options that could address independent living. (See Table 6).

The participants’ comments suggested awareness about the components of transition planning, however, their responses confirmed that they did not have high expectations for post-secondary outcomes. All comments made by the parent and student participants were placed in categories by the researcher. After categories were agreed upon, the participants were asked to review the categories. The participants were asked to identify at least three categories for each research question. After identifying the three categories, they were prioritized in order as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most important category for each research question. Participants’ input after responses were categorized indicated agreement with the categories. Information obtained in focus session three (3) involved only one participant’s input regarding categories.

The participants identified categories for each research question after all comments were posted. Question one sought input about the components of transition planning that yielded benefit for students and their families. Participants categorized their comments as (1) a better understanding of benefits such as social security and insurance, (2) employment would prevent their students from receiving benefits, and (3) the impact of not seeking employment. Participants' ratings for the most important category are listed in the table below.

Table 6

Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 1

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
1	Understanding benefits	3	1
	Impact of not seeking employment	1	2
	Employment eliminates benefits	0	3

Research question (2). To what extent did students accomplish post-secondary goals after graduation from high school?

Participant responses were limited. One parent (A) commented “my student’s behavior had improved.” Another parent (B) stated “since my student volunteers, he/she is more independent.” Both parents and one student, MB 16 indicated, “I know how to ride the bus,” Parent A noted, “learning how to use public transportation was an improvement in skills since our child graduated.” Along the same lines, parent B

commented, “using the bus system is a plus, since we don’t always have a good car.”

Refer to Table 7 for Metaplan participants’ responses.

The parent participants offered the majority of input for research question two. One student continued to talk about independent living options. One parent reported “my student participated with the adult day program and was able to volunteer in that setting.” “This has been good for my child’s self esteem,” she stated.

A common theme was not gleaned from responses provided for research question two. The activity of using public transportation received confirming responses.

Discussion for research question two about how students accomplished their post-secondary goals yielded the identification of four categories. Those categories listed below included independent living options and group homes, volunteering, no accomplishments, and participation in an adult day program.

Table 7

Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 2

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
2	Volunteering	3	1
	Adult day participation	1	2
	No accomplishments	0	3
	Independent living	0	3

Research question (3). To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning? Did they lead their own ARD/IEP meetings or inform committee members of their preferred goals after graduation from high school?

The parent participants had many comments about student involvement in transition planning. Their responses were varied and seemed to address the questions well.

Participants' comments are as follows:

Table 8

Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 3

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
3	Student involvement	2	1
	Student asked to take a specific class	1	2
	Parent involvement	0	3
	No involvement	0	3

One parent commented “the high school committee did not pay attention to information from the middle school.” The same parent also noted “the school was slow to listen to parent concerns.” Another parent, B stated “my student attended the ARD/IEP meeting but did not participate.” Parent A indicated “there were too many ARD/IEP committee meetings.” Student MB 15, stated, I remember those meetings.” Parent B said “my students answered questions when asked.” Parent A agreed and noted “my student was treated well by the members of the committee.” One student

commented “I asked to take [a] art class,” and a parent stated “my student had a chance to get a class like that.”

An additional query for research question three was did students lead their transition planning meetings in a way that informed the committee’s members of preferred goals after graduation from high school? Responses from the participants were limited, one parent participant simply replied “sort of” and when asked to elaborate the parent participant did not offer an example of that involvement, no involvement and students informed the committee of their interest (see Table 8). Other responses were equally limited such as another parent said “no.” Discussion among the participants on this part of the research question did not generate much dialogue.

Common themes were absent in relation to research question three. The conversation generated was not directly related to the researcher’s question. The researcher observed that the communication about the ARD/IEP meeting did, however, seem to help break the ice with regard to the participants’ level of comfort with participation in the focus session.

Question three (3) sought input from participants about students’ involvement in their transition planning and whether the students led their transition meetings. Categories identified included, parent involvement, student involvement, no involvement and students informed the committee of their interests as represented in Table 8.

Research question (4). To what extent were parents involved in transition planning for their students? For example, did parents share with the committee the types of

activities their student participated in during non-school hours and days? One parent shared “my student’s first year at high school was a struggle,” “participation in transition planning was not the best.” Parent B noted “once teachers finally realized what they [parents] wanted for their student the discussions got better.” Categories identified were, school did not listen, and teachers were good resources. See Table 9.

