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A Study of Parent Satisfaction of the Transition from Junior High to Senior High
School for Students with Special Education Needs

Colleen M. Feldman MSE

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education.

Saint Paul, Minnesota
Summer, 2015

Approved by:
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the parental perspective and satisfaction with the transition process as their child, who is a student with special education needs, moves from the junior high to the high school setting. For students with disabilities, transitions within the education system can be more challenging and difficult (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2010; Kinney, 2006;) than for students without unique learning needs. Many parents of special education students find the transition from junior high to senior high school to be particularly intense. If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical. The overarching research question of this study asked: What are the specific perceptions and level of satisfaction that parents of special education students experience as their student makes an educational transition from the junior high to senior high? A secondary question was: Are there differences between parent perceptions and satisfaction between students with mild disabilities, moderate disabilities, and students with more significant needs? Finally, what suggestions for improvement do parents want the school to know about and understand that would make the transitions easier and smoother for parents, and secondarily for their students? This study was a hybrid case study with quantitative and qualitative components. Data were obtained from a survey with a Likert scoring structure and two open textbox questions. Recommendations for the district to consider in supporting students with disabilities as well as future research are presented.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Jim, my parents, and my loving Lord.

Jim has been my faithful supporter, editing my work, giving me time to research, listening to my frustrations and fears, and cheering me when deadlines approached and tasks were accomplished. His constant prayers for me and his overwhelming love were apparent every day. He has been my faithful friend, companion, and encourager not only through this journey, but also through our life together. I am a better person because he is my best friend. Thank you, Jim, for loving me and caring for me.

Education was very important to my parents, especially my father, who only received an eighth grade education. He made sure all of his children obtained college degrees and encouraged us to be life-long learners. They would have been pleased to see me complete this journey and I can only hope they know from their heavenly perspective how much I love them and miss them.

It has only been through God's presence and grace that this process has come to fruition. God has been present in all that I have done, has guided me, and encouraged me through His word, His worship and through others. He has chosen me and I am forever grateful! I am a daughter of the King!

Acknowledgements

I am humbled by the many people who supported me through this process. I want to acknowledge the administration of Stillwater Area School District, particularly Dr. Ryan Laager, Dr. Aaron Drevlow, and Ms. Mary Leadem-Ticiu. They encouraged me in my studies, answered my many questions, and supported my passion about my research. I also want to thank Mr. Paul Lee, Director of Student Support Services, who helped me acquire district permission to send out my survey.

I want to thank my committee members as they have each played a different role in helping me bring this dissertation to completion. Dr. Mary Schulze-Michener, who has been my advisor, prayed for me, encouraged me, gave me feedback quickly, and shared this journey. Without her guidance, this journey would have been more challenging. Dr. Sandra Pettingell helped with all the data analysis, which is not my strength, provided an opportunity for me to learn, and she was very patient with me. Lastly, Dr. Donald Johnson, who stepped in at my high school as an Interim Principal, was very excited to support and encourage my research. I needed you all at different times and I thank you.

I also want to acknowledge a group of dear friends who have prayed for me, asked me how things were going, and provided encouragement when needed. I had a great team of cheerleaders!

Finally, I want to acknowledge my cohort colleagues, and the special relationships that developed through our journey together. We have encouraged each other, laughed together, shared frustrations, struggled over data analysis and truly enjoyed each other's company. A special thank you goes to Emily Mertes, who has

edited my writing, organized my efforts, encouraged me, and prayed for me. You have become a dear friend.

Preface

When it was time to consider a dissertation topic my professor said to choose an area of interest, something I was passionate about, because the journey can get long and laborious. It was very easy for me to decide to study the transition process for students with special education needs.

In my 27 years of being a school psychologist, I have journeyed along side many parents as they have sent their students to a different building or even a different grade level. I have sat in numerous IEP meetings listening to the fears, frustrations, and concerns they expressed regarding who would care for their student at the next level and who would be the new people on their team. They wanted to know, would their student fit in, would they find friends, would they be in classes where they could have academic success, and would they be prepared for the next transition, be it to post-secondary training or the district's Transition Program for students who are 18 to 21?

As a leader in my building, I developed my research in an attempt to help parents and students navigate the transition between the junior high setting and the high school building. I am hopeful that through this research I can help make changes at the building level, as well as the district level to better support our parents and students as they move through the transitions that occur in the typical American School structure.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction of the Problem

American public school students often experience several transitions throughout their academic development. Learning to navigate change can be challenging for the student as well as the family and educational support systems. New responsibilities, relationships, learning acquisitions, and school experiences can evoke either positive or negative feelings as people learn to adjust to new environments and expectations. Academic transitions can provide opportunities as well as challenges for students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Neild, 2009).

The structure of the American public educational system contributes to the complexities of the transition experience. Public education is structured into clearly marked divisions: early childhood, elementary school, middle or junior high school, and finally, high school. Each major division involves a transition from one setting to another. Some transitions require movement within buildings to a new classroom or classes; other transitions require changes in school buildings. Typically, school districts structure and organize themselves to meet the needs of their community, which result in some differences across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Some elementary schools include preschool, some include kindergarten through eighth grade and miss the separate middle/junior high structure, and high schools can vary between Grades 9 through 12 or Grades 10 through 12.

Amongst many practicing school psychologists, anecdotal evidence posits that the years when students move from one educational setting to another, from early

childhood to elementary, elementary to middle/junior high, middle/junior high to high school, and high school to post-secondary programming are often accompanied by significant parental angst and stress. While transitions are a natural part of development (Cimera & Rusch 2000, as cited by Hill, 2010; Smith, 2010), and academic transitions are expected in the educational maturation process, student and parent perceptions of transitions can be positive, negative or neutral. Much of the literature regarding educational transitions has focused on the negative aspects, although there are positive outcomes as well (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Different and specific challenges are confronted during an academic transition based upon the age of the student and whether the transition involves movement to a new environmental setting. Unique educational ramifications and considerations are evident as students move from the smaller, nurturing environment of the elementary system to a larger system with multiple classes, multiple teachers (Barber & Olsen, 2004), an increase in academic rigor, and the onset of the adolescent tasks of developing self-identity and autonomy in preparation for maturation into the adult world. Research evidence indicates that student academic achievement can fall between middle/junior high and high school, and impact long-term graduation and high school completion (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh, 2000; Mizelle, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Neild, 2009; Newman, Newman, Griffin, O'Connor, & Spas, 2007). While these changes can be intense for typically developing students and their parents, for parents of special education students, the information and educational system present challenges that can be overwhelming (Stone, 2003).

Adolescence is a significant developmental transition, which typically coincides with a student's move from an elementary system to a secondary system. The elementary focus of a smaller one-teacher, holistic approach to education changes to a more independent and academic focus where students move around to various teachers, academic rigor increases, peer relationships take on new emphasis, and parent-child relationships change. Secondary teachers focus on a particular content area rather than teach a variety of subjects, and they teach groups of students on a period basis rather than one group of students for the majority of the day.

There have been a plethora of studies looking at how to implement programming to support adolescents in the transition to secondary schools (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Hertzog 1998; Milligan, 1995). With statistics that show students are at-risk for lowered academic success after the move from middle/junior high to high school (Alsbaugh 1998; Alspaugh 2000; Cauley & Jovanovich 2006; Neild, 2009), school districts have intentionally developed programming to help increase academic and social success after the transition has occurred. Some districts have developed ninth grade or freshman academies (Smith, 2010) and other districts implement differing levels of support from high school counselors visiting with middle/junior high school students, to parent meetings, building tours (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Smith, 2001) and intentional transition teams (Herzog, 1998) with positive results and improved student outcomes (Queen, 2002).

Background of the Study

For many parents of special education students, the transition from junior high to senior high school can be particularly intense. Conversations between parents and

school staff during Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning meetings, which address the move from junior high to high school, can create strong emotional responses from parents. There is an added layer of responsibility and challenge that accompanies a student with disabilities, particularly if the disabilities are high needs and significant. In review of the literature on transitions, the majority has focused on general needs of students, with limited information regarding how transitions are perceived and managed for students with special education needs. “Smooth transitions to high school for special education students are even more critical to their success” (Williamston, 2010, as cited by Dorman 2012, p. 22).

There has been limited research into the parental satisfaction with the educational transition process, for parents of special education students who are leaving junior high to navigate senior high school. Much of the research on the parental perspective has focused on the transition from Early Childhood to the Elementary setting (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). However, abundant research indicates that the transition to high school can be a pivotal year (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh, 2000; Cauley & Janovich, 2006; Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles, et al., 1997; Mizelle, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Neild, 2009; Newman, Newman, Griffin, O’Connor & Spas, 2007; Reents, 2002; Smith, 2001; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Data summarizing parental satisfaction demonstrates a decrease in satisfaction as the student matures, suggesting a need to evaluate the satisfaction level of secondary parents (Bouck, 2011; Newman, 2005; Starr, Foy & Cramer, 2001, as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2005).

For the parents of students with disabilities, observing their children move through the educational system, and seeing the gap between their student and typical students widen, can be fraught with anxiety, fear, and grief (Atwater et al., 1991; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hay & Winn, 2005; Walker et al., 2012; Worthington, 1989). Relationships between family, the classroom and the community all impact the success of a child's transitional experiences. Several scholars have suggested that successful transitions require an understanding of the experience from the child perspective, the parent perspective, and the teacher/school perspective (Atwater, et al. 1991; Whitton, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Academic transitions from a school perspective often focus on structural or organizational concerns (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008) or academic readiness (Hard, Rosewarne, White, & Wright, 2010) while parents are more concerned with social and personal issues (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). In Akos and Galassi's (2004) research, that is also supported by others (Smith, 2010), there appear to be three major areas of educational transitions at the middle school and high school level: academic, procedural, and social. Academic concerns center around homework and increased rigor. Procedural concerns refer to students navigating through a new and most often larger building, and social concerns address concepts such as fitting in and finding new friends (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Students, teachers, and parents may perceive the transition process differently with differing challenges and opportunities for growth.

The majority of literature and research has focused on early childhood, early elementary transitions, and middle school transitions with fewer studies addressing the unique needs of adolescents moving from junior high to high school (Barber & Olsen, 2004). As part of the adolescent maturation process, students strive to be more independent with less reliance on parents, and parents struggle to allow for that independence (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). Additionally, as students mature and develop, achievement of developmental milestones are fewer and farther apart. Parents and students look forward to the rites of passage of driving a car, applying to college, and developing independent living skills. For many students with special education needs, that pathway looks markedly different. As parents work with school professionals to help their student follow an appropriate pathway, the struggle between letting go, increasing independence, and understanding their child's unique pathway can lead to challenging emotions and tensions between schools and parents (Bennet, Brins, & Deluca, 1997). Research that has examined two of these transitional timeframes -- early childhood to kindergarten and kindergarten to elementary -- concludes that transitions need to be intentionally planned, with solid communication between school professionals and families (Atwater et al., 1991; Dorman, 2012; Walker et al., 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010).

Research supports the notion that while educational transitions can be challenging for parents, in general, they are more so for parents of special education students (Dorman, 2012; Stone, 2003). For parents of special education students, observing their student as he/she moves through the educational system, and seeing the gap widen between their child and typical developing children, can be fraught

with anxiety, fear, and grief (Atwater, Fowler, & Schwartz, 1991; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hay & Winn, 2005; Walker, Dunbar, Meldrum, Whiteford, Carrington, Hand, & Nicholson, 2012; Worthington, 1989).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the parental perspective and the level of parental satisfaction with the transition process as their child, who is a student with special education needs, moves from the junior high setting to the high school setting. If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical. What a school professional may feel as an appropriate avenue for educational programming may be distinctly different from the parents' view. Parents often believe they know their child best and want the school to listen to them and understand their unique child and his/her unique situations. Parents and teachers want to work collaboratively to support successful transitions, but there are times when parents assume an assertive advocacy role to the extent that tensions between the school and parents arise (Bennet, Bruns & Deluca, 1997). The overarching research question of this study asks: What are the specific perceptions and level of satisfaction that parents of special education students experience as their son or daughter make educational transitions from the junior high to senior high school? A secondary question is: Are there differences between parent perceptions and satisfaction between students with mild disabilities, moderate disabilities, and students with more significant needs? Finally, what suggestions for improvement do parents want the school to know about and understand that would

make the transitions easier and smoother for parents, and secondarily for their students.

Rationale

For students with disabilities, transitions can be even more challenging and difficult (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2010; Kinney, 2006;). For many parents of special education students, the transition from junior high to senior high school can be particularly intense. Conversations between parents and school staff during Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning meetings, which address the move from junior high to senior high, can create strong emotional responses from parents. There is an added layer of responsibility and challenge that accompanies a student with disabilities, particularly if the disabilities are high needs and significant. In review of the literature on transitions, the majority has focused on general needs of students, with limited information regarding how transitions are perceived and managed for students with special education needs. Since schools address transition support from a more organizational and structural position and parents and students are more concerned about social and personal needs, (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008), they appear to have differing priorities in the transition process. In order to develop a more effective and efficient transition process from the junior high setting to the high school setting, it is imperative that school professionals have an understanding of what would benefit and support both students and parents in the transition process. “Smooth transitions to high school for special education students are even more critical to their success” (Williamston, 2010, as cited by Dorman, 2012, p. 22).

