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SELF-ADVOCACY AND POSTSECONDARY PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENT IN STUDENTS WITH
HIGH-INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
ALYSSA NELSON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

April 2022

BETHEL UNIVERSITY

SELF-ADVOCACY AND POSTSECONDARY PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENT IN STUDENTS WITH
HIGH-INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

By

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APPROVED

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April 2022

Abstract

This literature review examines studies that investigated and evaluated the relationship between self-advocacy and college program completion in postsecondary students with disabilities. Research was reviewed that used school-aged participants with disabilities, postsecondary-aged students with disabilities, high school faculty, postsecondary faculty, parents of the students with disabilities, and two and 4-year college Disabilities Services staff. Many factors are involved in why students with disabilities tend not to self-advocate for themselves or ask for support or assistance in secondary and postsecondary educational institutions. Inversely, some motivators promote students' self-advocacy decisions, which has sparked interest in this area of study. The studies reviewed showed a positive relationship between self-advocating and college graduation. Student participants of the studies showed a significant increase in college completion when reporting they had registered with their two or 4-year college's disability services office, requested eligible accommodations, asked questions on learning content, and asked for support and assistance. Effective transitional services that offer the skills needed for self-advocacy development during high school is key to building confidence in obtaining postsecondary support and requesting assistance. Student involvement in their IEP meetings and IEPs has also been attributed to a higher rate of requesting accommodations and college success. Students who receive proper quality self-advocacy practice, with their IEP development and meetings, and are informed of their eligibility for support will prepare them with the tools needed to complete their college programs efficiently.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Emerging Area of Study

Since the establishment of 1990, American Disabilities Act (ADA), and the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there has been an increase of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education. The ADA and IDEA 2004 paved the way for individuals with disabilities to receive an education while simultaneously providing confidence and self-efficacy skills to prepare them for adult life. Growth in enrollment due to the groundbreaking establishment of the laws of ADA and the IDEA has developed a need to ensure students with disabilities achieve success within their college programs (Gold & Harris, 2019).

The ADA was established in 1990 as a civil rights law that provided those with disabilities rights to equal opportunity employment, easy accessibility to public facilities and services including state and government-run as well as public and commercial-run organizations and agencies, telecommunication support such as relay services to those deaf and hard of hearing and speech impaired, as well as other support services to those with disabilities (ADA, 2017).

The IDEA, originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, 1975), began the new era of providing youth with disabilities equal rights to education. In 1990, many amendments were made to the EHA, including offering all students, disability or not, access to the same curriculum, and disability additions of traumatic brain injury and autism. One of the primary changes to the EHA was to add a mandatory special education service of providing effective transitional services, including self-determination skill-building, to students with disabilities, which also helped with the establishment of the EHA's transition to the newly named Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Bremel et al., 2003).

Self-determination skills include problem-solving, self-management, decision making, goal setting, self-awareness, choice-making, and self-advocacy (Stang et al., 2009). Self-advocacy includes the

ability to know oneself, know one's needs, and the ability to ask for assistance to meet those needs. When a student with a disability is educated about their disability, their needs to prevent future struggles, and to know what he or she needs, they are more likely to have the skills to advocate for themselves and ask for assistance.

Fourteen years after the IDEA was established, additional amendments including the requirement of written individual family service plans, additions to Child Find requirements, and additional offerings to Early Childhood Transition services, resulted in the reauthorization of IDEA 2004. There have been amendments to IDEA since IDEA 2004 but nothing has been changed significantly enough to dictate reinstatement (IDEA, 2020).

Since the ADA and IDEA were established, students with disabilities who are eligible for special education services have needed self-advocacy skills. Although students in the United States with disabilities are provided special education services and accommodations from early childhood education through secondary schooling or the twelfth grade, they are not so readily offered these accommodations within postsecondary universities (2 or 4-year colleges), trade, and/or technical schools. The need to build self-advocacy skills within students with disabilities before they complete their secondary education has grown since the founding of the ADA and the IDEA.

Although the enrollment numbers of students with disabilities have expanded, graduation rates have not. Students with high-incidence disabilities such as learning disabilities are more likely to complete college programming if they enroll with the college's disabilities services office and disclose their disability and/or access universal college supports (Newman et al., 2019). An emerging area of study has focused on the need for students with disabilities to build and/or practice self-advocacy to ensure accommodations are given at the postsecondary level. These studies explore the success levels of students who do and who do not practice quality self-advocacy skills at the postsecondary school in which they are enrolled.

Research on building self-advocacy within individuals with disabilities dates back to a movement in Sweden during the 1960s. This movement's mission was to build self-advocacy in individuals with disabilities and provide them with opportunities to develop their self-determination, skills-building social groups (Caldewell, 2011). In 1972, the rise of "People First," a group formed to communicate that a disability should not define an individual, was formed in Great Britain, Canada, and spread across the United States a few years later. In 1974, "People First" was established during the first United States self-advocacy conference (Crocker & Smith, 2019). The development of "People First" would be one among many self-advocacy groups across the United States as well as the world that provided opportunities to learn from each other about their rights and responsibilities and where they could practice leadership, problem-solving, and social skills that were essential to the exercise of their rights (Brunk, 1991).

Along with the development of the "People First" movement, in 1972, Wolfensburger introduced a concept called the principle of normalization. In his book titled, *The Principle of Normalization In Human Services*, Wolfensburger stated that "utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible, to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible" (Wolfensburger, 1972, p. 28). The concept of normalization grew and paved the way towards providing individuals with disabilities normalization, equality, and integration into general society (Brunk, 1991). In 1975, individuals with learning disabilities coordinated the first self-advocacy conference, which would be one among many self-advocacy groups across the United States as well as the world that provided opportunities to learn from each other about their rights and responsibilities and where they could practice leadership, problem-solving, and social skills that were essential to the exercise of their rights (Brunk, 1991). In 1991, the Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), a nationwide self-advocacy organization that provided self-advocacy support to those with disabilities and offered them equal opportunities to make decisions, choices, and have the same rights and responsibilities as the

general public, was founded in the United States (Zubal et al., 1997). SABE continues to support building self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities (SABE USA, n.d).