Table 9

Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 4

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
4	Teachers were good resources	2	1
	School did not listen to parents	1	2

One parent A responded “the school did not understand we did not want our child to work” and further stated “the school did not respect our wishes.” Parent B stated “teachers gave good information,” Parent A reported “the information was helpful for making decisions.” Both parents reported that the activities for students addressed work options, and that teachers helped them locate services. Both parents stated that teachers asked them [parents] what kind of information would be helpful. Student input was absent during this portion of the focus session.

Common themes around research question four suggested that parents believed their teachers were good resources for them and that the teachers made parents aware of a variety of options and services available for students with disabilities after graduation from high school. Further discussion about the research questions addressed input from

participants on question four (4) related to parent involvement in transition planning and types of information parents shared with the committee about their students when they were not in school.

Research question (5). To what extent did community agencies such as social security administration, mental health mental retardation, and Texas Workforce Commission, provide support for the student?

The parent participants indicated that the school discussed types of services agencies could provide. One parent said “most agencies had waiting lists.” Two parents and one student believed that there were not many options for students. The parent participants also noted that the county’s Arc (Association for Retarded Citizens) organization had good information about services for youth who had graduated from high school. Parents’ responses to question five emphasized a common concern about the availability of services for youth with disabilities. See Table 10 below.

Table 10
Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 5

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
5	No involvement	2	1
	Enrollment in program	1	2
	Agency waiting lists	1	2
	Services limited	0	3

Discussions with community agencies were not evident in the minutes of records reviewed. Question five sought input from participants about support from community agencies after high graduation. Categories were (1) services were limited, (2) agency waiting lists, (3) no involvement and (4) enrollment in programs.

Research question (6). To what extent do transition plans indicate commonalities between plans developed while students were in public school and their actual outcomes? One parent responded “sheltered workshop” options were available. Continued discussion about work parent B shared “work in food service businesses like area restaurants was available.” She continued “my student did not keep the job very long.” Student MB15 stated, I want to work in another city other than here.” This same student reported “I had a job, just no way to get there.” Another student reported “I did know how to use the bus.” Refer to Table 11.

Finally, research question six addressed commonalities between transition plans students actual outcomes. Categories identified below included yes, there were commonalities and no, there were not commonalities.

Table 11

Voting Results for Most Important Categories Question 6

Research Question	Categories	Number of Votes	Rank
6	No, commonalities	2	1
	Yes, commonalities	0	2

Review ARD/IEP Minutes

A review of the ARD/IEP minutes was the second phase of this research. The ARD/IEP minutes reviewed represented the documentation of discussions held during the ARD/IEP meeting that discussed transition for student participants before their graduation from high school.

A rubric was developed as the tool for evaluating each of the standards identified in the Table below. There were eight (8) standards of review. (Refer to Appendix O) for rubric). When minutes of a student's transition meeting are documented the recorder is expected to record information as found on the rubric. The higher the score assigned on the rubric for each student's evaluation of ARD/IEP minutes, the higher the quality of evidence noted in the minutes.

The review of minutes of the ARD/IEP meetings for the target group included a standard on student involvement in the transition process. Eight (53%) of the 15 records reviewed demonstrated excellent evidence of student involvement in the transition process.

To reduce bias, inter-rater reliability was utilized. The use of an inter-rater emphasized consistency between two or more raters. Therefore, the principal researcher and a member of the trained research team rated the minutes using a rubric.

The researcher and the second inter-rater closely agreed on three (3) of the eight (8) standards for a review of the ARD/IEP minutes. Scores for the researcher and the inter-rater were 26 and 35 respectively. The areas for which there was close agreement

included: 1) method of student’s exit from public school, 2) parent and student agreement with the recommendations of the meeting and 3) the minutes noted that the student was present in the meeting.