The framework of this study is to understand the parental perspective and the level of parental satisfaction with the transition process as their child, who is a student with special education needs, moves from the junior high setting to the senior high school setting. If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical. School professionals and parents may have differing perspectives about appropriate educational programming. However, most parents believe they know and understand their child best and want school professionals to listen to their input and collaborate with them. Schools need a better understanding of parent perceptions and level of satisfaction in order to help parents of special education students move along the developmental continuum, build positive relationships with school professionals, and support mutually agreed upon educational outcomes for their students.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were designed to guide this study.

Question One: What is the level of parental satisfaction in the transition from junior high to high school for special education students? Are there differences in parent satisfaction with respect to the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken?

Question Two: Is there a difference in parental satisfaction based upon whether the student has mild, moderate, or more significant special education needs?

Question Three: What types of programming and supports at the high school level would be helpful for parents of special education students as they navigate the educational system with their child?

Hypotheses

H1₀: There is no difference between parental satisfaction and the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken.

H1₁: There is a difference between parental satisfaction and the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken.

H2₀: There is no difference between parents of special education students with different levels of disability regarding their level of satisfaction with the transition process.

H2₁: There is a difference between parents of special education students with different levels of disability regarding their level of satisfaction with the transition process.

Significance of the Study

This proposed study is significant to the field of education in that much of the research on transitions for special education students has focused on early childhood to kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade or from high school to post-secondary outcomes (Davies & Beamish, 2009). Studies have addressed at-risk students as they move into the secondary setting (Crosnoe, 2009; Stone, 2003), but there are few studies that address the unique needs of special education students and

parent satisfaction at the junior high to high school level. Dillon and Underwood (2012), researchers from the United Kingdom, studied the parent perspective of students who had been identified on the Autism Spectrum, during the timeframe of eighth grade to high school. Results indicated parents expected the transition would be traumatic for the student, the parents, and the whole family. Furthermore, collaboration between school staff, parents, and community service providers was essential in supporting positive post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities (Finn & Kohler, 2008; Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006; Zhang, Ivester, Chen & Katsiyannis 2005) and begins with the transition from middle school to high school (Milligan, 1995). Milligan (1995) reported that the transition to high school from middle school requires careful considerations of a student's post-high school plans, in addition to the move from middle/junior high school to high school. Specific components for an Individual Education Program (IEP) team to consider are the severity of the student's disability, student's long range goals, curricular needs, and inclusion in general education programming. Planning needs to be systematic and earlier in the process rather than later.

If school professionals are going to help support parents and students in the transition from junior high to senior high, research-based suggestions and practices are imperative. What professionals know intuitively may be accurate, but their appraisal may not be and may not reflect best practices. Additionally, how can school professionals develop appropriate transition practices that are supportive of parents, with an understanding of the goal of increased independence for adolescents, if research does not ask the parents what they need and what the transition process looks

like from their lens? Since schools address transition support from a more organizational and structural position and parents and students are more concerned about social and personal needs, (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008), they appear to have differing priorities in the transition process. Schools need a better understanding of parent perceptions and level of satisfaction in order to help parents of special education students move along the developmental continuum, build positive relationships with school professionals, and support mutually agreed upon educational outcomes for their students. This study can contribute to the literature in providing research based ideas, possible interventions and program development that would be beneficial in the transition process to the unique population of special education students, as schools work with parents to meet the needs of their children.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, students in special education are students who have qualified for and receive special education services through the public school district. Every student who receives special education services is provided an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which documents the need for special education, goals and objectives the student will be working on, when the student is with mainstream or general education programming, a discussion related to post-secondary goals, the amount of special education service time, frequency of progress reports, and appropriate accommodations and modifications (Lunenburg, 2012).

Students receive varying amounts of special education services throughout a school day. Every student in special education is placed in a Federal Setting, which

defines what percentage of his/her day is allocated to special education versus regular education.

Federal Setting: the amount of time a student aged six to 21 receives special education services in his/her school day. (www.hastings.k12.mn.us/sites)

Federal Setting 01: Special education outside regular class less than 21% of the day. Equates to 1-20% of a 380 minute instructional day = 76 minutes a day. At the secondary level this would typically translate into one daily class period, in a school structured with a six period day.

Federal Setting 02: Special education outside regular class at least 21% of the day and no more than 60% of the day. Twenty-one to 60% of a 380-minute instructional day = 70 to 228 minutes a day. In a secondary setting, this would translate into two to four periods a day, in a school structured with a six period day.

Federal Setting 03: Special education outside the regular classroom for more than 60% of the day. Sixty-one to 100% of a 380 minute instructional day = 228 to 380 minutes a day. In a secondary setting, this would translate into five or more periods a day, in a school structured with a six period day.

Students in the following Federal Setting categories will be not be included in this study.

Federal Setting 04: Public Separate Facility

Federal Setting 05: Private Separate Facility

Federal Setting 06: Public Resident Facility

Federal Setting 07: Private Residential Facility

Federal Setting 08: Homebound/Hospital

Special education categories are based upon federal categorical labels. The following is a description of the 13 categorical labels. Students are given a primary disability category and some are given an additional secondary disability category. The following categorical labels and definitions are federally and state defined (Minnesota Statute Chapter 3525 of Minnesota Administrative Rule).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A range of pervasive developmental disorders, onset in childhood, uneven developmental profile, qualitative impairments in social interaction, communication, or restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities.

Deaf-Blindness (DB): Students with medically diagnosed vision and hearing losses.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH): Students with a diminished sensitivity to sound, or hearing loss as measured by audiology exams.

Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD): Students with significantly below average cognitive/intellectual abilities and concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior skills.

Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD): Students who exhibit withdrawal or anxiety, depression, problems with mood or feelings of self-worth; students with disordered thought processes; and students who demonstrate behaviors of aggression, hyperactivity, or impulsivity.

Physically Impaired (PI): Students with a medical diagnosis of a chronic, physical impairment, congenital or acquired.

Other Health Disabilities (OHD): Students with a medical diagnosis that impacts their strength, endurance, vitality or alertness in an educational environment.

Severely Multiply Impaired (SMI): Students with multiple learning and developmental problems resulting from two or more areas of disabilities.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): Students with a disorder in a psychological process involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that exhibits challenges in the areas of listening, thinking, speaking, reading, spelling or mathematical calculations.

Speech/language Impairments (SPL): Students with fluency disorders, voice disorders, articulation disorders, and/or language disorders.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Students who have experienced an injury to the brain caused by an external force, resulting in functional disability or psychological impairment.

Visually Impaired (VI): Students diagnosed with a vision loss that impact them in learning and navigating through their environment.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE): Services for infants or toddlers.

For the purpose of this research study, students defined as those with mild disabilities, moderate disabilities, or more significant disabilities was determined by the amount of time they receive special education services. Students with mild disabilities fall into Federal Setting 01; less than 21% of their day is supported by special education instruction. Students with moderate disabilities fall into Federal Setting 02; 21% to 60% of their day is in a special education setting or receiving

special education instruction. Students with significant disabilities fall into Federal Setting 03; 61% to 100% of their day is in a special education setting.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study was designed with features from action research. Action research is defined as research that addresses a particular problem, is typically practical in nature, and includes not only a scholarly researcher but also interested participants who want to know about a particular issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007). This research aimed to address a particular concern in a Midwestern high school (Stillwater Area High School, Stillwater School District #834, Stillwater, Minnesota). Input from colleagues and parents in the development of the survey was completed through a Field Test of the proposed survey. Research from a practical problem solving perspective is considered valid and appropriate by many experts in the field of social science research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007). A limitation of action research is a lack of generalizability since the research was specific to one high school in the Midwestern area of the United States. However, the overriding purpose of this research was to develop better transition programming for students in that particular school district. This study assumed that all participants would answer the survey items openly and honestly.

Nature of the Study

This research was a quantitative methods study designed to measure the level of parent satisfaction with the transition from the junior high to the high school setting for their students with special education needs. With a survey format, the research was also able to provide survey respondents an opportunity to make

suggestions for improvement to the process. Although not qualitative in design in the sense of a formal face-to-face exchange, open-ended text boxes in the survey lent a qualitative aspect to the study.

Organization of the Study

Bethel University, and its Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this research study. When the IRB approval was secured, a presentation of the study was presented to a Stillwater Area School District committee, which included the Director of Secondary Curriculum and the Director of Human Resources. In November 2014, a letter was sent, through email to the parents of incoming 10th graders with special education needs who were enrolled at one of the two junior high feeder schools in the 2013-2014 school year. The letter explained the research and provided the electronic link to the survey. The survey link was opened for six weeks and a reminder was sent to parents to complete the survey after one week had elapsed. Once the survey closed, data were examined and analyzed using SPSS statistical software, version 22.0 (SPSS IBM, 2013).

The remainder of this research is organized into four chapters, a list of references, and appendixes. Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature regarding school transitions and parent satisfaction. Chapter Three delineates the research design and methodology of the study, the survey instrument used to gather data, the procedures followed, the setting, and the sample population. Chapter Four is a presentation of data and Chapter Five provides discussion, implications, and future recommendations.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The purpose of Chapter Two is to share the peer review of literature available in relationship to parent perspectives and satisfaction regarding middle school/junior high to senior high school transitions, with particular emphasis on students who have been identified with special education needs. Chapter Two includes a review of life transitions, the structure of the American Public school system, adolescence, transition programs, and transition for special education students.

Life Transitions

Transitions occur throughout the life cycle when changes in life occur (Cimera & Rusch, 2000, cited by Hill, 2010; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Smith (2001) defined transition as a movement from one definable point to another, and in human development, childhood and adulthood are those two points, with adolescence the movement between those constructs. Transitions accompany developmental changes as well as societal changes and expectations. Young children experience numerous transitions as they grow and develop into adulthood. However, proceeding through a transition may not necessarily be a point in time, but rather a process that is influenced by an individual moving into the next “stage” and those ready to embrace the incoming participants (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Walker, Dunbar, Meldrum, Whiteford, Carrington & Hand, 2012; Williamston, 2010). Some transitions are marked by a passage of time, such as a birthdate or rite of passage, and others are unremarkable (Atwater, Fowler, & Schwartz, 1991). Hard, Rosewarne, White and Wright (2010) suggest that transitions are a “process of uncertainty/certainty,

powerlessness/powerfulness, and loss/gain characterized by shifting identities rather than a type of societal initiation ritual or rite of passage” (p. 2). For students who are moving through middle school and high school, educational transitions are accompanied by “accelerated change in cognition, social, and psychological functioning, as well as the marked physical restructuring of puberty” (Klein, 1997, as cited by Hay & Winn, 2005, p.141).

In the educational setting, transitions occur as children progress from early childhood programming into elementary school, into middle school or junior high, into high school, into post-secondary options, and finally into adulthood. Transitions also occur daily with changes in routine, changes in teachers, and changes in peer relationships. Transitions in school for typically developing children focus on formal instruction and academic goals and emphasize “readiness” in a child to cope with new and demanding situations (Hard et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2012). Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) suggested that schools emphasize administrative and organizational procedures in the movement of students from different buildings. However, parents and students are more concerned with social and personal issues. For some students, the transition process can be very anxiety producing and seen as a “challenge of living” (Crosnoe, 2009; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Jindal-Snappe and Miller (2008) identified primary to secondary school transitions as a “challenge of living,” meaning that some students may be at-risk for navigating and being overwhelmed by the transition which involves a new environment, changes in relationships, and needing to develop new responses to new situations, all numerous changes within a short period of time. While schools have supports in place to help students move

from elementary to middle school to high school, often more vulnerable children are uniquely impacted and find the process negative and difficult (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). A growing body of research concludes that transitions can have negative impacts on a student's academic progress, performance and motivation (Galton et al., 1999, cited by Newton, Wright, Clarke, Dolan, Lister, & Cherguit, 2006; Roderick, 1993; Stone, 2003). However, while transitions can be challenging, they also can provide opportunities of growth for students and for those who support and teach them (Newton et al., 2006).

Research regarding student and parent perceptions surrounding the movement from middle/junior high school to high school indicates that students and parents are similar in their concerns and excitement regarding the upcoming transition (Aakos & Galassi, 2004; Falbio, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Zeedyk, et al., 2003). Smith et al. (2006) conducted a study in which students and parents completed the Perceptions of Transition Survey. Overall results indicated that students and parents were excited about the new opportunities available in high school, especially in the areas of increased availability and participation in extra-curricular activities. Akos and Galassi (2004) reported school transitions center around three separate and yet interrelated variables; academic, procedural, and social circumstances.

Structure of American Public Schools

The structure of the American public educational system compounds the complexities of the transition experience. The public school system is divided into clearly marked divisions; early childhood, elementary school, middle or junior high

school, and finally high school. Each division involves a transition from one setting to another; from home or day care to early childhood programming, from early childhood programming to elementary, from elementary to middle or junior high, and finally arriving at the high school level. Some transitions require movement within buildings to a new classroom or classes, other transitions require changes in school buildings. Typically, school districts structure and organize themselves to meet the needs of their community, which result in some differences across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Some elementary schools include preschool, some are kindergarten through eighth grade and miss the separate middle/junior high, and high schools can vary between Grades 9 through 12 or Grades 10 through 12.