The first studies investigating the relationship between self-advocacy and college completion were implemented between the years 1985-1993 by the National Longitudinal Transition Study to evaluate postsecondary results on students with high-incidence disabilities who do and do not practice self-advocacy at the postsecondary level. Results of reports from 220 postsecondary-aged youth showed that students who enrolled in postsecondary disabilities services and advocated for accommodations, practice, and self-advocacy, were more likely to graduate (Newman et al., 2019). Since then, other studies have continued to look at the relationships between students who advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level and those who do not. A variety of studies have shown that when students are knowledgeable of their disability-related needs, the resources and supports available at the postsecondary level, practice self-advocacy skills including asking for help when needed and building confidence, they are more likely to complete their college programs.

Definition of Terms

In these studies, there are several frequently used terms to understand. Self-advocacy is a broad term that encompasses three parts, knowing oneself, knowing one's needs, and knowing how to get what you need (The University of Wisconsin, n.d.). Stodden et al. (2003) defined self-advocacy as the ability to communicate one's needs and wants and make decisions about the support needed to achieve them. Self-determination is an even broader term that includes self-advocacy, as well as the confidence to persevere and make and follow through with decisions (Kester et al., 2021; The University of Wisconsin, n.d.). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines postsecondary as education that follows secondary education (i.e., 2-year and 4-year colleges, trade schools, technical schools). Stang et al. (2009) explained that self-determination skills include: problem-solving, self-management, decision making, goal setting, self-awareness, choice-making, and self-advocacy. High-incidence disabilities are defined as being the

most prevalent disabilities among children. High-incidence disabilities include emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), learning disabilities (LD), mild intellectual disability (MID), high-functioning autism (ASD), attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and speech and language impairment (Gage et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2021). Within the context of this research paper, the word disclosure indicates making a disability known (Newman et al., 2019). Accommodations are used in the context of this report as the support, alterations to assignments/tasks, and change of environment to enhance learning comprehension that will help a student with a disability complete a regular course of study (Lopez, et al., 2019; Washington University, 2021). Transitional skills or transitional planning strategies involve teaching students basic life skills including self-advocacy, planning for life after secondary school graduation, educating students about accommodations available to students at the postsecondary level, communicating with and informing the students' parents of accommodations available to their child, as well as practicing the development of self-efficacy (Mambaloe et al., 2020). "Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997, p. 5). "Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's motivation, behavior, and social environment" (American Psychological Association, 2009; Kim et al., 2021, p. 314).

Thesis Questions

Guiding questions for this literature review are:

- 1) Why are students with high-incidence disabilities not requesting eligible accommodations at post-secondary institutions?
- 2) Why are most students with high-incidence disabilities unsuccessful in completing postsecondary programs?
- 3) How can secondary school faculty prepare students with high-incidence disabilities with self-advocacy skills that will benefit them at the postsecondary level?

4) What effective strategies and activities should secondary faculty teach students with high-incidence disabilities to ensure they self-advocate and ask for eligible assistance at the postsecondary level?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

This chapter reviews the published literature on the importance of building self-advocacy in students with learning disabilities. The research assembled within this report discusses the proof of unsuccessful students when they are not advocating for themselves and asking for assistance in college. It also covers reviews of what transitional services strategies are being implemented to help students with learning disabilities requesting services within the secondary and postsecondary settings. Research and reviews were also obtained about students with learning disabilities who have made achievements due to self-advocating for themselves in high school and postsecondary education and the statistics showing these success rates. The literature used in this thesis was obtained from the research librarians at Bethel University, searches of Bethel University Digital Library, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, SAGE Publications, EBSCO, and Google Scholar.

Importance of Being a Self-Advocate

On record, more and more students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education. In fact, “Sixty percent of young adults with disabilities were reported to have continued to postsecondary education within eight years of leaving high school” (Newman et al., 2011, p. xv). The Individuals of Disability Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 mandates that students with disabilities, who have previously received special education services, are eligible for accommodations and support at the college level and have benefited from these services. Although they benefit from asking for assistance, students with disabilities are rarely requesting these accommodations and therefore not completing their college programs. Self-Advocacy is defined as the ability to communicate one’s needs and wants and make decisions about the support needed to achieve them (Stodden et al., 2003). This explanation provided by Stodden et al. (2003) of being an advocate for oneself was confirmed by the University of Rhode Island researchers Daly-Cano et al. (2015), discovered that students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary

education should be receiving self-advocacy skills instruction before enrollment. Daly-Cano et al. (2015) gathered this data from a study that involved interviewing eight college-age students. The students were asked questions about their transitions to their currently enrolled university, who were involved in helping with their transition process, and how their experience was during their first year in college. Never prompted, the students mentioned the term, concepts, and the importance of self-advocacy numerous times during their questioning. Experts of this study reported that students with disabilities benefit from practicing self-advocacy by displaying knowledge of information about one's disability, including his or her needs, knowing what accommodations and supports are available to him or her at the postsecondary level, and the ability to disclose one's disability to the college and the school's disability services office. Within their report, Daily-Cano et al. (2105) agreed with researchers Van Reusen et al. (1991, p. 37) in the definition, "self-advocacy as an individuals' ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs, and rights."

Evidence of the Problem

Research shows that students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary institutions do not always ask for assistance and support when it is needed. In 2011, Newman et al.'s research study results, from the 2001 National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER) and a subsequent National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), indicate that 63% of the students with disabilities did not acknowledge they had a disability (when their secondary school reported they did). Another 9% of the students with disabilities chose not to report it, 24% of the postsecondary students decided to disclose their disability and pro-actively connected with the disability services office before enrollment. The other 4% chose to disclose their disability after enrolling in the postsecondary institution.