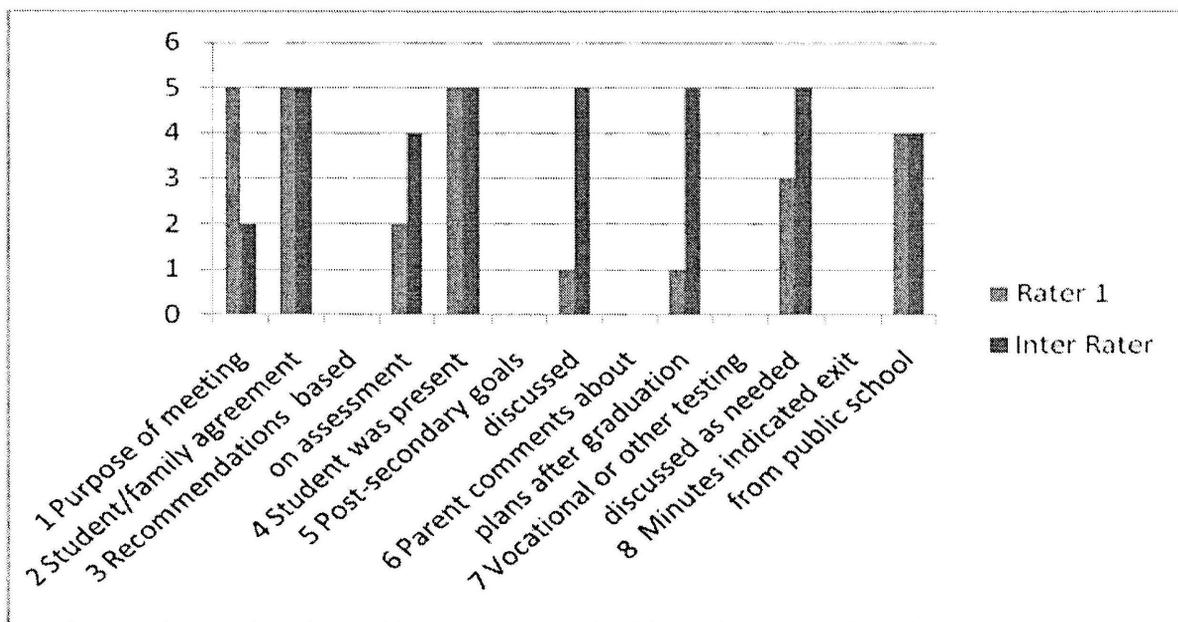


Figure 1. Inter-rater reliability by standard

The review of ARD/IEP minutes included records for 15 (78%) of the 19 former students. The rating of the ARD/IEP minutes using the rubric provided for the maximum possible points on the rubric for each standard as five (5) with a maximum overall value for the rubric of 40 points. The higher the value for each student’s ARD/IEP minutes the higher the level of evidence found within the ARD/IEP minutes.

Data obtained through the rating of the rubric were analyzed using standard deviation. Ratings for the student records scored using the rubric are below. The maximum score for any document was 40 with a minimum score of 1. The mean of all records is 26.6,

suggesting that the majority of records met an acceptable standard for addressing issues of importance for meeting deliberations. Records reviewed varied in the levels of evidence among the eight standards. Table 12 below notes the variations.

Table 12

Ratings for Records Reviewed

Student Code	Total Score	Rank	Rater 1	Rater 2
MB5	37	1		
MB10	34	2		
MB9	33	3		
MB17	32	4		
MB18	29	5		
MB14	28	6		
MB1	26	7	26	35
MB8	26	7		
MB16	26	7		
MB3	25	8		
MB6	23	9		
MB2	22	10		
MB13	22	10		
MB4	21	11		
MB 15	15	12		
<i>Average or M</i>	26.6			
<i>Standard Deviation (SD)</i>	5.76			

The data indicated the average range of the scores for the rubric at 26.6, six of the records reviewed scored higher than the mean and six of the records received scores lower than the average. The standard deviation for the rating obtained during the review of the minutes equals 5.76.

Scores obtained between the researcher and the second rater demonstrated that the researcher's score for the rubric was within the average range (26) and the second rater's score for the rubric was above the average range (35). The mean of scores obtained on the rubric for the rater and inter-rater combined was 30.

A basis for assessment and the need for additional testing are two areas that demonstrated the most inconsistency in the documentation of each student's meeting. See Table 13.

Table 13

Distribution of Levels of Evidence for Records Reviewed

<u>Levels of Evidence</u>	<u>Excellent</u> (5)	<u>Acceptable</u> (4)	<u>Limited</u> (3)	<u>Weak</u> (2)	<u>None</u> (1)
<u>Standard</u>					
1 Meeting purpose	14	0	0	0	1
2 Student family agreement	14	0	1	0	0
3 Basis for assessment	1	3	6	4	1
4 Student present	8	0	0	1	6
5 Goals discussed	6	2	0	1	6
6 Parent comments	1	2	1	0	11
7 Need for add'l testing	2	5	2	0	6
8 Method of exit	12	1	0	0	2

Excellent levels of evidence were noted among three of the eight standards on the rubric for (1) purpose of meeting, (2) student/family agreement with recommendations, (8) method of student's exit from high school. A high number of records-eleven reflected

no evidence reported on standard (6) comments from parents during the planning meeting. These were the same areas of strong agreement between the two raters. Scores for other standards were varied across the other ranges of levels of evidence.