Historically, the creation of separate schools for young adolescents began in Denmark in 1903 (Smith, 2001). According to Smith's (2001) research, the goal of this change in structure was to encourage elementary school children to remain in school and to prepare them for the academic rigors of high school, simultaneously providing them a social environment and closeness typical of an elementary school setting. As the United States changed from an agrarian community to a more industrialized country, the structure of schools also changed. Smith (2010) and Weiss and Bearman, (2007, as cited by Tyack, 1995) summarized the historical development of the American Public Educational system by noting that grade configurations changed through reform efforts to increase students' educational attainment and designing programs that were uniquely tailored to student needs. Thus the public

school system saw the decline of the one room schoolhouse and the need for education beyond eighth grade to support economic development.

Currently, the typical structure of a local school district's grade configuration is dependent upon the unique characteristics of its community. In a review of the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), grade configurations range from Pre K to 3 or 4, Pre K to Grade 5, Pre K to 6, Pre-K to 8, Grades 4, 5 or 6 to Grades 6, 7 or 8, Grades 7 to 8, 7 to 9, 7 to 12, 8 to 12, 9 to 12, and 10 to 12. While variety exists in grade configurations, the most typical structure is elementary school (K-5 or 6), middle school (6 to 8), or junior high 7 to 9, and high school with either Grades 9 through 12 or 10 through 12.

Research over the past few decades has documented the negative outcomes for students as they transition from the middle school or junior high level to the high school (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh, 2000; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles, et al., 1997; Mizelle, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Neild, 2009; Newman, Newman, Griffin, O'Connor & Spas, 2007; Reents, 2002; Smith, 2001; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Students entering high school can become unsettled due to lack of academic success, getting behind on earning credits toward graduation, not fitting in socially, and lack of educational engagement such as declines in attendance, and increase in at-risk behaviors (Neild, 2009; Reyes, Gillock & Kobus, 1994, as cited by Weiss & Bearman 2007; Smith J. S. 2006). While much of the research on educational transitions points to negative aspects, other studies support the notion that transitions can be a powerfully positive experience and not necessarily the negative experience so often portrayed in the research or in anecdotal reports (Akos & Galassi

2004; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). While a transition can be a challenging experience with the correct supports, many students navigate the systems well.

Adolescence

Adolescence is the period of time that historically has described when children grow up and develop the skills needed for adulthood. Graber and Brooks-Gunn, (1999, as cited by Modell & Goodman, 1990) stated that adolescence is a single transition period where an individual's emergence is dependent upon the economy of the era. Adolescent development encompasses physiological changes, social changes, and psychological changes, spurred on by biological changes (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Hamburg & Takanishi, 1989). It is a time of significant growth, challenges, opportunities, self-discovery, expanding horizons, and increasing one's self-independence. Piaget's developmental theory posits that it is during this adolescent development that children begin to develop the capacity for abstract thinking, which he labeled Formal Operations (McLeod, 2009). Another noted theorist of development, Erik Erickson, described human development in psychosocial stages where at each stage there is a particular task or competency to learn. For adolescents, the task is exploring independence and developing a sense of self-identity (McLeod, 2008).

Transition Programs

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, which was organized in 1986 to address concerns specific to adolescents, disseminated their findings in a report titled "Great Transitions, Preparing Adolescents for a New Century." The council stated:

Most American adolescents navigate the critical transition years from ten to eighteen with relative success. With good schools, supportive families and caring community institutions, they grow up to meet the requirements of family life, friendship, the workplace, and citizenship in a technically advanced democratic society. Even under difficult conditions, most young people grow into responsible, ethical, problem-solving adults (p. 1).

However, the Council (1995) stated that up to one quarter of the adolescent population were at-risk to engage in dangerous behaviors that could have significant consequences throughout their life. The Council strongly advocated that schools, families and communities needed to work together to help adolescents navigate through this challenging time in their lives. Schools need to meet the needs of their students, especially at the middle school level. The Council implemented the Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative to support adolescents in advantaged and disadvantaged communities to encourage increased learning and academic support and reduce high-risk behaviors. Transitioning into secondary educational programming coincides with the unique physical, biological, physiological, and social tasks of adolescence indicating the need for schools to address these tasks in a supportive manner.

There is strong movement within the educational system to provide intentional programming to support students who are moving from one school setting to another, especially from an elementary setting to a secondary environment. Proponents of educational research strongly support the notion there are strategies to ameliorate the negative effects of the middle/junior high school to high school transition (Cohen &

Smerdon, 2009; Herzog & Morgan, 1998; Legters & Kerr, 2001; Neild, 2009; Queen, 2002; Reents, 2002; Smith, 2001). These experts call on school districts, middle/junior high schools, high schools, parents, and the community to partner together to develop supports for students as they transition from grade to grade and building to building.

Akos and Galassi (2004) and Mizelle and Irvin (2000) suggested the major components of effective transition programming include the following: provide students with information about their new school, involve parents, give students social support, and partnership between high schools and middle/junior high schools. Suggestions for providing students information include specific year-long preparation for students in eighth grade such as buddy/mentoring with high school students, tours, information regarding academic course requirements, meetings with high school counselors, shadowing students at the high school prior to the move, beginning school orientations, and study skill development through summer school to help solidify and build skills for the increased academic rigor.

Parent involvement is critical and students with strong parental involvement navigate educational demands more successfully (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Effective communication between schools and parents is important to assure that parents are aware of the transition supports provided and that they have the information to support the transition activities. Mizelle (2005) also gave charge to the schools to keep parents informed and to organize specific transition activities that parents can access such as tours of the high school prior to the start of ninth grade, meeting with

the high school counselor, and a day to visit the high school to become acquainted with it.

Providing social support to students is a third component of a good transition program. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers; high school is typically a time when friendships and peer relationships take on new importance. The transition to high school can disrupt a students' social network and activities should allow for opportunities to develop positive relationships with new peers and with older students. Activities such as social groups at the beginning of the school year, an e-mail pen pal program, or summer social opportunities have been suggested (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; Hertzog et al., 1999).

The final component of a solid transition program involves the collaboration between schools. Mizelle (2005) has suggested utilizing a vertical team approach that includes teachers, counselors and administrators from feeder schools to the high school for scope and sequence of curriculum development. Additionally, collaboration to design and support transition program activities has seen positive results not only for student transitions but also for building positive teacher relationships and understanding of curriculum and student needs at various ages (Mizelle, 2005).

The National High School Center (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007) published a report identifying five challenges for schools to support the movement of students to high schools. The first challenge is for schools to establish a monitoring and accountability system to track student academic progress and help to identify students who are at-risk of not achieving a high school diploma. The second challenge is to

address the diverse instructional needs of incoming high school students. “High schools must meet the diverse needs of students many of whom need extra support to get caught up to at least grade level in reading and math” (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 8). The third challenge is to personalize the learning environment and help support student engagement. The fourth challenge is for school districts to build capacity in low-performing schools, through hiring and retaining qualified and certified teachers, especially teachers who are sensitive to the needs of incoming high school students. The final challenge is for districts to create connections to the community, to the business employers, and to higher education “to provide students with meaningful learning opportunities and for highlighting the potential relevance of what students are studying” (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 11). Legters and Kerr (2001) reported that organizational reforms such as developing small learning communities, development of a common core curriculum as opposed to ability tracking of students, and creating personalized learning environments at the high school level through interdisciplinary teaming are structures that can help support students moving into the high school arena.

Transitions for Special Education Students

Research on at-risk students posits that transitions from an elementary or middle school program to a high school program are more challenging than for typical students (Frasier, 2007; Stone, 2003). The move to high school requires students to learn a new organizational structure, navigate a larger building, develop new or different peer groups, and establish new relationships with teachers. In review of literature, Stone (2003) indicated that students’ perceptions of the change in an

educational environment was less than positive, especially if the students moved to a larger school. Additionally, school transitions align at developmental stages, such as puberty, where there is a desire for increased peer influence, a decrease of parental influence, and a desire for independence (Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

For students with disabilities, transitions can be even more challenging and difficult (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2010; Kinney, 2006). Students who need specialized equipment such as communication aids, “are at risk of not achieving their full potential at school and face additional challenges in the transition between educational settings” (Newton et al., 2008, p.141). Likewise, students who have been identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in making transitions into secondary school are challenged within the social arena of a middle school or high school setting with more demands for pro-social skills, understanding higher level learning such as using analysis and synthesis, improving weak expressive communication skills, and needing to develop relationships with a variety of teachers rather than one primary teacher who has been an anchor point of stability (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hay & Winn, 2005). Additionally, the changes in routine are always challenging for students on the Autism Spectrum as well as sensory overload with bright lights, lots of noise, busy cafeterias, and crowded hallways.

For the parents of students with disabilities, observing their children move through the educational system, and seeing the gap between their student and typical students widen, can be fraught with anxiety, fear, and grief (Atwater et al., 1991; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hay & Winn 2005; Walker et al., 2012; Worthington, 1989). Parents with students who have been identified on the Autism Spectrum

experience more stress, anxiety and depression (Hay & Winn, 2005). The concept of chronic sorrow also has been documented for mothers with children who are significantly and multiply disabled (Parrish, 2010; Worthington, 1989). Parents and teachers want to work collaboratively to support successful transitions, but there are times when parents assume an assertive advocacy role to the extent that tensions between the school and parents arise (Bennet, Bruns & Deluca, 1997).

The literature on educational transitions for students with disabilities is typically focused on early-childhood or graduation and post-secondary outcomes (Davies & Beamish, 2009), with limited research examining the transition process for special education students from the parental perspective. Studies from Australia have focused on early-childhood to kindergarten transitions and suggested that “important links between home and school are built in order to ensure successful transitions to school (Walker et al., 2010, p. 22). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000, cited in Walker et al., 2010) have proposed a framework for viewing transitions as a network of relationships that impact student’s transitions to school and how those relationships change over time. Relationships between family, the classroom, and the community all impact the success of a child’s transitional experiences. Several scholars have suggested that successful transitions require an understanding of the experience from the child perspective, the parent perspective, and the teacher/school perspective (Atwater, et al., 1991; Whitton, 2005).

Wildenger and McIntyre (2010) studied parent perspectives of their children transitioning from pre-school to kindergarten. The children were typically developing and not identified with any disabilities. The majority of parents felt the

transition to kindergarten was a “very” or “moderately” successful entry. However, some parents reported having “many” concerns regarding child behavior problems and separation. Parents suggested several ideas that would have been helpful: more information about academic expectations, more information regarding their child’s skill level, more information about the kindergarten teacher and program, the desire to be more involved in the transition preparation, more information about strategies that would have prepared their children, and the steps that the school had implemented for the transition process. While these were parents of typically developing students at a young age, and for a specific grade level, it would seem plausible that for parents of students with disabilities these concerns would be more pronounced and evident in later years.

Dillon and Underwood (2012) studied the parent perspective of transition for students on the Autism Spectrum in the United Kingdom. Results indicated that parents approached the movement from eighth grade to a high school setting with the expectation that the transition would be traumatic for the student, the parents, and the whole family (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). Parents’ preconceived ideas about transition seemed to be predicated on how well previous transitions had transpired. If the elementary transition experience was positive, the parents were cautiously optimistic. If the elementary transition experiences were not positive, parents were more concerned and indicated that things could only get better or they would be worse because of the lack of teacher understanding about their child’s unique learning and behavior needs. Hay and Winn (2005) found that parents of secondary students

with ASD struggled with burnout and lacked information about services, especially services available at the post-secondary level.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) Amendment (2004) clearly state that transition planning for post-secondary outcomes is mandatory and begins at age 14 in the areas of post-secondary education, employment training, and independent living, which includes community participation, recreation and leisure, and skills needed to live independently. In review of the literature regarding post-secondary transitions, parents report the challenges of accessing community and adult services (Curtis, Rabren, & Reilly, 2009; Davies & Beamish, 2009) and attending post-secondary institutions (Wilson, Bialk, Freeze, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012). Outcomes for post-secondary adults are predicated on the significance of their disability and their experience through school (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens 2009; Davies & Beamish 2009; Wilson et al., 2012). Collaboration between school staff, parents, and community service providers is essential in supporting positive post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities (Finn & Kohler, 2008; Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006; Zhang, Ivester, Chen & Katsiyannis, 2005) and begins with the transition from middle school to high school (Milligan, 1995).

Furthermore, Milligan (1995) reported that the transition to high school from middle school requires careful consideration of a student's post-high school plans, in addition to the move from middle/junior high school to high school. Specific components for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) team to consider are the severity of the student's disability, the student's long range goals, curricular needs, inclusion

in general education programming, and planning needs to be systematic and earlier rather than later.