Many students with disabilities have been unsuccessful in achieving college or other post-secondary education institutions compared to their peers without disabilities (Newman et al., 2011). Research indicates that when students disclose and request accommodations, they are more likely to

complete their college program. The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) provided data gathered from students with disabilities who fell within 13 to 16 years old. Results offered from these students were gathered five times during the years 2001 and 2009, in which these students eventually fell between the ages of 21-25. The group of student participants was compiled from a sample of students across the country who were receiving special education support within one or more of the 12 disability categories and had individual education plans (IEPs) (Newman et al., 2011). This study's longitudinal statistics show that twenty-eight percent of the students who participated had disclosed their disability to their postsecondary school, and only nineteen percent requested accommodations at this level. Although a portion of the students were still enrolled and attending their college of choice, researchers of the NLTS2 found that thirty-one percent of the students had dropped out of their post-secondary institution before completing their program (Newman et al., 2011). Forty-four percent of the students had requested some form of support, disability-related or other universal assistance offered to the entire student body. Nineteen percent of these students had reported receiving disability-related accommodations and services in college (Newman et al., 2011) when 87% of the students received accommodations in high school (Newman et al., 2011). The data collected from this study verifies the need for students with disabilities to self-advocate for themselves to receive the additional support they are guaranteed through IDEA 2004.

Since the NLTS2 study was completed in 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted another study in 2012-2013 asking parents/families and high school students with disabilities similar to the 2001-2009 NLST2 study. The study was conducted in three separate parts. The first study asked the participants questions of students' background characteristics, health, functional abilities, and engagement in school, the academic supports they receive, and their expectations for and steps to achieve transitions beyond high school (NCEE). The reasoning for this study was to compare the background information of those with disabilities with those without. The second survey asked questions about

students' disabilities to determine differences among each of the twelve main disabilities. The third set of questions was to receive information on how the students with IEPs have changed over time.

Results from the NLTS 2012 study revealed that although most of the students with disabilities reported that they had attended their IEP meetings, the percentage of these students who had received transition services at the secondary level decreased from 79 to 70 percent within the years of 2003 to 2022. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported discrepancies between students with and without disabilities enrolling in postsecondary educational programs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). The report also confirmed whether each disability category had received a decline in transition services and the percentage of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) had declined. Similarly, the students' parents who participated in the study and who received communication about transition services also decreased from 79 to 60 percent during that time (Liu et al., 2018).

Many students with disabilities who have had an IEP or 504 in high school who enroll in postsecondary education reported struggles to ask for eligible accommodations or other support that could help them succeed in their coursework. The Lightner (2012) study verified that although they received transition services within their secondary educational programs, students with learning disabilities have not always asked the college's Office of Disability Services (ODS) upon beginning their freshman year for eligible assistance with their studies. The most prominent reasons the students did not initially ask for ODS support reported that they did not have the time, they were not aware of what support was available or whom to contact, they wanted to "break free" from their disability label and felt they were doing well without. The students with disabilities who participated in the study were enrolled at a reputable 4-year university and varied in class from their second year to their fourth year within their college program and consisted of 19 women and 23 men (Lightner, 2012). Fifty-five percent of the students who participated in this study did not report to ODS until their senior year. The majority of the students' reasons for this were not independently being successful within one or more courses. Those who asked for ODS support

initially or earlier on within their freshman year in college reported that they had received information regarding transitioning postsecondary education and what they were eligible for. These statistics may prove that students are not always receiving efficient secondary education transition services and learning. Still, it was unclear if impairments within self-advocacy skills also added to the problem.

Many postsecondary students, specifically those with high-incidence disabilities such as learning disabilities, are challenged with having the confidence to strive for academic success. This struggle leads to refraining from disability disclosure and asking for eligible accommodations at the postsecondary level. A longitudinal study was conducted with 532 post-secondary students with learning disabilities enrolled at a 4-year college or university to determine whether confidence in academic abilities was a factor in academic outcomes. Fifteen percent of these students were enrolled in larger universities, and 85% had enrolled in smaller 4-year colleges and universities. The research was gathered during the participants' freshman year (2004) and then again during their senior year (2006). In 2021, researcher Kim determined that students with learning disabilities lacked confidence in academic ability and intelligence much more than students without disabilities. Although more students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education than in years past, the study reports that they are less likely to seamlessly transition to college life and the expectations of independence (Kim, 2021). This study determined that self-doubt in academic abilities affects the students' self-efficacy and, therefore, a lack of the confidence to disclose their disability, request support, or ask for clarification. According to student-reported responses, students with disabilities struggled with self-efficacy and confidence in these abilities (Kim, 2021).

This statistic verifies that students need to receive specific self-advocacy skills practice within their secondary transitional services (Kim et al., 2021). Students also struggle to disclose their disability or ask for academic support as they do not want to be labeled by the disability's stigma. If they are taught why they should ask for services within secondary education, they would be more likely to disclose their

disability as those who do report their disability or request accommodations are known to receive higher academic success (Kim & Lee, 2016).

The general belief in personal success, or self-efficacy, is another key factor in whether a student with disabilities will complete their college program and obtain personal success. When confidence is established, the student is more liable to ask for assistance to help him work towards positive outcomes (Kim et al., 2021). These findings suggest that students need to be readily prepared before transitioning to postsecondary education.

Kim's (et al.) work agreed with another study conducted in 2012 by Quinlan et al. that confidence plays a large role in whether students will disclose their disability to the postsecondary institution or its disability services office. The researchers of the 2012 study gathered longitudinal data of the same large group of students in 2008, their freshman year, and again in 2010, their senior year of college. The data determined that those students with learning disabilities (and other high-incidence disabilities) were less likely to disclose their disabilities than those with more apparent disabilities, such as physical or sensory impairments (Quinlan et al., 2012).