The standard addressing the basis for assessment, more records (10) were reported as having limited to weak evidence. Overall the majority of standards evaluated through the review of records showed a pattern of scores being high in the area of excellent levels of evidence or no evidence. Table 14 addresses the number of records receiving maximum to minimum ratings for each standard evaluated.

Table 14

Range of Ratings for Records

Levels of Evidence	Excellent (5)	Acceptable (4)	Limited (3)	Weak (2)	None (1)
<u>Standard</u>					
1 Meeting purpose	14	0	0	0	1
2 Student family agreement	14	0	1	0	0
3 Basis for assessment	1	3	6	4	1
4 Student present	8	0	0	1	6
5 Goals discussed	6	2	0	1	6
6 Parent comments	1	2	1	0	11
7 Need for addtl testing	2	5	2	0	6
8 Method of exit	12	1	0	0	2

In the area of excellent levels of evidence, standards 1, 2, and 8 were the areas with the highest levels. In the areas of no evidence, standards 6, 4, 5, and 7, respectively indicated those records lacked evidence of the standard evaluated.

The range of ratings for each area of evidence yielded scores as noted above. The standards of deviation for the excellent levels of evidence are within 2 of the mean for the value of all standards evaluated. The standard deviation for other levels of evidence such as 'acceptable' and 'none' were within less than one of the mean for the standard scores. Overall, the results of the review of student records indicate that the spread of the values are within -1 to two standard deviations of the mean for each level evaluated.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research was to determine outcomes of students with mental retardation after graduation from high school. The study involved focus group sessions which consisted of former students and their parents. A second component of this study involved the review of ARD/IEP meeting minutes of the former students.

Federal law specified components for transition planning as employment, post-secondary education, recreation and leisure as well as independent living options (Public Law 108-446, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (2004) stipulates a student's initial transition plan must be in place by his or her 16th birthday. Schools are responsible for assuring that each student had a team of knowledgeable individuals including the student and the parent, who support the student with activities of transition planning.

Each research question in relation to the literature review will be discussed. Lastly, the implications of the study and suggestions for future research will be presented.

Research Questions and Literature Review

Research question (1): To what extent did the components of transition planning (post-secondary education, employment, and independent living) yield benefit for students after graduation from high school?

During the focus sessions after the first question was asked, the participants (former students and parents) were slow to respond. This hesitancy to engage with the researcher could be associated with the possibility that the participants had not had prior experience with involvement in focus sessions. One of the students did offer a response after which a parent began to respond. Comments from the participants for this and other research questions did not fully answer the questions. The participants did offer input based on their experiences and level of understanding of both the questions and the process of transition. Therefore, schools need to assure that parents are provided more information about transition and transition planning early in their students' educational experience thus helping parents become better informed participants in the process of transition planning. Equally important is to assure that students are given as much information about opportunities to discuss transition. Transition planning is about their future, therefore being well-informed will be beneficial for them as they embrace graduation and enter post-secondary environments.

This study reflected agreement regarding the importance of teams helping students identify what type of services and supports they will need as they prepare for adulthood (Posny, nd). In addition self-determination training for students is an important strategy for youth, especially as they begin to engage in transition (Agran & Wehmeyer, 2003; Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes, 2000).

Research question (2): To what extent did students accomplish post-secondary goals after graduation from high school?

Responses to question two were varied. Students and parents responded, however their responses did not address the question well. The student participants had been out of public school for five years at the time of the focus session. Their memories about goals after graduation from high school may not have been clear. Their graduation from high school was one year after the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004); therefore, activities for preparing students for transition planning were not well developed at the state and local levels. Thus student input regarding post-secondary goals was limited. Posny, (nd) and Halpern, (1991) confirm the void in student and parent recognition if post-secondary goals were realized. They discuss that transitional success is dependent on the quality of planning, involvement of parents or other family members, and especially the student. Halpern (1991) further elaborates that the school-to-work system in America is among the worst of most advanced industrialized countries. He continues by noting that only youth who know adults in positions of power will be able to find employment and others are will more than likely not be able to realize their post-secondary goals.