With this premise in mind, that transitions to the high school can influence post-secondary outcomes, Fraiser (2007) described a specific transition program for students with disabilities in suburban Orange County Los Angeles, which received attention from the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs as an exemplary program that addressed the additional needs of special education students. While similar to other suggested transition programs referred to earlier, the foundation for this program was embedded in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. The transition process was initiated in the spring of the school year and included visits from high school special education staff to the junior highs for observations of students and conversations with case managers. All junior high students moving to the high school participated with their parents in a spring IEP meeting that was held at the high school. Participants included parents, students, junior high case managers, and high school probable case managers, with administrative representation, as required by law. Treats were provided for the IEP meeting to set a caring and comfortable atmosphere. Students were provided tours in the spring of the year and also an opportunity to participate in a special summer orientation. The summer orientation included other at-risk students, not only special education students. Parents were informed about this process via letters from the school district and invitations to the IEP meetings. Similar transition practices were put into place in the Phoenix-Talent School District in southern Oregon, as reported by Kinney (2006) predicated on the needs for improved communication, IEP's that would match the

services provided at the high school setting, and to support parents “who were concerned about leaving the security of a school they knew and trusted” (p. 29).

Parent Satisfaction

Parent satisfaction about their child’s special educational experience runs the continuum from those who are very satisfied to those who are very dissatisfied. In review (Newman, 2005) of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2, 2000) and the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS, 2001), the majority of parents indicated they were somewhat or very satisfied with their children’s schools. Parents of secondary school age children endorsed greater satisfaction with their child’s special education services and school efforts to keep them informed than with their overall rating of the school. When compared to parents of younger students, parents of older students reported greater satisfaction with their child’s school. However, 14% percent of parents of elementary age students and 20% percent of parents for older students were somewhat or very dissatisfied. A similar trend of greater dissatisfaction for parents of older children was found in other studies (Starr, Foy & Cramer, 2001; as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh 2005; Summer, Hoffman, et al., 2005).

According to the NLTS2, (2000) and SEELS (2001) data, 16% of the dissatisfied parents were dissatisfied with the special education services and the information provided about their child’s progress. In general, parents of special education students were less satisfied than parents of general education students. Parents of students with emotional/behavioral issues reported the least satisfaction, followed by parents of students with other health impairments, traumatic brain

injuries, or autism. Less satisfaction was noted in a study by Miles-Bonart (2002) by parents of students with physical impairments and significant health needs, perhaps due to the differing needs parents and school staff perceive for those children.

In a similar vein, research in England by Whitaker (2007) surveyed parents of students with autism. Sixty percent of parents rated themselves as satisfied with their student's education; 40% of parents were dissatisfied. While education in England is not exactly like the United States, the surveyed parent's students were in mainstream educational settings, not in separate schools, with 62% percent of the participants of primary age children. This is in contrast to a pilot study by Starr, Foy, and Cramer (2001; as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2006), which found that 70% of parents of children with ASD rated their student's education as fairly satisfying, somewhat higher than the England study.

The majority of research stated above, suggests many parents of special education children are satisfied with their child's overall educational experience (Bouck, 2011; Newman, 2005, Starr, Foy and Cramer, 2001, as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2005). However, even with a percentage as great as 70% satisfaction rate, 30% of parents were dissatisfied. Additionally, the data also suggest that the level of parental satisfaction decreases as the student matures, indicating an increased need to evaluate how satisfied secondary parents feel. Also, none of the studies investigated specifically the middle school/junior high school to high school transition experience. That said, abundant research indicates the transition to high school can be a pivotal year (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh, 2000; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Eccles, et al., 1993; Eccles et al., 1997; Mizelle, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000;

Neild, 2009; Newman, Newman, Griffin, O'Connor & Spas, 2007; Reents, 2002; Smith, 2001; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). This is a gap in the literature. If schools are going to be able to support students as they move through the varying educational transitions, educators and professionals need to understand how to help students and their parents navigate the transition in a positive manner in order to build collaborative working relationships and increase positive outcomes for students.

Chapter III

Methodology

Philosophy and Justification

Research on at-risk students posits that transitions from an elementary or middle school program to a high school program are more challenging than for typical students (Frasier, 2007; Stone, 2003). For students with disabilities, transitions can be even more challenging and difficult (Hill, 20210; Kinney, 2006; Hay & Winn, 2005). For many parents of special education students, the transition from junior high to senior high school can be particularly intense. Conversations between parents and school staff during Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning meetings, which address the move from junior high to senior high, can create strong emotional responses from parents. There is an added layer of responsibility and challenge that accompanies a student with disabilities, particularly if the disabilities are high needs and significant. In review of the literature on transitions, the majority focused on general needs of students, with limited information regarding how transitions are perceived and managed for students with special education needs. “Smooth transitions to high school for special education students are even more critical to their success” (Williamston, 2010, as cited by Dorman 2012, p. 22).

Research on school transitions indicates varied responses to the level of parent satisfaction. Some studies indicate that for many parents of special education children, they are satisfied with their child’s overall educational experience (Bouck, 2011; Newman, 2005, Starr, Foy & Cramer, 2001, as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2005) with 70% of parents satisfied and 30% of parents dissatisfied.

Additionally, the data also suggest that the level of parental satisfaction decreases as the student matures, suggesting an increased need to evaluate how satisfied secondary parents feel.

The purpose of this study was to understand the parental perspective and the level of parental satisfaction with the transition process as their child, who is a student with special education needs, moves from the junior high setting to the high school setting. If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical. What a school professional may feel as an appropriate avenue for educational programming may be distinctly different from the parents' view. Parents often believe they know their child best and want the school to listen to them and understand their unique child and his/her unique situations.

This study collected data through a parent satisfaction survey. Parents who progressed through the transition were surveyed in November 2014 after their student had settled into a sense of normalcy. In addition to quantitative data, there were two text boxes for parents to share ideas of how the transition process could improve. If schools are to respond appropriately to parent input, educators must understand the parent perspective to develop and implement different and more student-centered programming.

The data collected were disaggregated based upon the number of class periods a student receives special education services, the area of disability, and demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, primary language spoken in the home, and the number of adults parenting in the home.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide this study.

Question One: What was the level of parental satisfaction in the transition from junior high to high school for special education students? Were there differences in parent satisfaction with respect to the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken?

Question Two: Was there a difference between parental satisfaction based upon students with mild special education needs, moderate special education needs, and students with significant special education needs?

Question Three: What types of programming and supports at the high school level would be helpful for parents of special education students as they navigate the educational system with their child?

Theoretical Framework

This research was predicated on the importance of helping adolescents navigate a major life transition; an educational transition from one building to another, during a period of development called adolescence. Adolescent development encompasses physiological changes, social changes, and psychological changes, spurred on by biological changes (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Hamburg & Takanishi, 1989). It is a time of significant growth, challenges, opportunities, self-discovery, expanding horizons, and increasing one's self-independence. For students with disabilities, transitions can be even more challenging and difficult (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2010; Kinney, 2006).

The majority of research documented in the literature review suggests that many parents of special education children are satisfied with their child's overall educational experience (Bouck, 2011; Newman, 2005, Starr, Foy & Cramer, 2001, as cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2005). However, even with a satisfaction level of 70%, 30% of parents were dissatisfied. Additionally, the data also suggest that the level of parental satisfaction decreases as the student matures, suggesting an increased need to evaluate how satisfied secondary parents feel.

The purpose of this study was to gather data regarding parent satisfaction with their student's transition from the junior high level to the senior high building. All parents asked to complete the survey had students who were identified with special education needs and their student would have just completed the move from one of two junior high buildings to the one senior high in a Midwestern, suburban/semi-rural school district (Stillwater Area Schools, Stillwater, Minnesota). Data were collected in November 2014 after the routine had been established following the start of a new school year.

This research was developed with features from action research. Action research is defined as research that addresses a particular problem, is typically practical in nature, and includes not only a scholarly researcher but also interested participants who want to know about a particular issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007). Research from a practical problem solving perspective is considered valid and appropriate by many experts in the field of social science research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007).

Variables

The dependent variable in this study was parent satisfaction and was compared with the demographic data.

The independent variables in this study were the differing levels of special education disability, defined in this study by the amount of time during the school day a student receives special education support, gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken.

Hypotheses

H1₀: There was no difference between parental satisfaction and the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken.

H1₁: There was a difference between parental satisfaction and the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken.

H2₀: There was no difference between parents of special education students with different levels of disability regarding their level of satisfaction with the transition process.

H2₁: There was a difference between parents of special education students with different levels of disability regarding their level of satisfaction with the transition process.

Research Design Strategy

Setting

The setting for this research was a suburban/semi-rural high school of approximately 2,100 students, Stillwater Area High School, Stillwater, Minnesota. Prior to asking parents if they would be willing to participate in this study, authorization was needed from the School District; Stillwater Area School District #834. The district did not have formalized procedures for research requests. However, initial approval from the Director of Special Student Services and from the Assistant Principal who provided oversight to the special education program at the proposed high school had been received. The Director of Secondary Curriculum was informed about the research and indicated once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had been received from Bethel University, they were to be contacted and set up a district committee to review the proposed research. The District requested the researcher to change the survey, as they would not allow an optional demographic question to be asked; if the student received free or reduced lunch. They also requested a comment for the textbox questions to be added that names of school employees not be used by parents.

When final district approval was secured, a letter was sent to parents electronically. In the letter, there was an authorization and support from the district for the study as well as the purpose of the study and their potential role as a participant. See Appendix A for a copy of the letter. See Appendix B for a copy of the Authorization for Release of Information.

Instrumentation

The parent survey was developed using the Qualtrics software program and was available via the Internet and hard copy. An email was sent through Qualtrics and directed the participants to the survey via a link. For those parents who did not have an email address or preferred to take a paper/pencil version, they completed and returned the survey in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Paper/pencil materials were used if a parent did not have an email account, or if he/she did not want to take the survey electronically, so lack of technology and preference would not be exclusionary factors.

Another consideration was when to conduct the research; data gathered prior to the transition, within the transition, or after the transition. If the data were more reflective than anticipatory, that would influence the results. The intent of this research was to collect data after the transition occurred, after the start of the school year, but within the month of November. The reason to collect data after the transition occurred was to receive suggestions from parents for improving the transition process. Waiting until after the first two months of school was important to allow for students and parents to “settle in” into their new routines yet still be recent enough that recollection was accurate.

Measures

This research utilized a 21-item survey/questionnaire developed specifically for this study using the Qualtrics software survey program (see Appendix C). All items were a forced choice response with two open-ended items provided for additional ideas or concerns regarding student transitions. The survey utilized a four-

point Likert scale with a range from Very Dissatisfied (1) Somewhat Dissatisfied (2), Somewhat Satisfied (3), to Very Satisfied (4). Content validity, also known as face validity, was completed to make sure the items on the survey measured parent satisfaction. The survey/questionnaire was reviewed by experts to verify content validity (Vogt, 2007). Suggested items were reviewed by parents of special education children who were at least one year beyond the initial transition into high school. Additional review of the survey items was completed by educational professionals including: special education teachers, school psychologists, and special education administrators. These were appropriate steps to determine content or face validity for a survey/questionnaire. The District requested the researcher to change the survey, as they would not allow an optional demographic question to be included; if the student received free or reduced lunch. They also requested a comment for the textbox questions to be added that names of school employees not be used by parents.

Sampling Design

The research sample population for this dissertation was the parents of special education students at a suburban/semi-rural Midwestern district (Stillwater Area High School, Stillwater School District #834, Stillwater, Minnesota) who have made the transition from the junior high setting (Grades 7 to 9) to the senior high school (Grades 10 to 12). Since this population was very specific, the sample methodology was a purposive sample, “a sample is gathered deliberately, with a purpose in mind, but not randomly” (Vogt, 2007, p. 81). It is a valid and popular research technique and often used when data are gathered through a survey approach (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007). Purposive sampling can be used in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-

methods approaches (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007). The largest drawback to using a purposive approach is the lack of generalizability because the sample will not necessarily be representative of parents of special education students in other high schools. However, the long-term purpose of this study was to identify what supports and programming would be helpful specifically to the parents at the identified high school setting.

This study was also developed with features from action research. Action research is defined as research that addresses a particular problem, is typically practical in nature, and includes not only a scholarly researcher but also interested participants who want to know about a particular issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007). Action research is often used to improve a school practice through greater understanding of a program or system in an educational setting (Jackson & Taylor, 2007). This research aimed to address a particular concern in a Midwestern high school and included input from colleagues and parents in the development of the survey. Research from a practical problem solving perspective is considered valid and appropriate by many experts in the field of social science research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007).

Since the primary independent variable was level of disability based upon the number of class hours daily a student receives special education and its effect on parent satisfaction with the transition from a junior high setting to the high school, it was important to have representation from the various special education federal categories and also distinguish the amount of special education services a student receives. Students in special education are categorized based upon a federal

categorical label of disability and also the percentage of time they receive special education services within the school day. The greater percentage of time the student receives services, the greater the special education need, which suggests the student requires more supports and modified programming. Parents whose children have milder disabilities may feel differently about the transitions to high school, than those parents whose children have more intense and significant needs. Likewise, other variables would need to be accounted for: adults in a parenting role in the house, gender of student, ethnicity, and primary language spoken in the home.