The participating students with LD reported that they had not informed the college of their disability because of fear of stigma and insecurities of their academic ability, which leads them towards lower opportunity for college completion (Quinlan et al., 2012). As stated previously, the Kim et al. study (2016) reported that a student is more likely to have higher academic achievement if they choose to access available support and requests accommodations. These combined statistics infer that students with learning and other high incidence disabilities need to be informed of the importance of self-advocating in college to offer greater opportunities for academic success and program completion.

National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), a longitudinal study that used many avenues of gathering research data (including student interviews, institution records, government databases, and other administrative sources), researched the characteristics of students in postsecondary

education as well as the number of students who reported having disabilities. The study concludes from their last assessment held in 2015-2016 that 19-20% (19%: female; 20%: male) postsecondary students reported having disabilities an average of 11% of the time. The NPSAS study statistics from 2008 show that 8.9% of postsecondary students disclosed they had a learning disability (NCES, 2021). The data from the NPSAS studies did not clarify whether there could have been students who participated in the study who chose against disclosing their disability as that may have affected the results.

Although the NPSAS and NTLS2 studies provided research-based data, due to student bodies' varying socioeconomic, environmental, cultural, type of institution (public/private), and size of the school, the Leake (2015) study recommends that individual secondary institutions should conduct their research studies to determine where they need to increase transitional skills instruction to prepare their students for degree achievement and successful outcomes with their post-secondary education (Leake, 2015).

Newman et al. (2019) offered confirmation that students who receive postsecondary accommodations in which they are eligible for under their disability, as well as supports that are available to the entire student body, are more likely to complete their college program and have the opportunity to move on to a new career. The Newman study reported that 53% of the students with learning disabilities (LD) had requested assistance from their institution and 26% of the students with LDs asked for support through disability services when 98% of high school students with LD obtained special education services. Only twenty-five percent of the students with LDs disclosed their disability to the college. The authors of this study stress how crucial it is to the students' success for secondary teaching staff to offer transition services that inform their students of the importance of connecting with the college's disability services office and accessing assistance that is available to the entire student body. Within these transition services, Newman and his co-researchers recommended that staff educate their students with the process

of disclosure, knowing their legal rights as students with disabilities, as well as practicing how to ask for these supports which calls self-advocacy to be a large role (Newman et al., 2019).

In 2021, while researching ways to effectively train and help youth and families understand the options available for transitioning out of high school, Kester et al., gathered key findings based on responses received from students (503 youth/young adults, ages 14-25 with disabilities), their family members, and stakeholders involved in disability transitional planning. The researchers of this study found that students require a need for feeling included within social communities and self-determination skills training. The youth also indicated the need for building a growth mindset and self-efficacy (the confidence in their abilities and potential). The majority of the participating youth also reported distrusting adults, which offered little motivation to obtain goals (Kester et al., 2021). Family members offered feedback that they were not satisfied with the transition services offered to their son or daughter and had little trust for the education system as a whole. Authors indicated that many parents and other caregiver participants offered promising responses of faith that these services would improve in the future due to studies such as this and the openness the researchers had to suggestions and recommendations. Knowing this key information, researchers understood what services and programs needed to be improved upon and implemented to encourage a higher success rate for students with disabilities transitioning into adulthood (Kester et al., 2021).

Researcher Miller-Warren (2015) found that students are not completing their post-secondary education programs and meeting their goals as they are not receiving effective and helpful secondary transition services. Miller-Warren researched to obtain the current transition services and programs being offered to secondary students with disabilities, ages 18-25, and of various backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. The author's goal was to determine whether the transition services met IDEA standards, mandatory for these students to achieve their goals within their postsecondary education setting. Using the reputable assessments, Transition Technical Assistance Center Indicator 13 Checklist,

the IDEA regulations, and Johnson's 2003 Parent and Family Guide to Transition Education Planning, as well as audio-recordings of participants' responses, Miller-Warren determined that the secondary transition services offered to the students participating in the study were not meeting the preparation requirements needed for these youth to succeed at the postsecondary level (2015).

IDEA 2004 mandates that all students with disabilities requiring special education services and supports should receive transition services, including practicing self-determination skills to promote their success post-high school. Although secondary special education faculty must offer these services to their students, research has indicated these practices are not consistently implemented.

A study conducted by Stang et al. (2009) determined the importance and benefit of receiving self-determination (including self-advocacy) skills practice beginning as early as possible. Stang et al. (2009) surveyed 891 elementary (563) and middle school (328) teachers from 6 different school districts located in a western state on the importance and perceived benefits of instructing self-determination skills to their students. The researchers presented seven key areas of self-determination skills (problem-solving, self-management, decision making, goal setting, self-awareness, choice-making, and self-advocacy) presumably required for the participants' success. They were asked to rate each area of self-determination skills in their order of importance. The participating teachers, predominantly female general education classroom teachers, reported moderate to highly moderate importance to teaching self-determination skills. Over 50% of the teachers indicated that they had frequently taught problem-solving, self-management, and self-regulation in their classrooms. Most admitted they had not introduced or infrequently taught their students self-advocacy, leadership, self-awareness, and self-knowledge skills. These findings allowed Stang et al. (2009) to verify that students are predominantly not receiving enough instruction on building self-determination (including self-advocacy), growth mindset, and self-efficacy skills during their earlier educational years. The researcher's results also determined that students who receive self-determination-related skills practice within their earlier years (elementary through secondary

school) are more likely to succeed in post-secondary as well as other independent “real world” settings (Stang et al., 2009).