Research question (3): To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning? Did they lead their own ARD/IEP meetings or inform committee members of their preferred goals after graduation from high school?

This question contained two parts. Parents and students offered responses to part one of this question with comments about asking to take certain classes during their meetings. Parents commented that their children were treated well during the meetings. Detail specifics regarding student involvement in the transition planning meeting were absent

(National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1991; Posny, nd; Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes, 2000) discuss the importance of students' involvement in their transition planning, as well as defining other participants in those meetings who make up the transition planning team IDEA (2004). The significance of this involvement was not observed in either the focus group sessions or the review of minutes.

Agran & Wehmeyer, (2003) emphasized the significance of student's engaging in self-determination. With appropriate training the student is able to inform the team of his or her plans for the future and how the team can support those goals.

Research question (4): To what extent were parents involved in transition planning for their students? For example, did parents share with the committee the types of activities their student participated in during non-school hours and days?

Parents were very engaged on this question. Student responses were absent. Both parents noted their students' teachers were valuable resources. One parent also noted that her child's transition planning team did not seem willing to listen to the family's concerns. As for indicating if parents shared their student's non-school day activities examples were not provided.

Parent and family engagement in transition planning along with the student is highly expected as noted in (Ankeny, Wilkins, and Spain, 2009; Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, and Will, 2006; IDEIA,2004; NCSET, 2000; Posny, nd). Evidence of meeting the parent involvement component was not confirmed through the review of the records.

Research question (5): To what extent did community agencies such as social security administration, mental health mental retardation, and Texas Workforce Commission, provide support for the student?

Participation of community agencies was clearly absent as evidenced through the review of minutes taken during each student's admission, review, and dismissal, (ARD) committee meetings. Parents noted during the focus sessions they were aware of community agencies such as the workforce commission, and mental health and mental retardation. Neither parent commented that an agency representative was present in their students' ARD meetings. They (parents) continued to indicate that each agency had its own set of rules and many had waiting lists. In addition to access to community service agencies, post-secondary educational opportunities were discussed by Neubert, Moon, Grigal, & Redd, 2001. Post-secondary education is an option that parents did not discuss. Parent perception about services from agencies beyond the public school confirms that parents' expectations are high, but typically they do not pursue services.

Research question (6): To what extent do transition plans indicate commonalities between plans developed while students were in public school and their actual outcomes?

Research question six, evaluated the comparison between high school transition planning and students' actual outcomes. Parents noted that sheltered employment and competitive employment were options for their children. One parent did not want employment opportunities for her child, but was satisfied that opportunities to volunteer were available. According to (Halpern, 1993), outcomes are influenced by family

background, the quality of a student's school program paired with the level of transition services available. Comments from parents during the focus sessions confirm that their personal desires will outweigh the recommendations of school personnel. Perhaps more rich experiences during the student's school career, parents expectations can be better realized regarding their students' post-secondary outcomes.

Overall, parents seemed to be reasonably pleased with their children's outcomes. The student participants provided input to the research questions remarkably well given the novelty of participating in a focus group session. The parent participants were cooperative and seemed to become more comfortable as the focus session progressed. The participants did not have an opportunity to practice being engaged in a focus group.

Review of the Records

An evaluation of the minutes taken during students' individualized education program (IEP)/admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee meetings was conducted using a rubric. The rubric's design consisted of eight (8) standards whose values for levels of evidence ranged from a high of five (5) for excellent evidence to a low of one (1) no evidence. Total records evaluated were N=15. Excellent levels of evidence were obtained for 14 (93%) of the 15 records evaluated on standard one, the purpose of the meeting and standard two, the student and family agreed with the recommendations of the committee. Twelve, (80%) of the 15 records evaluated had excellent levels of evidence for standard eight (8), method of exit from public school, (such as graduation).

Eleven (73%) of the 15 records evaluated received a rating of no evidence for standard six. This standard addressed the involvement of the parent in the IEP/ARD committee meeting. Not only are parents encouraged to engage in committee meetings for their students, (Posny, nd) provides examples of parent involvement such as talking with teachers and making contributions to plan as well as expressing their expectations for the child's future. Other standards evaluated included 3) basis for assessment, 4) student present, 5) post-secondary goals discussed, and 7) additional testing.