The sample population (n) was recruited from the larger population of parents whose students were moving into the high school setting. Students who transferred to the prospective high school from other school districts into Grade 10, were not included in the participant sample. While many high schools are comprised of Grades 9 through 12, the high school in this study was a Grade 10 to Grade 12 building. Ninth graders attend the junior high buildings, although earn high school credit toward graduation in their classes.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a survey/questionnaire that was developed specifically for this study. Qualtrics was the software vehicle for the survey development and parent email addresses were utilized for sending the survey electronically. There were three or more parents who did not have an email address or Internet capabilities, therefore, a paper/pencil survey was mailed or sent home with the student with a stamped envelope for return of the survey. Completion of the

electronic or paper/pencil survey was anonymous to ensure confidentiality of the respondents. Data were collected in November 2014.

Field Test

A field study was conducted in November 2013 to determine content validity in the development of the Parent Satisfaction Survey. The survey items were reviewed and edited by a group of educational professionals including: one doctoral candidate in educational administration, two practicing school psychologists, a high school building administrator who provides oversight and planning to the transition process from a junior high to the high school setting, and a doctoral-degreed administrator working at the elementary level in data analysis. Final approval for items was obtained by a college professor at the doctoral level, who specializes in the development of surveys as part of her responsibility in at a higher education institution. Two parents of special education students who previously experienced the transition process reviewed the survey and provided responses that the questions were appropriate and relevant to the topic. The survey was completed by 20 other educational professionals: school psychologists, administration, and special education teachers in the school district where the research was implemented. Feedback provided was positive with comments indicating the questions were relevant, the survey was clearly written, and the survey could be completed in a relatively short amount of time. Minor changes were made to the survey as a result of the field study. The survey was open for a two-week time frame. From the pilot study suggestions, the first change in process was a reminder to complete the survey after a one-week time frame, allowing for a higher rate of responses. The second suggested change

was an addition to demographic question number four. The question asked how many class hours the student receives special education services and the options provided were one through six. However, many students received less than one hour daily of special education services and that additional option was added to that question. See Appendix C for a copy of the survey.

Mock data were gathered and analyzed as part of the field study. Twenty-eight surveys were completed and analyzed. Results were not significant and did not allow for rejection of the null hypothesis.

Data Analysis

Initial descriptive statistics were run in order to describe the sample. These were demographic in nature.

Research Question One was analyzed with descriptive statistics through frequency distributions including mean scores and standard deviations of the parent satisfaction responses. Scores are shown for the total sample as well as by disability group. The demographic variables also were tested using t-tests and cross-tabulation tables with Chi-Square tests where appropriate.

Research Question Two utilized an Oneway Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which allowed for comparisons between the three groups of parents (mild needs, moderate needs, or more significant needs). Prior to the analysis, potential covariates were examined. None had a significant relationship with parental satisfaction and were therefore not included in the model.

Research Question Three was a description of the parent ideas for additional supports and improvements obtained from the open-ended items.

Limitations of Methodology

Limitations and delimitations are similar concepts, and refer to the boundaries of research. Roberts (2004) described limitations as “inherent weaknesses in the methodology...” (p. 129). Mauch and Birch (1993, as cited by Rogers, 2004) differentiate a limitation from a delimitation by what is under the control of the researcher. A limitation is not under a researcher’s control, whereas, a delimitation is a boundary that has been determined by the researcher.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this research. First and foremost was the lack of generalizability. The research structure was similar to a case study where a particular population is chosen and thus generalizations to other parents of special education students in differing school districts would be minimal.

A second limitation concerned the completion of a survey/questionnaire. With a forced response format and two open-ended items for parents to suggest ideas for improvement, there may have been underlying factors that would not be addressed due to the nature of the data collection. However, justification for using a survey format addressed the need to keep participants comments anonymous and required minimal time for completion. Since the researcher worked at the high school where data were collected, using a qualitative approach would have more challenging. Parents may not have wanted to share information in a group or interview format since they would be working with the researcher throughout their student’s high school career. Also, many parents may have been resistant to the time commitment a focus group or interview would demand.

A third limitation was the number of sample participants. Lack of responses from participants is a drawback of the survey data collection methodology (Vogt, 2007). Qualtrics provided an option where reminders were sent to participants who had not completed the survey, which was thought to help increase the number of responses returned.

Delimitations

Time of the Study: Data collection occurred in the fall of the 2014 school year, in the months of November and early December.

Location of the Study: This study was specific to a Midwestern suburban/semi-rural school district.

Sample of the Study: This study was limited to parents of special education students who transition from junior high to high school. The sample population did not include parents of special education students in the upper grades of high school. The sample included only parents whose students transitioned from one of the two junior highs in the district and did not include parents of students who transferred into the high school from another district. It also did not include students who were receiving education outside the high school setting, such as students in a special education district program.

Selected Criteria of the Study: This study had one dependent variable, parent satisfaction, and did not attempt to measure other variables associated with a life transition, such as fear, anxiety, and grief.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study included following Institutional Review Board process and specifications regarding informed consent. Informed consent guidelines were followed and included in the initial correspondence to the parent population. Participants were clearly informed about the study, the purpose of the study, the kinds of questions or topics that were addressed, confidentiality, data storage, voluntary participation, and they could exit the study at any time, fulfilling obligations for informed consent (CITI, 2013).

Secondly, composing survey/questionnaire items of a sensitive nature were developed with care and consideration for others to keep the risk of harm as limited as possible (CITI, 2013). Using parents who have been through the transition process as part of the field study and experts in the field in the development of the survey items addressed this concern.

A third ethical situation addressed was the high priority of confidentiality, since the researcher worked at the high school where the sample was drawn. Participants were assured of their privacy, that discussions with others in the researcher's building or district were conducted without reference to specific parents or students; rather framed in what was working, what was not, and how improvements could be implemented that would help families in the transition process. The anonymity of a survey methodology was structured to assure confidentiality.

Finally, interviewer bias was addressed which would be minimal with a survey/questionnaire format. Since the researcher experienced positive and

collaborative transitions and difficult ones in this setting, survey items and text box questions were carefully screened for personal bias for preconceived expectations based upon historical events.

Conclusion

Transitions are a natural occurring part of life, and for children present unique opportunities as they move through the structure of the educational system. For some students, movement through the school system is completed with relative ease, for others transitions can be more difficult. For students with disabilities, transitions can be even more challenging and difficult (Hay & Winn, 2005; Hill, 2010; Kinney, 2006). The next chapter demonstrates that the district is doing some things well, and many of the parents are satisfied overall with the transition experience. However, there are areas of needed improvement, that align with recommendations from research best practices.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

This research was developed to study the level of parental satisfaction experienced as their child, who was identified with special education needs, moved from the junior high setting to the high school environment. While a quantitative designed study, it was also a hybrid with a qualitative component. This research was a case study with an action research underlying structure. The researcher wanted to know how to better support students and families as they moved through the educational system, and to implement changes in the current informal structure in a Midwestern suburban/semi-rural school district.

Description of Sample

Seventy-seven emails were sent out to parents of the 62 students included in the study. Twenty parents took the Parent Satisfaction Survey and reported on their student, which is a response rate of 25%. Of these, 25.0% (n=5) had students who were female and 75.0% had students who were male (n=15). Their students were largely Caucasian (90.0%) with one parent reporting Hispanic/Latino (5.0%) and Other (5.0%), respectively. Seventy-five percent of the respondents households were two parent households (n=15), 15.0% were single parent households (n=3), 10% were co-parenting but not in the same household (n=2), and there were no legal guardians or relatives in the sample population. English was the primary language spoken at

home for 95% of the families (n=19), and one parent indicated they were a bilingual home of Russian and English (5%).

Five primary special education labels were endorsed. Of these, 20% of the respondents indicated their student was identified with a Specific Learning Disability (n=4), 15% of the respondents indicated their student was identified with an Other Health Disability (n=3), one student was identified with an Emotional/Behavior Disorders (5%), 45% of the respondents reported their student was identified under the federal categorical label of Autism Spectrum Disorder (n=9), 10% of the sample were identified with a Developmental Cognitive Disability (n=2), and one respondent indicated they did not know their student's disability label (5%).

Twenty percent of the parents indicated their child had a secondary disability label of Specific Learning Disability (n=4). Ten percent of the parents indicated Emotional/Behavioral Disorders as a secondary disability (n=2). Autism was indicated as a secondary disability for 20% of the parents (n=4), and two respondents indicated Developmental Cognitive Disability was a secondary label (n=2) while the remainder of parents (40%, n=8) indicated there was not a secondary label for their student.

In summary, 35% of the parents (n=7) indicated their student was identified with one categorical label, whereas, 60% of the parents (n=12) indicated their student had two categorical labels. One respondent (5%) did not know their student's special education label.

Parents were asked to categorize the number of class hours their student received special education services daily. Choices included from less than a class

hour to six class hours. Of the respondents, 45% of the parents (n=9) indicated their student received less than one class hour of special education services daily. Fifteen percent of the respondents (n=3) indicated their student received one class hour daily, and 15% (n=3) indicated their student received four class hours of special education services daily. Ten percent of the respondents (n=2) indicated their student received five class hours and another 10% (n=2) indicated their student received six class hours of daily special education services. There were no endorsements for receiving three class hours of services.

Students were categorized into three different disability levels based upon the number of class hours they receive special education services. Students who are considered Federal Setting 1 receive less than 21% of their day in special education, which converts to less than one class hour of daily services. At the secondary level this would typically translate into one daily class period in a six period high school daily schedule, which a class period equating to approximately 55 minutes. Of the respondents, 60% (n=12) fell within the Mild classification of disability level. Students, who are considered Federal Setting 2 receive at least 21% of the day and no more than 60% of the day in special education. In a typical 380-minute instructional day, 21% to 60% of the day would equate to approximately 70 to 228 minutes. In a secondary setting, this would translate into two to four periods a day, in a six period day schedule. Twenty percent of the respondents (n=4) fell into the Federal Setting 2 category, indicating students with Moderate special education needs. Federal Setting 3 students have high needs that are more significant and require 60% to 100% of their instructional day in special education services. There were 20% of the respondents

(n=4) who indicated their child received Setting 3 services due to their unique learning needs. In the high school setting of the study, this would translate into five or more class periods a day.

Table 1

Description of Sample

Demographic Descriptor	N	Percent
Student's Gender		
Female	5	25.0
Male	15	75.0
Total	20	100.0
Student's Ethnicity		
Caucasian	18	90.0
African American	0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	1	5.0
Asian	0	0.0
Other	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0
Parent Relationship to Student		
Parent in a Two Parent Household	15	75.0
Parent in a Single Parent Household	3	15.0
Co-Parenting, Not in the Same Household	2	10.0
Primary Care Giver or Guardian (i.e., Relative, Friend, Legal Guardian)	0	0.0

Total	20	100.0
Primary Language Spoken at Home		
English	19	95.0
English and Russian	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0
Student's Primary Learning Disability Label		
Specific Learning Disabilities	4	20.0
Other Health Disabilities	3	15.0
Emotional/Behavior Disorders	1	5.0
Autism Spectrum Disorder	9	45.0
Developmental Cognitive Disability	2	10.0
Severely Multiply Impaired	0	0.0
Vision Impaired	0	0.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing	0	0.0
Physically Impaired	0	0.0
Speech/Language Impairments	0	0.0
Deaf-Blindness	0	0.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.0
Don't Know	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0
Student's Secondary Learning Disability Label		
Specific Learning Disabilities	4	20.0
Other Health Disabilities	0	0.0

Emotional/Behavior Disorders	2	10.0
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4	20.0
Developmental Cognitive Disability	2	10.0
Severely Multiply Impaired	0	0.0
Vision Impaired	0	0.0
Deaf Hard of Hearing	0	0.0
Physically Impaired	0	0.0
Speech/Language Impairments	0	0.0
Deaf-Blindness	0	0.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.0
Not Applicable	8	40.0
Total	20	100.0
Number of Diagnoses		
One	7	35.0
Two	12	60.0
Missing	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0
Number of Class Hours Your Student Receives Special Education		
Less than One Hour	9	45.0
One	3	15.0
Two	1	5.0
Three	0	0.0

	Four	3	15.0
	Five	2	10.0
	Six	2	10.0
	Total	20	100.0
Disability Level			
	Setting 1 – Mild	12	60.0
	Setting 2 – Moderate	4	20.0
	Setting 3 – Significant/High Needs	4	20.0
	Total	20	100.0

Description of Individual Parent Satisfaction Items

For the first survey item, “My experience with having adequate information regarding special programs at the high school before my student completed 9th grade left me feeling...”, 45% of the respondents (n=9) responded they were Very Satisfied, 40% (n=8) were Somewhat Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 5% (n=1) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the second survey item, “My experience with accessing the on-line high school information prior to the start of the school year left me feeling ...”, 35% of the respondents (n=7) were Very Satisfied, 45% (n=9) were Somewhat Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Dissatisfied and 10% (n=2) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the third survey item, “My experience with reaching special education high school staff in the spring of my student’s 9th grade year left me feeling ...”, 40%

of respondents (n=8) were Very Satisfied, 30% (n=6) were Somewhat Satisfied, 20% (n=4) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 10% (n=2) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the fourth survey item, “My experience with reaching (i.e., phone, email, face-to-face, etc.) special education school staff the summer prior to my student’s 10th grade left me feeling ...”, 40% of the respondents (n=8) were Very Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Satisfied, 30% (n=6) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 20% (n=4) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the fifth survey item, “My experience with my student’s class schedule on the first day of high school left me feeling ...”, 40% of respondents (n=8) were Very Satisfied, 45% (n=9) were Somewhat Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 5% (n=1) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the sixth survey item, “My experience with programming, to meet my student’s unique needs on the first day of high school, left me feeling ...”, 35% of respondents (n=7) were Very Satisfied, 45% (n=9) were Somewhat Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 10% (n=2) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the seventh survey item, “My experience with arranging a transition planning IEP meeting at the junior high in the spring with special education high school staff left me feeling ...”, 55% of respondents (n=11) were Very Satisfied, 25% (n=5) were Somewhat Satisfied, 20% (n=4) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and no respondents endorsed being Very Dissatisfied.