The results from this study also supported the indication that students will benefit most if all teaching faculty (general and special education teachers) offer self-determination skills training (Stang, 2009). A collaboratively planned effort among all staff across each school level and within each school (elementary, middle, and high school) will ensure staff universally offer self-determination and self-advocacy-related skills that will produce the most overall postsecondary success in students. A study conducted by Meade in 2017 reported that parents could be eminent participants in their exceptional son or daughter’s success in postsecondary education. Meade asked 40 fully-consented special education teachers and case managers employed by five different high schools within a Georgia school district to respond to survey questions asking what transition services they offer their students with disabilities and what post-secondary outcomes they experienced. The special education teachers responded that students were not as likely to succeed after high school if their parents were not involved in their transition planning (Meade, 2017), which includes encouraging self-advocacy skills (ensuring students know they have to disclose their disability to the postsecondary school of choice, asked for accommodations, and learn specifics about their impairments). The faculty’s communications verified that parents’ involvement is key to their children achieving their goals beyond high school. If they are not involved, students with disabilities are less likely to succeed.

According to Hadley (2006), if students with learning disabilities (LD) do not learn to advocate for themselves, they are less likely to achieve college-level academic success. Twenty-six participating students with LD (including dyslexia) were asked to participate in a qualitative study involving a one-on-one interview as well as focus groups to find out how they thought they had adjusted academically from receiving a high level of support in high school to being responsible for asking for needed assistance within their post-secondary institution (Hadley, 2006). The college-age students with LD responded that

they had struggled with assignments that required extensive amounts of reading and writing assignments. The same group of students also confessed feelings of inadequacy about disclosing their disability to college staff, that they were not used to or prepared to ask for accommodations, and felt discouraged by peers who were navigating schoolwork without difficulties (Hadley, 2006). Hadley concluded her study by stressing that the low concentration of students with learning disabilities who are successful in college is due to the lack of building early self-advocacy skills during secondary transition planning opportunities. Part of self-advocating for oneself includes understanding one's impairments. It also needs to know how to ask their educators for assistance, which is why they need to receive these skills before they venture towards postsecondary educational life.

Based on the results of this study, Hadley explained that although student self-advocacy is imperative at the college level, postsecondary faculty also contribute to the success of their students with learning disabilities. Proactive steps should be taken to ensure that college faculty are supportive of students with learning disabilities and provide all students equal opportunities for a career-yielding education (Hadley, 2006).

What is Helping at Secondary Institutions

It was reported by Newman in a 2011 study that students with LD make up the largest population of students with disabilities who enroll in college and have the lowest college completion results. Although students with LD are less likely to succeed, findings show that if secondary educators effectively teach certain transitional strategies, students are more likely to request accommodations in college and complete their programs.

Studies have shown that students with disabilities who receive either universal or disability supports in college are more likely to complete their programs. Although IDEA of 2004 mandated that students who are the ages of fourteen and older must receive transition services (Employment, Postsecondary Education/Training, and Independent Living, Home Living, Community Participation, and

Recreation/Leisure), statistics suggest that students with learning disabilities who have enrolled within a postsecondary institution have not requested accommodations or assistance from their disability services office and educators. 35% of postsecondary students who had received special education services in high school had disclosed their disability. Although 98% of the students with disabilities received special education services in their secondary institution, 24% received college accommodations. Students with high incidence and less apparent disabilities, such as learning disabilities, were less likely to receive assistance in their postsecondary setting (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

Newman et al., 2019 verified how crucial it is to request support at the postsecondary level. This important detail has not been communicated to students with disabilities earlier. This study showed that students with disabilities are predominantly not requesting assistance when their college completion depends on it. The article clarified the importance of teaching students how to advocate for themselves and offers research-based effective strategies to help students develop these skills at the secondary level (Newman et al., 2019).

Newman et al. asked high schools to volunteer 220 of their students with learning disabilities to participate in a longitudinal study to determine if specific transitional skills strategies taught at the secondary level help promote the acquisition of additional support and accommodations at the postsecondary level. The student participants who had requested college-level support and completed their postsecondary programs indicated that direct instruction and role-playing were effective strategies that prepared them for asking for assistance. They also communicated the significance of teaching self-disclosure, learning and practicing self-advocacy, and self-determination skills. In addition, Newman et al. found that students need help identifying and accessing college-wide supports (2019). Their research found that 56% of the students with learning disabilities who asked for additional support were more likely to complete their college program (Newman et al., 2019).

Researchers who conducted a survey to test the effectiveness of their transition services program offered similar findings. Offering programs at the secondary level to promote self-advocacy and conflict resolution skills are key to college success.

Lopez et al., (2019) tested a modified version of a tried and true self-advocacy program called, Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution (SACR). Researchers asked students with high-incidence disabilities to identify whether it would provide high school students with adequate confidence and knowledge needed to request accommodations from their current secondary educators. They were also asked if these programs would prepare them for the same scenario within their future postsecondary institution.

The original SACR program consisted of two separate modules. The first instructed students in self-advocacy and communication skills, and the second taught the same students how to overcome conflict through negotiation strategies. The first module used the combination of trainer modeling, practicing requesting accommodations with staff and peers, and role-playing self-advocacy skills with staff (Roessler & Palmer, 2000). The second module involved observing an effective teaching model and interacting with staff to practice learned negotiation skills. Results from this study confirmed the effectiveness of the SACR program in that the majority of the students who participated in the program's modules clearly showed improvement in their knowledge of available postsecondary accommodations as well as their responsibilities, different than the support provided in secondary school, in requesting assistance in college (Roessler et al., 2000).

Due to the successful results of the SACR program for post-secondary students with disabilities, researchers Lopez, et al. wanted to create a study that offered a modified version of the Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution (mSACR) program to high school students with disabilities. Lopez, et al. asked five African American students with fourteen varying common disabilities (i.e., autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, etc.) who sought post-secondary education to participate in the study that instructed them in

the modified version of the proven effective SACR program (2019). Since the original SACR program was a success for postsecondary students, the researchers believed it would provide a proactive approach to learning the skills needed to advocate for themselves in college (Lopez, et al., 2019).