The evaluation results of student's ARD/IEP committee meeting minutes suggest that campus teams need to identify ways to include students and parents in the planning process. Paired with comments from the parents during the focus sessions, there is, with this study group, a deficit in parent or student involvement and planning for post-secondary outcomes.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest the following implications for the field of special education in the area of transition in a number of ways. First, the focus of students with intellectual disabilities and their transition to post-secondary settings needs to be emphasized more by school personnel. Next, public schools need to inform parents about transition and its function in their children's futures. Lastly, schools should dedicate personnel on their campuses who are experts on transition planning, employment options, post-secondary opportunities, as well as independent living considerations. By providing dedicated transition personnel, parents and students will be able to increase

their circles of support. With the availability of employment opportunities becoming more limited, helping expose students with disabilities to competitive work situations will be an advantage for youth with disabilities seeking employment.

Helping parents to overcome stigma in relation to their children's disability will be key in providing a richer dialogue about the transition process. The researcher found it difficult to secure parent participation in a focus group study, which suggested that parent's are concerned about discussing their children with mental retardation or intellectual disabilities in a group setting.

The ratings obtained in the review of ARD/IEP minutes for students participating in their transition meetings indicated that students were present in the meeting, however, the quality of their participation is unknown. Alternatively, the same can be said in regard to the quality of parent involvement in the transition planning meeting.

Students admission, review, and dismissal (ARD)/individualized education program (IEP) committees must work to assure parents that their input is valued. Parents did indicate during the focus session that school personnel did not listen to them. Parents also stated that their children's teachers were good resources for them about options available for students with mental retardation and other disabilities (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009). Parents in this study shared that teachers took the time to ask what kind of information was needed or wanted. Parents also found that some adult agencies provided better sources for information than others.

Public schools may want to consider developing relationships with organizations such as the Chambers of Commerce, service organizations, and leadership programs in most cities as a means of identifying possible businesses and hiring managers who will support post-secondary endeavors for individuals with disabilities. These partnerships may provide future opportunities for students with disabilities as they transition from public school to post-secondary activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings of this study suggested possible topics for future research. Future research needs to investigate the long-lasting effects of stigma that was demonstrated when seeking participants for the focus session portion of this study. While it was apparent during a student's enrollment in public school that parent involvement was limited, similar patterns of resistance to engage in activities that remind parents of their children's disability were experienced. This researcher found that parents are still reserved about discussing their children with disabilities in open settings.

Other general areas of future research may include an evaluation of the types and intensity of vocational evaluation and training for students with mental retardation. Future research might investigate when vocational evaluations are completed for students with mental retardation and how the results are used for transition planning. In addition, future follow-up studies related to post-secondary outcomes and transition planning for students with other disabilities such as emotional disturbance, autism, and specific learning disabilities are needed.

During this study, the participants expressed a level of satisfaction with the availability of vocational training experiences while their students were in high school. Also a study related to the functionality of vocational training and the degree of competence gained by students as a result of the vocational training is an area for future research.

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APPENDIX A

Explanation of the Research Study

**Val Morgan
Research Student
Texas Woman's University
Denton, TX 76201**

December 2, 2009

Dear former student/parent:

I am conducting research to determine what type activities you/your child have participated in since your/your child's graduation from high school. The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee helped identify possible activities after graduation from high school. These discussions and recommendations were part of Transition Planning.

In my studies at Texas Woman's University (TWU), I am interested in learning about your/your child's current activities. I would like to talk to you about transition planning and current activities.

Enclosed with this note is an invitation to attend a Focus Group session where we will talk about transition planning and current activities.

I hope you will be able to attend.

Sincerely,

Val Morgan, Research Student
Texas Woman's University

APPENDIX B

Metaplan Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Question 1

Prompt

For students with disabilities, Federal law; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act-2004 (IDEIA) dictates that transition components such as post-secondary education, employment and independent living options are discussed with students and families beginning at age 16, and annually until the student graduates from high school.

Question 1

How did the components of transition planning yield benefit for the students after graduation from high school?

Focus Group Question 2

Prompt

The purpose of developing post-secondary goals through transition planning is to develop a path for students to follow after they leave high school.

Question 2

What post-secondary goals did students accomplish after graduation from high school?

Bluc

Focus Group Question 3A/3B

Prompt

The intent of transition planning as dictated by IDEIA-2004, is to promote the involvement of students and their families in a way to assure their voices are heard.