For the eighth survey item, “My experience with the outcomes of a transition planning IEP meeting left me feeling...”, 15% of respondents (n=3) reported feeling

Very Satisfied, 40% (n=8) were Somewhat Satisfied, 40% (n=8) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 5% (n=1) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the ninth survey item, “My experience with reaching my student’s high school IEP case manager before school began left me feeling ...”, 45% of the respondents (n=9) were Very Satisfied, 15% (n=3) were Somewhat Satisfied, 10% (n=2) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 30% (n=6) were Very Dissatisfied.

For the tenth survey item, “My experience with having my general concerns addressed in the IEP meeting in a timely manner left me feeling ...”, 55% of the respondents (n=11) were Very Satisfied, 35% (n=7) were Somewhat Satisfied, 5% (n=1) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 5% (n=1) were Very Dissatisfied.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Individual Parent Satisfaction Items

Item	N	Percent
My experience with having adequate information regarding special programs at the high school before my student completed 9 th grade left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Satisfied	8	40.0
Very Satisfied	9	45.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with accessing the on-line high school information prior to the start of the school year left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	2	10.0

Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Satisfied	9	45.0
Very Satisfied	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with reaching special education high school staff in the spring of my student's 9 th grade year left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	4	20.0
Somewhat Satisfied	6	30.0
Very Satisfied	8	40.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with reaching (i.e., phone, email, face-to-face, etc.) special education school staff the summer prior to my student's 10 th grade left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	4	20.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	6	30.0
Somewhat Satisfied	2	10.0
Very Satisfied	8	40.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with my student's class schedule on the first day of high school left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	1	5.0

Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Satisfied	9	45.0
Very Satisfied	8	40.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with programming, to meet my student's unique needs on the first day of high school, left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Satisfied	9	45.0
Very Satisfied	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with arranging a transition planning IEP meeting at the junior high in the spring with special education high school staff left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	4	20.0
Somewhat Satisfied	5	25.0
Very Satisfied	11	55.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with the outcomes of a transition planning IEP meeting left me feeling...		
Very Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	8	40.0
Somewhat Satisfied	8	40.0

Very Satisfied	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with reaching my student's high school IEP case manager before school began left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	6	30.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	10.0
Somewhat Satisfied	3	15.0
Very Satisfied	9	45.0
Total	20	100.0
My experience with having my general concerns addressed in the IEP meeting in a timely manner left me feeling ...		
Very Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Satisfied	7	35.0
Very Satisfied	11	55.0
Total	20	100.0

Overall Parent and Student Satisfaction Items

For the overall parent satisfaction item, “I would rate the overall transition experience to the high school as...”, 35% of the respondents (n=7) rated the experience as Very Satisfied, 45% (n=9) rated the experience as Somewhat Satisfied, 15% (n=3) were Somewhat Dissatisfied, and 5% (n=1) were Very Dissatisfied. For the overall student satisfaction item, “My student would rate their transition

experience to the high school as...”, 35% of the respondents indicated their student was Very Satisfied, 60% (n=12) indicated their student was Somewhat Satisfied, 5% (n=1) indicated their student was Somewhat Dissatisfied. There were no respondents who endorsed their student as being Very Dissatisfied with the overall transition experience.

Table 3

Overall Parent and Student Satisfaction Items

Item	N	Percent
I would rate the overall transition experience to the high school as ...		
Very Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	3	15.0
Somewhat Satisfied	9	45.0
Very Satisfied	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0
My student would rate their transition experience to the high school as ...		
Very Dissatisfied	0	0.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	1	5.0
Somewhat Satisfied	12	60.0
Very Satisfied	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0

Research Question One

What is the level of parental satisfaction in the transition from junior high to high school for special education students? Are there differences in parent satisfaction with respect to the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken?

As seen in Table 3, the majority of the respondents indicated being Very Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied with the overall transition experience from the junior high to the high school 35% and 45%, respectively (n=16) with 20% of the respondents who reported being Somewhat or Very Dissatisfied (n=4). Ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated their student would rate their transition experience as Very Satisfied (35%, n=7) or Somewhat Satisfied (60%, n=12) with 5% (n=1) indicating being Somewhat Dissatisfied. There were no endorsements of Very Dissatisfied from the student perspective.

As seen in Table 4, with respect to gender, parents with female students had a slightly higher level of satisfaction (3.30 vs. 3.04). However, this difference was not significant, $t(18) = 0.678$, $p = 0.506$. The null hypothesis was not rejected. Ethnicity could not be examined statistically as there were only two parents in the sample who endorsed a racial/ethnic group other than Caucasian. For number of disabilities, parents who had students with two disabilities were significantly more satisfied with the transition process from junior high to senior high than those with students having one disability, $t(17) = -2.862$, $p = 0.011$. On average, those with one disability fell between Somewhat Dissatisfied and Somewhat Satisfied ($m = 2.53$) compared to

those with two disabilities who fell between Somewhat Satisfied and Very Satisfied ($m = 3.36$). The null hypothesis was rejected. “Hours in services” was a continuous variable, so a Pearson Correlation was used to examine this relationship. Hours in services ranged from 0 to 6 hours with an average of 1.95 hours ($SD = 2.31$) a day. The relationship was positive; however, it was not strong enough to be statistically significant ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.243$). The null hypothesis was not rejected. For Household Status, those in 2 Parent Households had slightly higher parent satisfaction levels than those in other household structures (3.21 vs. 2.78). This difference was not statistically significant, $t(18) = 1.140$, $p = 0.269$. The null hypothesis was not rejected. Primary language spoken at home could not be examined statistically as there was only one parent in the sample who endorsed something other than English.

Given that the sample size was small, nonparametric Mann-Whitney U tests were also conducted with the t-tests. Results of the Mann-Whitney U tests were consistent with the t-tests, so there was no reason to doubt the results of the t-tests.

Table 4

Parent Satisfaction by Gender, Number of Disabilities, and Household Status

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI	
						Lower	Higher
Gender							
Female	5	3.30	0.60	0.678	0.506	-0.55	1.07
Male	15	3.04	0.68				
# of Disabilities							
One	7	2.53	0.44	-2.862	0.011	-1.44	-0.22

Two	12	3.36	0.68				
Household Status							
2 Parent Household	15	3.21	0.72	1.140	0.269	-0.36	1.22
Other	5	2.78	0.75				

Research Question Two

Is there a difference in parental satisfaction based upon whether the student has mild, moderate, or more significant special education needs?

As seen in Table 5, when comparing disability levels, those in Setting 3 – Significant/High Needs had the highest parent satisfaction levels ($m = 3.60$) followed by Setting 1 – Mild ($m = 3.04$) and Setting 2 – Moderate ($m = 2.79$). These differences were not statistically significant, $F(2,17) = 1.381$, $p = 0.278$. The null hypothesis could not be rejected.

Given that the sample size was small, a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was also conducted with the Oneway ANOVA (Analysis of Variance). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test was consistent with that of the Oneway ANOVA, so there was no reason to doubt the results of the Oneway ANOVA

Table 5

Parent Satisfaction by Disability Levels

Disability Level	N	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
Setting 1 – Mild	12	3.04	0.75	1.381	0.278
Setting 2 – Moderate	4	2.79	0.82		

Setting 3 – Significant/High Needs	4	3.60	0.43		
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Research Question Three

What types of programming and supports at the high school level would be helpful for parents of special education students as they navigate the educational system with their child?

There were two text boxes which addressed Research Question Three. The first text box question was, “What ideas do you have to improve the transition process to the high school.” Fourteen respondents wrote comments about their ideas. Many of the ideas centered around early planning meetings that would begin in the spring and staff would be available prior to the start of the school, “...updated IEP should be revised and approved prior to the end of school year so EVERYONE is on board.” Additionally, these planning meetings would include all teachers and special education staff to share information, an opportunity to meet the new case manager (noted by three different respondents), articulate what students and parents could expect at the high school, and “a review of classes and teachers to make sure they are the best fit for success.” Having richer discussions about assigned teachers and helping to provide the best fit for students was mentioned by two respondents. One respondent suggested a summer open house for special education, another suggested having case managers more accessible in the spring prior to tenth grade and over the summer. There was a comment that indicated there was not a transition plan and “the two schools seem very segmented from each other.” One respondent did not answer the item indicating the transition was not an area of concern, but rather shared ideas

about the special education programming at the high school and their frustrations of working within a structured setting and a desire to have met high school staff prior to registering for classes.

The second text box question was, “What additional supports would have been helpful to you and/or your student in the transition process to the high school?” Ten respondents addressed the question of what additional supports would have been helpful in the second text box. Several of the suggestions centered around meeting the assigned case manager prior to the start of the school year, preferably having them present at the spring junior high IEP meeting in ninth grade. One parent wrote, “I would have loved to be informed and contacted by my daughter’s IEP manager prior to school starting.” Another comment included having small group sessions in the Career Center to help students identify the resources that are available at the high school. One parent expressed their frustration with their students’ schedules being changed, different classes chosen and not an accurate schedule “well in advance of the first day of school.” Changes were made and parents were not participants in the decision making process. Another respondent wrote “...the teachers knowing what my child might need when they are struggling, otherwise I think the transition went well.” Three respondents did write that their student’s transition to the high school went well. One parent again shared frustrations about the overall special education program at the high school and the lack of flexibility and understanding of their student’s disability and educational needs.

Conclusion

This research was developed to study the level of parental satisfaction experienced as their student, who had been identified with special education needs, moved from the junior high setting to the high school environment. A small sample participated in the study, however, there was a 25% response rating, sufficient for data analysis. Due to the small sample size, demographic data and differences were not obtainable for race and ethnicity. Analyses resulted in finding that the majority of parents were satisfied with the transition process and yet indicated areas of improvement that would be appropriate for the school district to consider. A significant finding was obtained indicating parents whose children have more complex needs, as defined by two categorical federal special education labels, may be more satisfied with the transition process than parents whose children have more mild to moderate needs.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary overview of the study and important conclusions drawn from the data analysis in the previous chapter. It provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Parents who completed the survey were satisfied overall with the transition experience from junior high to high school. They also reported that they felt their student would also report overall satisfaction with the transition process. Parents whose students had more significant needs, as based on two federal categorical labels and hours of service, were more satisfied than those parents who had students with more moderate to mild needs. Comments from parents regarding areas of need and improvement aligned with research indicating that parents want improved communication with schools and specifically with the case manager at the high school level. Several parents noted that supports in the spring and throughout the summer would be beneficial and changes in programming should not occur without their input.

Recommendations for further study include expanding the survey to other educational transition levels such as from Early Childhood to Kindergarten, Kindergarten to Elementary, and High School to post-secondary 18-to 21-year old transition programs within the district. Also, development of a longitudinal study

where parents would be surveyed every two or three years since parent perspectives may change and district programming may need continued realignment to best practices based upon student needs and population should be considered.

Overview of Study

American public school students often experience several transitions throughout their academic development. Learning to navigate change can be challenging for the student as well as the family and educational support systems. New responsibilities, relationships, learning acquisitions, and school experiences can evoke either positive or negative feelings as people learn to adjust to new environments and expectations. Academic transitions can provide opportunities as well as challenges for students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Neild, 2009). While these changes can be intense for typically developing students and their parents, for parents of special education students the information and educational system present challenges that can be overwhelming (Stone, 2003). Several scholars have suggested that successful transitions require an understanding of the experience from the child perspective, the parent perspective, and the teacher/school perspective (Atwater, et al. 1991; Whitton, 2005).

While there is an abundance of research documenting the transition from early childhood to elementary school, there is limited information about the transition from junior high to high school. This study was developed to understand the level of parental satisfaction in the transition of their student, who has special education needs, as they move from the junior high setting to the high school environment. This research occurred in a Midwest suburban/semi-rural school district and was a

hybrid case study using a quantitative research design. The purpose of the study was to inform the school district about the level of parent satisfaction with the transition to high school for students with special education needs and to help the district understand what is working well and areas for further consideration and improvement. If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical.