Results from this study proved successful as students had shown a significant increase in the knowledge of the skills required to request accommodations and reported to prefer to ask for school staff support independently. By providing students with the mSACR program that initially prepared each student one-on-one with the discussion defining the word “accommodation.” This was followed by a presentation of the accommodations listed in their IEPs. Then, they familiarized each student with the self-analysis component of the program. Within the lessons of the mSACR, students were asked to participate in video-recorded role-playing to practice disclosing their disabilities and requesting accommodations. They watched their role-play videos and were assigned to write a self-reflection. Students received support and assistance while self-analyzing their role-plays and writing a reflection and could reference an informative poster for additional ideas when needed (Lopez, et al., 2019).

Lopez, et al. (2019) asked each student to schedule a meeting with one of their current general education teachers before mSACR and post-mSCAR instruction. Results revealed that each student improved after mSACR instruction to request accommodations and self-advocate. Two to six weeks later, upon screening again, the students continued to show a 71 - 100% improvement, and they presented eight out of fourteen skills taught within the program.

The Lopez, et al. (2019) study successfully showed positive results with effective self-advocacy skill training in high school. High school students who receive training in knowing their disability and needs and requesting eligible accommodations will show improvement and prepare them for future endeavors requiring these skills (Lopez et al., 2019).

Research has shown that some students who follow through with requesting postsecondary support with DSS or with their college institution, in general, are not always requesting this upon initial

enrollment. Lightner et al. (2012) at James Madison University interviewed 42 students with disabilities to obtain whether there is a difference in academic achievement from those who request accommodations and disclose their disability to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at the beginning of their college programming with those who wait until they feel it is needed. The interviews have shown that students who delay support requests result in a lower grade point average (GPA) than those who request services upon enrollment (Lightner et al., 2012).

The students who initially requested services with ODS reported that they had received transitional support from their parents and high school staff. They indicated that the amount of high school transition services related to postsecondary acclimation, including the range of services offered at the college level and being involved in their IEPs and IEP meetings, had a significant factor in their timing of connecting with ODS. This report indicated a correlation between the ability to self-advocate at the postsecondary level with the given quality of transitional services skills practice at the secondary level (Lightner et al., 2012). These findings confirmed that if there is parent involvement in the student's transition, student's involvement with their IEPs, and if teachers are providing the student with knowledge about what accommodations they are eligible for within their postsecondary education, the student is likely to achieve greater academic success (Lightner et al., 2012).

White et al. at the University of Kansas wanted to test the belief that a program that provides specific self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills-based training to students with disabilities would increase the confidence in high school students with disabilities and prepare them to be strong and willing self-advocates initially within their postsecondary setting (2014). The program that was tested involved a combined implementation of online and in-person training that provided knowledge of the students' disability rights and how to request postsecondary accommodations (White et al., 2014). The authors of this study asked 52 college-age students with varying disabilities who had reported to their Disability

Support Services (DSS) office at one of four Midwest higher education institutions to participate in their study.

The study's first phase included the instruction and execution of the online KBOT program, which included an information-based online workshop, followed by a self-assessment. The study's second phase included instruction and practice building the skills needed to request eligible support, based on their rights through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) at the college level (White et al., 2014). The training was completed in one and a half days.

The White et al. experiment showed a significant increase in knowledge after implementation of the program. Students scored 67% accuracy with the pretest and achieved 87% correct with the post-test. Before they received training, they scored 42% in the knowledge-skills pre-test, and after curriculum participation, they scored 65% accuracy. The majority of student participants reported within a survey conducted during the study their overall satisfaction with the training curriculum. They would recommend the implementation of this training curriculum to other students with disabilities. The gathered data from this study shows high school and post-secondary students with disabilities will benefit from proactive, secondary transitional supports, as well as post-secondary skills practice or review, that promote knowledge of their needs and self-advocacy (2014).

A study by Daly-Cano et al. revealed that experiences taught the importance of working on self-advocacy skills early and continually encouraging the practice and review of these skills throughout high school. This knowledge inspired them to conduct a study to determine if building self-advocacy skills in students throughout their school years produced a higher likelihood of independently asking for assistance needed in college. Daly-Cano et al. asked eight college students of various ages, disabilities, and majors, who had connected with their disability services office, to participate in a qualitative study. The students were asked to respond to two separate interviewer questions during the fall semester and during the spring semester to determine whether their experiences of learning self-advocacy skills had

promoted their confidence in asking for assistance within their postsecondary school. The students were also asked to volunteer what support they had received, were effective, and what they would recommend future students with disabilities receive, building their confidence in requesting assistance (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

Half of the participants of this study reported that parental involvement in building self-advocacy skills was one of the reasons they were able to advocate for themselves in college. The students indicated that their parents had conversations with them about the importance of persevering through challenging situations. Although college life requires independence, they were always available for support. Students also said their parents had offered positive comments that motivated pursuit in achieving their postsecondary goals and provided instruction in connecting with their college's disability services office (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

This study also communicated the importance of receiving direct self-advocacy instruction in school. They connected their abilities to ask for assistance from postsecondary staff to the advice, lessons, and activities school staff had given during their K-12 years with special instruction in self-advocacy within the secondary level (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

Based on these results, researchers Daly-Cano et al. (2015) offered recommendations to parents and school staff to help with preparing their students with the skills needed to self-advocate for themselves in college. Researchers of this study suggested that parents and students should be educated in the importance of building self-advocacy skills and that students should be involved in their own IEP meetings to learn to assert themselves. Their findings also indicated that supportive dialogue from parents is vital and that parents and secondary teachers should frequently remind their students the need for advocating for oneself at the postsecondary level. Research reports also suggest that postsecondary educators and disabilities services staff should play a role in offering support and communicating how crucial it is to request assistance when it is needed (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

Results from a study by Holzberg et. al., conducted in 2020 show that high school students with disabilities are more likely to experience positive experiences when they disclose their disability and as well have had higher perceptions of the instructor providing accommodations (Holzberg et al., 2020). This study reported that more students with mild disabilities were enrolling in postsecondary education and stressed the importance of proactively building self-advocacy skills in these youth before they begin their new independence (2020).