Question 3A

To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning?

Question 3B

Did they lead their own individualized education program (IEP) meetings, informing committee members of their preferred goals after graduation from high school?

Green

Focus Group Question 4

Prompt

Parent involvement is another area of emphasis that the IDEIA-2004 stresses as a means of assuring that parents are full participating partners in their children's educational experience.

Question 4

How involved were parents in transition planning for their students?

Orange

Focus Group Question 5

Prompt

Involvement of community agencies is another requirement of the IDEIA-2004. These agencies may be invited to students' IEP meetings to discuss how their agencies will provide students support in relation to their transition goals.

Question 5

What was the manner in which community agencies provided services for the student?

Pink

Focus Group Question 6

Prompt

The expected outcome of transition planning is that it will serve as a road map for students when they graduate from high school. Because of the plan, students and families will know what activities students will be able to engage in after high school

Question 6

Were there commonalities between plans developed while students were in high school and students' actual outcomes?

Purple

APPENDIX C

Metaplan Rating and Voting Sheets

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 1

Question 1: To what extent did components of transition planning yield benefit for students after graduation from high school?

How important is each category to you?

	Not Very Important to Very Important						
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Yellow

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 2

Question 2: To what extent did students accomplish post-secondary goals after graduation from high school?

How important is each category to you?

	Not Very Important to Very Important						
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Blue

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 3A/3B

Question 3A: To what extent were students involved in their own transition planning?

3B: To what extent did they lead their own individualized education program (IEP) meetings?

How important is each category to you?

Not Very Important to Very Important

1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Green

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 4

Question 4: To what extent were parents involved in their children’s transition planning meetings?

How important is each category to you?

Not Very Important to Very Important

1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Orange

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 5

Question 5: What was the manner in which community agencies provided services for the student?

How important is each category to you?

	Not Very Important to Very Important						
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Pink

My Participant Code _____

Date _____

Focus Group Member Rating and Voting Sheet for Question 6

Question 6: Were there commonalities between transition plans developed while students were in high school and students' actual outcomes?

How important is each category to you?

	Not Very Important to Very Important						
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vote on your top most important categories.

1st Most important category is # _____

2nd Most important category is # _____

3rd Most important category is # _____

4th Most important category is # _____

Purple

APPENDIX D

Rubric

Student Code: _____

Rubric for reviewing minutes of Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings

Documented Standards of Discussion

Level of Evidence

	1 None	2 Weak	3 Limited	4 Acceptable	5 Excellent	COMMENTS
1. Minutes indicated the purpose of the meeting						
2. Minutes indicated student/family agreed with the deliberations of the meeting						
3. Minutes indicated recommendations were based on a specific assessment						
4. Minutes indicated student was present in the meeting						
5. Minutes indicated discussion of post-secondary goals						
6. Minutes indicated parent(s) had comments about student's plans after graduation from high school						
7. Minutes noted vocational assessments and/or the need for testing (vocational, intellectual, achievement, etc.)						
8. Minutes indicated how the student would exit public school as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation via IEP completion • Graduation due to age 						

Maximum points 40

Legend:

- 1 no evidence 2 weak evidence 3 limited evidence
 4 acceptable evidence 5 excellent evidence

APPENDIX E
IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

October 27, 2009

Ms. Val Morgan
1931 Willowcrest
Denton, TX 76205

Dear Ms. Morgan:

Re: Transition Planning and Students' Post-Secondary Outcomes: Parents' and Students' Perspectives

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from October 27, 2009. According to regulations from the Department of Health and Human Services, another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy DeOrnellas, Chair
Institutional Review Board -Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Nan Restine, Department of Teacher Education
Dr. Lloyd Kinnison, Department of Teacher Education
Graduate School

From: Kinnison, Lloyd
Sent: Tuesday, October 26, 2010 1:10 PM
To: King, Bonnie
Cc: Morgan, Valda
Subject: Title Change for Val Morgan

IRB

Val Morgan's dissertation committee made a minor change in the title of her dissertation.

FROM: Transition Planning and Students' Post-Secondary Outcomes: Parents' and Students' Perspectives

TO: Parents' and Students' Perspectives of Transition Planning and Post-Secondary Outcomes.

Lloyd Kinnison

*Be the change that you wish to see in the world.
M. Gandhi*

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TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

*Approved 10-28-10
Holly DeDuellas, Ph.D.*