Review of Methodology

Data were collected through a survey that had been developed and field tested by the principal researcher. The target population was parents of students who matriculated from the two junior highs in the district to the one high school, all of whom were identified with special education needs and received special education services with a current Individual Education Plan (IEP). Data were collected during six weeks from November 1, 2015 through December 15, 2015. Informed consent and an electronic link to the survey were sent out by mass email from the school district Student Support Services department to 62 families of the incoming class of tenth graders. Seventy-seven emails were sent as several families had multiple email addresses. Case Managers followed up with a phone call or email to their respective families encouraging them to complete the electronic survey or a paper survey if they preferred. Twenty surveys were completed and four surveys were started but not finished which resulted in a 25% response rate for data analysis. Paper survey results were entered into the electronic survey by a neutral third party.

Data was analyzed using the SPSS statistical program (IBM Corp. (2013)). Data analyses for research question one used t-tests and given that the sample size

was small, nonparametric Mann-Whitney U tests were also conducted. Results of the Mann-Whitney U tests were consistent with those of the t-tests, so there was no reason to doubt the results of the t-tests. Research question two statistical analysis used an Oneway ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and given that the sample size was small, a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was also run. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test were consistent with that of the Oneway ANOVA, so there was no reason to doubt the results of the Oneway ANOVA.

Summary of Major Findings

Research Question One: What is the level of parental satisfaction in the transition from junior high to high school for special education students? Are there differences in parent satisfaction with respect to the gender of the student, ethnicity of the student, number of disabilities (one vs. multiple), hours in services, household status, and primary language spoken?

As seen in Figure 1, the majority of the respondents indicated being Very Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied with the overall transition experience from the junior high to the high school 35% and 45%, respectively (n=16) with 20% of the respondents who reported being Somewhat or Very Dissatisfied (n=4). Ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated their student would rate their transition experience as Very Satisfied (35%, n=7) or Somewhat Satisfied (60%, n=12) with 5% (n=1) indicating being Somewhat Dissatisfied (Table XIV, Chapter 4). There were no endorsements of Very Dissatisfied from the student perspective.

Figure 1

Overall Parent Satisfaction

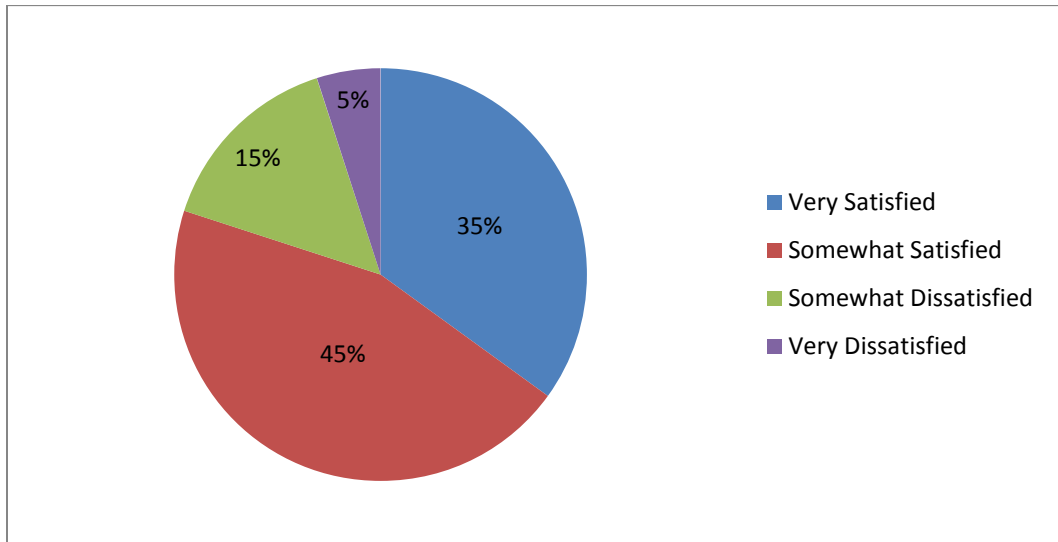
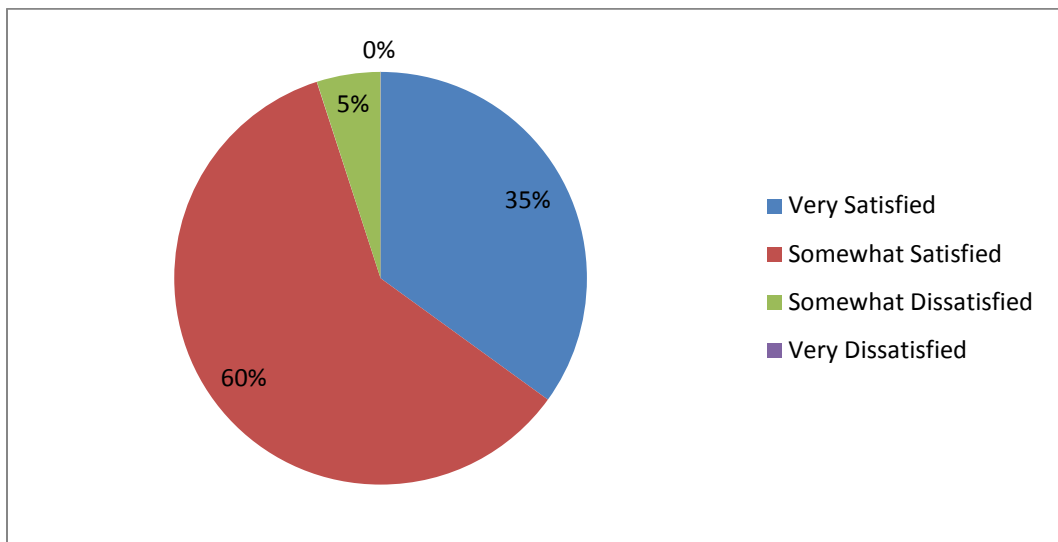


Figure 2

Overall Student Satisfaction



The null hypothesis was not rejected for research question one which analyzed responses based upon demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, parent household, primary language, primary disability and secondary disability identification and hours of service delivery. As seen in Table 4 (Chapter 4), with respect to gender, respondents with female students had a slightly higher level of satisfaction (3.30 vs. 3.04). However, this difference was not significant, $t(18) = 0.678$, $p = 0.506$. The null hypothesis was not rejected. Ethnicity could not be examined statistically as there were only two parents in the sample who endorsed a racial/ethnic group other than Caucasian. Respondents who had students with two disabilities were significantly more satisfied with the transition process from junior high to senior high than those with students having one disability, $t(17) = -2.862$, $p = 0.011$. On average, those with one disability fell between somewhat dissatisfied and somewhat satisfied ($m = 2.53$) compared to those with two disabilities who fell between somewhat satisfied and very satisfied ($m = 3.36$). The null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question Two: Is there a difference in parental satisfaction based upon whether the student has mild, moderate, or more significant special education needs?

The null hypothesis was also not rejected for research question two which analyzed the data to see if there was a difference between parent satisfaction for students with mild, moderate, or significant/high needs. As seen in Table 4 (Chapter 4) when comparing disability levels, those in Setting 3 – Significant/High Needs had

the highest parent satisfaction levels ($m = 3.60$) followed by Setting 1 – Mild ($m = 3.04$) and Setting 2 – Moderate ($m = 2.79$). These differences were not significant, however, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Research Question Three: What types of programming and supports at the high school level would be helpful for parents of special education students as they navigate the educational system with their child?

Research question three data were gathered through respondent's comments in two textbox questions:

“What ideas do you have to improve the transition process to the high school?”

“What additional supports would have been helpful to you and/or your student in the transition process to the high school?”

Fourteen responses were submitted for the first question. Many of the ideas for improvement centered around better communication and planning prior to the transition experience for parents and students with the new school case manager and teachers. Comments included; “I was hoping there would be some time he could meet with his teachers and case manager before the school year started, this did not happen nor was it ever suggested to us” and “I did not have any communication with the high school before he started his tenth grade year.” As noted in survey questions three and four 30% of parents were dissatisfied with reaching high school staff in the spring of their student's 9th grade year and 50% were dissatisfied in trying to reach high school special education staff during the summer. Teachers are not in session during the summer, but districts may want to identify a special education teacher to

be available during the summer, and provide some compensation for their time. One parent suggested a summer open house, one commented having case managers more accessible in the spring prior to tenth grade and over the summer, “make case managers more accessible in the spring prior to tenth grade and over the summer to some extent.” Another parent wrote an “updated IEP should be revised and approved prior to the end of the school year so EVERYONE is on board.” One respondent reported, “there was not a transition plan, the two schools seem very segmented from each other.” Clearly, parents see a need for schools to increase the support of students through better planning, face to face meetings, and availability of staff during the spring and summer months prior to student’s starting at the high school.

Ten responses were provided for textbox question two which asked, “What additional supports would have been helpful to you and/or your student in the transition process to the high school?” Suggestions for additional supports included conversations with new high school case managers prior to the start of the school year, information for teachers on their student’s unique learning needs, stability of schedules with no last minute changes and keeping the parents a part of the decision process if changes needed to occur. One parent wrote, “I would have loved to be informed and contacted by my daughter’s IEP manager prior to school starting.” Another parent expressed frustration that their student’s schedule changed and different classes were chosen. These changes were made without parent involvement. A third parent suggested “don’t wait until the last moment to assign case manager— have them attend the Jr. High IEP Meeting in ninth grade prior to starting at the high school.”

Educational researchers emphasized numerous times the importance of parent involvement and partnership with the school to support student transitions. Parent involvement is critical and students with strong parental involvement navigate educational demands more successfully (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Effective communication between schools and parents is important to assure that parents are aware of the transition supports provided and that they have the information to support the transition activities.

Discussion

The overarching question, (Research Question One) regarding the level of parent satisfaction with the transition experience from the junior highs to the high school for their student with identified special education needs resulted in a positive trend with 80% of the parents reporting being Very Satisfied, or Somewhat Satisfied with their student's transition experience. Research on school transitions indicates varied responses to the level of parent satisfaction. Some studies indicate that for many parents of special education children, they are satisfied with their child's overall educational experience (Bouck, 2011; Newman, 2005, Starr, Foy and Cramer (2001; cited by Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2005), with 70% of parents satisfied and 30% of parents dissatisfied. Other studies indicate that the level of satisfaction declines as the child matures, which was not evidenced in this study since earlier transitions were not included in this research for comparison.

It appears that the overall process of helping students move from the junior high to the high school in the identified Midwest school district is a positive process.

Additionally, parents indicated that 95% of their students would have identified the process as being Very or Somewhat Satisfying. It appears that the district is doing some things right in supporting their families. However, with an 80% approval rating, 20% of the parents see room for improvement and are dissatisfied. The district needs to address their needs as this is not a time to be complacent about the transition process.

In reviewing more closely the data obtained for demographic variables, due to the small sample size and a homogeneous population of respondents (only two respondents indicated an ethnic group other than Caucasian) the race variable was not sufficient for data analysis. What was noted was parents of female students were slightly more satisfied than parents with male students, but the data analysis did not produce a significant result. As seen in Table 4, (Chapter 4) with respect to gender, respondents with female students had a slightly higher level of satisfaction (3.30 vs. 3.04). However, this difference was not significant. This may be an area of for further study to determine if there are unique or specific needs that parents would like addressed that are different based upon the gender of their student.

A significant finding was generated for Research Question one. Respondents who identified their students as having two special education identifications, meeting criteria for two federal categorical labels, were more satisfied with the transition experience than those who reported their student to be identified with one categorical label. On average, those with one disability fell between Somewhat Dissatisfied and Somewhat Satisfied ($m = 2.53$) compared to those with two disabilities who fell between Somewhat Satisfied and Very Satisfied ($m = 3.36$).

This was a significant finding and posits that perhaps students with two special education labels are more complex and in need of more service, therefore, the district does a better job of programming intentionally for those transitions. Supporting that notion, is the positive trend line for students who were categorized as needing more hours of special education service during the day (mild, moderate, significant/high needs), which was the premise of Research Question Two. Respondents reported a greater level of satisfaction with the transition experience for students with more significant needs than those with more mild needs. As seen in Table 5 (Chapter 4) when comparing disability levels, those in Setting 3 – Significant/High Needs had the highest parent satisfaction levels ($m = 3.60$) followed by Setting 1 – Mild ($m = 3.04$) and Setting 2 – Moderate ($m = 2.79$).

These data beg to ask the question if the district is more intentional about supporting more complex students and parents in the transition process, whereas, parents with students who have less significant needs fend more for themselves using the information for all incoming students rather than having additional help through the special education department. In the 2013-2014 school year, the district did implement a new process of spring transition meetings specifically for students with more challenging and complex needs. This was an intentional decision by the Student Support Services department to initiate a pilot system to help students with complex needs and their parents navigate the move to the high school with more support. Students with more moderate and mild needs were not included in that pilot project. Thus, the positive trend for greater levels of satisfaction for more complex

students could be a reflection of a new system that was piloted in the spring prior to the research (May 2014) and could have impacted the results in a direction that was not expected. Qualitative comments provided in the two text-box questions did not identify as to whether the student had multiple needs or not, rather the comments were more broad and overarching in scope.