Four high school seniors were asked to participate in a learning experience of receiving instruction with a modified version of the original Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution (SACR) program. The four students who participated in this study were pursuing a postsecondary education, expressed an interest in attending postsecondary education, had taken the SAT or ACTs, had a known high incidence disability, had agreed to or received permission to participate, and had previously struggled with self-advocacy (Holzberg et al., 2020).

The SACR program was compiled of a baseline data collection and two modules. The baseline data collection probe included a pre-test of how the student would appropriately request accommodations in college. Once the baseline data was collected, researchers Holzberg et al. (2020) instructed students to use a device to observe the multimedia presentation to the students in a series of explicitly guided lessons teaching key behaviors and assigning role-play scenarios to practice self-advocacy and asking for assistance. The subjects taught by the instructors within the modified SACR program lessons stressed the importance and requested practice of a successful greeting (“Introduction”), disclosing their disability and needs properly (“Disclosure”), and knowledge of previous accommodations and how they benefited from these accommodations. They were subsequently instructed in the areas of asking their current educator for agreement to specifically communicated accommodations, how to respond to a denied request (“Specifying”), listening to and restating the instructor’s concerns to confirm understanding (“Reflecting”), communicating why the accommodation has assisted them and help them towards success

in the past (“Mutualizing”), come up with an agreed-upon solution (“Collaborating”), and presenting an alternative solution (“Inventing”). Finally, the research team taught the students to create closure and a resolution to the student’s accommodation request by summing up their request and collaborated ideas (“Summarizing”), asking the instructor to choose which accommodation option they would accept (“Selecting”), the student will then summarize the accommodation they have agreed upon, (“Summary”), and create finality of their agreement with a proper closing (“Closure”) (Holzberg et al., 2020). The students were periodically assessed in between chunks of instruction to confirm retainment of the target behaviors being presented.

Participants’ results in the modified SACR program’s role-play recordings, and periodic retainment assessment were gathered to confirm the effectiveness of instruction. Holzberg et al. (2020) reported that the modified SACR program instruction had a positive effect on the students’ ability to explain their needs and their disability, and the students understood and were able to follow and execute the steps within the program’s process, which were shown during the role-play activities. The findings also indicated that students gained confidence in asking for and negotiating accommodations. Also clearly demonstrated during the role-play activities, the students followed the steps taught within the program, reported they were more aware of their needs, and understood the importance of learning how to request accommodations in college. They said that they would use the steps they learned from the modified SACR program to resolve conflicts when requesting accommodations (Holzberg et al., 2020).

Based on the feedback from the student participants and results gathered from Holzberg et al., students benefited from the instruction of the SACR program. Students reported that the steps within the program were straightforward to follow. They also indicated they benefited from learning the target behaviors taught within the SACR and now felt more confident in their abilities to request accommodations and negotiate with faculty a compromise for these requests. One of the students had already practiced requesting assistance within his secondary setting, which resulted in his

recommendation that an audio version of typical responses is offered as a substitute for written responses (Holzberg et al., 2020).

The Holzberg et al. research team easily identified that the SACR program was needed to help students sufficiently advocate for accommodations and disclose their disability criteria (2020). Researchers have found that although the IDEA 2007 amendment mandates that students must receive proper transitional planning services in secondary school, concerns have been raised that special education teachers are not meeting these requirements (Meade et al., 2020). Meade and his team of researchers wanted to determine what evidence-based, effective practices and criteria were being implemented within five high school transition programs. They conducted a survey that included forty special education teachers working with students with learning disabilities (LD) within five Georgia high schools with similar transition programs. Participant teachers were asked which three evidence-based transition service programming criteria would have the most positive impact on the students' postsecondary outcomes and what they would suggest utilizing within their future special education transition programming. The three key practices included enhancing and training self-determination skills, school staff and parental collaboration, and "interagency collaboration." The participating teachers were asked how the student's capabilities were affected with, if any, of these criteria. They were also asked to explain any struggles or issues the staff may have with implementing any proven criteria.

Results collected from the first half of the teacher survey showed that self-determination skills and school staff and family partnerships impacted students with learning disabilities graduating four years from their enrollment date. Teachers responded that outside agencies working with the parents were not as impactful on whether they graduated on time.

The second half of the teacher survey reported five obstacles to receive effective transition programming services, which included a "(1) lack of teacher training (2) lack of student involvement (3) lack of parental involvement (4) lack of administrative involvement and (5) lack of resources" (Meade et

al., 2020, p. 69). The researchers' findings concluded that the SACR student's secondary transition services program would enhance student achievement and completion within their post-secondary education (2020).

Students with learning disabilities who receive special education services in high school have communicated the importance of self-advocating in postsecondary school. A group of freshman students with varying majors who had reported having a learning disability at a private, coeducational, 4-year Midwest college was asked to be involved in a study to determine their experiences within their first year of post-secondary education (Hadley, 2006). Knowing the students were not receiving the same kind of support in college as they did within their secondary school, researcher Hadley (2006) asked the students to participate in discussions within interviews and focus groups on describing how they could receive support from their professors when it was needed.

The first-year college students recalled how they were presented with three primary challenges. Those obstacles included being assigned longer overwhelming reading assignments, struggles with writing assignments and feeling ashamed to ask for support or accommodations, and that their homework assignments were not graded. If the students did not receive good grades on the assessments, they were set up for failure within that course or those courses (Hadley, 2006). Although the students reported having obstacles, one of the female students advocated for the accommodation of taking tests outside of class. The entire group of participating students agreed that requesting to meet with their professors when initially feeling overwhelmed or falling behind in their coursework is key to overcoming their struggles.