Respondents, who rated their student with more moderate needs, were the least satisfied of all the three groups. Perhaps this group of parents has a different understanding of the system and may not feel supports are in place for their student. This appears to be different from the research noted in the literature review where parents of students with more complex needs were less satisfied.

A study by Miles-Bonart (2002) noted parents of students with physical impairments and significant health needs to be very dissatisfied with special education services, and data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2 2000) and Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS 2001) reviewed by Newman (2005) identified parents of students with emotional behavior concerns the least satisfied, followed by parents of students with other health impairments, traumatic brain injuries, or autism. This researcher believed that parents with more complex needs would be less satisfied, than those with more mild needs. Data analysis indicated the opposite occurred and it may have been a direct reflection of the new pilot system.

Research Question three was the driving force behind this study. As noted in the research, transitions are normal part of the educational experience and academic transitions can provide opportunities as well as challenges for students (Akos &

Galassi, 2004; Neild, 2009). Research supports the notion that while educational transitions can be challenging for parents in general, they are more so for parents of special education students (Dorman, 2012; Stone, 2003). If school professionals are in the position to support educational transitions, understanding the parent perspective is critical and parents want to be involved in the transition process.

As noted in Figure 1, an overwhelming majority of respondents, (80%) rated the transition experience as Somewhat or Very Satisfied with the process. However, that does not suggest that the district is doing all things well. Many of the comments in the text boxes emphasized the need for additional communication, a need for meeting high school case managers in the spring, having meetings in the spring so schedules could be set, having case managers available prior to the start of the school year, meeting with student's teachers so parents are able to share information directly with their student's new teachers, and for parents to be involved in decisions that may result in a change of their student's program. These comments were similar to findings of other researchers as they have attempted to understand the parent perspective and parent needs during major educational transitions.

Akos and Galassi (2004) and Mizelle and Irvin (2000) suggested the major components of effective transition programming include the following: provide students with information about their new school, involve parents, give students social support, and partnership between high schools and middle/junior high schools. Parent involvement is critical and students with strong parental involvement navigate educational demands more successfully (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Effective communication between schools and parents is important to assure that parents are

aware of the transition supports provided and that they have the information to support the transition activities. Mizelle (2005) also gave charge to the schools to keep parents informed and to organize specific transition activities that parents can access such as tours of the high school prior to the start of ninth grade, meeting with the high school counselor, and a day to visit the high school to become acquainted with the high school.

Intentional programming and systems for all students moving from one educational setting to another is emphasized in the literature review. Proponents of educational research strongly support the notion there are strategies to ameliorate the negative effects of the middle/junior high school to high school transition (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Herzog & Morgan, 1998; Legters & Kerr, 2001; Neild, 2009; Queen, 2002; Reents, 2002; Smith, 2001). These experts call on school districts, middle/junior high schools, high schools, parents, and the community to partner together to develop supports for students as they transition from grade to grade and building to building. In this study, it appears that the parent's perspectives as noted through the text box comments, indicate a desire for services that is supported through transition research based best practices. Additionally, areas of need and improvements suggested by parents in the sample school district were aligned with data identified in the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was a very precise research design using a hybrid case study with an underlying theoretical framework of action research. Research from a practical problem solving perspective is considered valid and appropriate by many experts in

the field of social science research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Vogt, 2007). However, results of such a hybrid study are not generalizable outside of the specific school district. This is a significant limitation of this research, but the purpose of this study was to help a specific school district understand and analyze parent satisfaction of the transition from junior high to high school, in hopes to develop systems and programming that include parent information, as well as educator expertise.

Additional areas of research would be to expand the study to other districts. Results may look very different in more urban areas, or rural areas, or in other demographic districts. Another area of future research would be to repeat the study, within the same district on a yearly basis or every two to three years to determine a pattern of satisfaction rather than a one specific time. Parents and student needs change over time, and the level of satisfaction evidenced in this study may not be reflective of upcoming parent groups.

A major consideration for future research would be to revise the survey to study the major school transitions within the district, from Early Childhood to Kindergarten, Elementary to Junior High, and High School to 18 to 21 year old transition programming. Providing a longitudinal picture of parent satisfaction throughout the district would help identify areas of strength and areas to address for needed improvement. As noted in the literature review, outcomes for post-secondary adults are predicated on the significance of their disability and their experience through school (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens 2009; Davies & Beamish 2009; Wilson et al., 2012). Collaboration between school staff, parents, and community

service providers is essential in supporting positive post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities (Finn & Kohler, 2008; Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006; Zhang, Ivester, Chen & Katsiyannis, 2005) and begins with the transition from middle school to high school (Milligan, 1995).

Further revision of the survey to include a social component related to transition would be an additional area of study for the district. This survey was designed and focused on areas of communication and the more structural aspects of the transition process. However, social support as students move from the junior high to the high school was noted to be an important consideration for districts to consider when developing transition experiences. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers; high school is typically a time when friendships and peer relationships take on new importance. The transition to high school can disrupt a students' social network and activities should allow for opportunities to develop positive relationships with new peers and with older students. Activities such as social groups at the beginning of the school year, an e-mail pen pal program, or summer social opportunities have been suggested (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; Hertzog et al., 1999).

Gathering additional information from parents whose students have less complex needs, may help the district in developing a transition system that is specific to those student needs, which may be different what parents and students of more complex concerns may need. While the findings were not significant, respondents for students with more significant/high needs were more satisfied in the transition process than students with more mild needs (Table 5, Chapter 4). Further research could be developed that would specifically address the transition needs of students

whose special education needs are more moderate or mild, based upon Federal Setting as described by number of hours/class periods of special education services.

A final area of research would be for the district to broaden the research and survey all their incoming parents of tenth graders to the high school. Statistics show students are at-risk for lowered academic success after the move from middle/junior high to high school (Alsbaugh 1998,; Alsbaugh 2000; Cauley & Jovanovich 2006; Neild, 2009). It is not only special education students who may need additional transition supports as they move to the high school. Students who qualified for accommodations due to a disability based upon protections provided under the 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 may also be at-risk. Other students may be identified by a junior high counselor as someone to be monitored by their high school guidance counselor and would benefit from additional programming to support their academic and social needs at the high school level.

Conclusions

Results of this hybrid case study indicate while the majority of parents were mostly satisfied with their student's transition from the junior high to the high school, about 20% of parents were dissatisfied. Parents with students with multiple disabilities and more needs were more satisfied than parents whose students had more moderate to mild needs. It could be that the district focuses more intentionally on transition planning for students with more complex needs and does not address the needs of families who enter the high school with less significant needs. Students with more moderate to mild needs may need more support than the traditional or typical

student. Many of the comments from parents supported research in that they want involvement in the transition process, they want intentional transition meetings, they want to meet the new case manager prior to fall, and they want a special educator available in the summer. The district should consider these suggestions as possible improvements to their current transition system.

Transitions in life are a part of the growing process that people experience and are especially evident and distinguishable within the academic structure of the American culture. While some students and families navigate those changes well, for others it is a more challenging and difficult experience. For students with disabilities and their families, educational transitions can be especially trying and difficult (Stone, 2003). Schools need to develop intentional systems to support all students and especially those students with disabilities and unique learning needs, to make the transitions within the educational system more seamless and help students maintain academic skills. This can be accomplished through better communication between differing grades and buildings, staff at the incoming buildings being more accessible to incoming families prior to the transition occurring, and schools providing avenues for parents involvement to help develop positive pathways for their student. Students are the beneficiaries when schools and parents work together and when intentional systems are developed to support student needs as students navigate and move through the structure of the American public school system.

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Appendix A

A Study of Parent Satisfaction With The Transition From Junior High to High School For Students with Special Education Needs

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The School Psychologist at Stillwater Area High School, Colleen Feldman, is conducting a survey regarding parent's experience and level of satisfaction related to their student's transition from junior high to Stillwater Area High School. The research survey is part of Ms. Feldman's dissertation as a doctoral candidate at Bethel University. The objective of the study is to better understand your perception and level of satisfaction with how the senior high supported your student's move to the high school. This study focuses on students identified with special education needs in an attempt to learn if there are some unique supports that would benefit students with disabilities in the transition process.

Stillwater Area Public Schools is requesting your consent to release your email address to Ms. Feldman so that she may send you the survey. An Authorization for Release of Information (Appendix B) can be found at the below link. By clicking the box and providing your email address, you will consent to having the survey sent to the email address you provide. Your responses are anonymous and your feedback will not be correlated to your email address. If you prefer a paper/pencil copy, please contact Colleen Feldman at (651) 351-8084 or via email at feldmanc@stillwaterschools.org

The survey document you receive will include a request that you allow Ms. Feldman to release the results and analysis of the survey data to the Stillwater School District so that we may consider improvements to best serve our parents and students in the transition process from ninth grade to tenth grade.

The consent to release your email address to Ms. Feldman is voluntary, as is your participation in the research survey. If you choose to release your email address to Ms. Feldman, please review the below link Authorization form and electronically provide your consent by clicking the link below by Friday, November 7, 2014. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (651) 351-8381 or at leep@stillwaterschools.org

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this important research. The information gained will help make a positive impact for our students.

Paul Lee, B.A., M.S., Ed.S.
Director of Student Support Services
Stillwater Area Public School

Appendix B

Authorization for Release of Information

To: Independent School District No. 834 (Stillwater Area Public Schools)

THIS AUTHORIZES Stillwater Area Public Schools (Independent School District No. 834 to release the email address I provide to Colleen Feldman, School Psychologist at Stillwater Area High School.

PURPOSE: The forgoing information has been requested by Ms. Feldman for the purpose of sending me a survey related to my child’s experience in transitioning from junior high to Stillwater Area High School. The survey that I will receive is part of Ms. Feldman’s dissertation as a doctoral candidate at Bethel University.

VOLUNTARY RELEASE: I understand that I am not legally required to release the information described herein. My consent authorizing the release of information is completely voluntary and we understand that the only known consequence for declining to release the information is that the School District will not release my email address to Colleen Feldman, School Psychologist at Stillwater Area High School and thus I will not receive a research survey.

REVOCATION: I understand I may revoke this authorization in writing at any time, except to the extent that persons have already made disclosures in reliance on my consent.

DURATION OF CONSENT: My consent to release the information described herein will expire one year from the date of this authorization or upon release of our email address, whichever occurs first.

A photocopy or facsimile of this signed authorization is valid as an original.

Date: _____
Parent _____

Date: _____
Parent _____

*Only one parent signature required.

Appendix C

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Please respond to the items below based upon your experience with your student's transition from the junior high to the high school.

1. My experience with having adequate information regarding special education programs at the high school before my student completed ninth grade left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

2. My experience with accessing the on-line high school information prior to the start of the school year left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

3. My experience with reaching special education high school staff in the spring of my student's ninth grade year left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

4. My experience with reaching (i.e. phone, email, face to face etc.) special education high school staff the summer prior to my student's tenth grade left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

5. My experience with my student's class schedule on the first day of high school left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

6. My experience with programming, to meet my student's unique needs on the first day of high school, left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

7. My experience with **arranging** a transition planning IEP meeting at the junior high in the spring with special education high school staff left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

8. My experience with the outcomes of a transition planning IEP meeting at the junior high in the spring with special education high school staff left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

9. My experience with reaching my student's high school IEP case manager before school began left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

10. My experience with having my general concerns addressed in the IEP meeting in a timely manner left me feeling...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

11. My student would rate their transition experience to the high school as...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

12. I would rate the overall transition experience to the high school as...

Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Very Satisfied

13. What ideas do you have to improve the transition process to the high school?

Answer required, you can state no comment. Please do not identify staff by name.
(Text Box Item)

14. What additional supports would have been helpful to you and/or your student in the transition process to the high school?

Answer required, you can state no comment. Please do not identify staff by name.
(Text Box item)

Demographic Information

1. Student's Gender

-Male, -Female

2. Student's Primary Disability Label

-Specific Learning Disabilities
-Other Health Disabilities
-Emotional/Behavior Disorders
-Autism Spectrum Disorder
-Developmental Cognitive Disability
-Severely Multiply Impaired
-Physically Impaired
-Vision Impaired
-Deaf Hard of Hearing
-Traumatic Brain Injury
-Speech/Language Impairments
-Deaf-Blindness

3. Student's Secondary Disability Label

-Specific Learning Disabilities
-Other Health Disabilities
-Emotional/Behavior Disorders
-Autism Spectrum Disorder
-Developmental Cognitive Disability
-Severely Multiply Impaired
-Physically Impaired
-Vision Impaired
-Deaf Hard of Hearing
-Traumatic Brain Injury
-Speech/Language Impairments
-Deaf-Blindness

4. Number of Class Hours Daily Your Student Receives Special Education Services

-Less than One Hour
-One
-Two
-Three
-Four
-Five
-Six

5. Your Relationship to the Student

- Parent- Two-Parent Household
- Parent-Single Parent
- Co-Parenting but not in the same household
- Primary Care Giver/Guardian, i.e. Adult Relative, Adult Friend, Legal Guardian

6. Student's Ethnicity

- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian
- Other

7. Primary Language Spoken At Home
(Text Box Reply Required)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this confidential and anonymous survey.