Hadley's findings from the postsecondary freshman students offered answers as to why they had faced struggles within their first year of college. During the studies interviews and focus groups, the students stated that if they had been prepared with effective self-advocacy skills practice in high school, they would have had the confidence to request assistance at the college level. Hadley suggested that students with disabilities with special education services should receive transitional services that include

learning self-advocacy skills. Secondary and postsecondary faculty should be aware of the importance of informing their students about their specific disabilities and providing their students with the assistance necessary to provide them with an equal opportunity for success (Hadley, 2006).

Research has shown that involving students with disabilities in their IEP meetings is another way teachers can help build postsecondary self-advocacy. Due to little data being researched and reported on this finding, Hengen and Weaver of the University of Nebraska (U of N) pursued the hypothesis of the importance of involving students in their IEP planning to promote self-advocacy in 2020. They cooperated with the U of N's Disability Services Office (DSO) to determine whether students with disabilities who had registered with the DSO had participated in their own IEP meetings and were able to advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level.

One hundred and fifty students at the U of N participated in the submission of a survey requesting demographic and personal information and a reliable survey that assessed post-secondary students with disabilities' capacity to advocate for themselves. Within the survey, Hengen and Weaver wanted to know how many students had advocated for themselves in college by disclosing their disabilities, admitting they had an IEP or 504 plan, and to what extent they were involved in their IEP. Fifty-five percent (88) of the students reported that they had disclosed their disability to the college faculty or the DSO, and thirty-six of the participating students said they had an IEP or 504 Plan. The additional students did not indicate whether they had an IEP or 504 Plan or did not know (Hadley, 2006).

Hengen and Weaver (2006) reported results revealing a substantial discrepancy between the knowledge of self-advocacy and disclosing their disabilities from the students who had participated in the decisions of their IEPs and those who had not. They also concluded that although IDEA 2004 mandates schools to provide optimal transition services to ensure future success and that students benefit from the skills instructed and practiced to promote future self-advocacy, students are being deprived of learning

these important skills. Instilling the importance of advocating and involving students in their education plans prepare students for future achievement and an optimal quality of life (Hengen & Weaver, 2006)

What is Helping at Post-Secondary Institutions

Support from postsecondary institution faculty has increased college-level achievement in students with disabilities. Mamboleo et al. (2020) wanted to find out if these students trusted whether their college educators would provide them with the accommodations necessary to complete their courses and if they did, were they comfortable enough to have disclosed their disability to their professor. These researchers coordinated a study that asked 1,500 students who had registered with their Office of Disabilities Services (ODS) in six public mid-Atlantic universities to participate in a survey to determine if the students felt comfortable enough to, and had indeed followed through with, report their disability and needs to their educators.

Results from the survey indicated that the students agreed on the importance of building self-advocacy skills to ensure students have the confidence to disclose their disability to be eligible for accommodations and support. Many of the participants in this study who reported disclosing their disability to the university felt trust and confidence in their educators and received benefits from their support. A large group of these students indicated that they felt supported after disclosing their disability and requested accommodations (Mambaleo et al., 2020).

The study also determined that most students who disclosed their disabilities and asked for accommodations had received effective transitional skills programming in high school. These facts offered the researchers knowledge to conclude that to complete their coursework and continue until program completion, secondary special education teams and transitional services teachers must provide appropriate transitional programming to their students, including the education and practice involved in disclosing their disabilities and developing self-advocacy skills. Mambaloe et al. (2020) also advised that postsecondary faculty responsible for disability services should connect with their enrolled students with

disabilities to ensure their knowledge of the importance of communicating their disability and requesting support from their educators.

Students with high-functioning intellectual disabilities who have the desire to continue their education can achieve a college degree with proper development of “self-awareness, setting personal goals, and making positive choices for time investment, job training, and lifetime activities” skills (Feathers & Schadler, 2020, p. 12). To validate that building foundations in self-advocacy will prepare students with disabilities to stand up for themselves and ask for assistance/accommodations at the postsecondary level, Feathers, Director of Longwood University, developed the Longwood LIFE pilot study program. The 2-year Longwood LIFE program offers students with disabilities from ages 18-25 who are seeking further education an opportunity to prepare themselves with the skills essential to independent living at the college level (Longwood University, n.d.).

Feathers et al. (2020) assessed their program learning content to justify its validity by recruiting five 18-25-year-old students with intellectual disabilities who had participated in secondary transition programs to participate in the study.

A mixed-method data analysis performed at Longwood University resulted in a reliable data source indicating the students gained essential knowledge and confidence from receiving the Longwood LIFE and prepared them for future independence within their postsecondary instruction of choice. A quantitative analysis which included the simulation of the students’ results from the Pearson’s Quality of Life (QOLI) survey, determined the students believed their contentment and confidence increased since participating in the Longwood LIFE program. The student’s feedback from the QOLI also indicated that they felt that the pilot program had provided them with the essential knowledge and tools needed to live an independent life beyond high school (Feathers et al., 2020).

The Feathers et al. study results showed that, although secondary students benefit from learning self-advocacy skills along with other key transition services, they can also benefit from self-advocacy skill training and support at the postsecondary level (2020).

Although mandated by IDEA in 2004, not all students aged fourteen and up have participated in their IEP meetings and other special education services planning at a Midwest metropolitan university. Discoveries have been made on the importance for students with disabilities to attend their IEP and Evaluation meetings. In 2020, Hengen and Weaver suggested that every secondary school student participate in their own IEP and other special education-related meetings and planning. They believed that involvement in their future could ensure students with disabilities have a stake in planning their future, provide them with an understanding of their disabilities and needs, can build confidence, and build independent skills that encourage the preparation of future self-advocacy [within the postsecondary institution in which the student is enrolled] (Hengen, 2020). To test the correlation between students who are involved early on in attending and participating in their IEP meetings and the students who self-advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level, they executed a study that involved 150 students with disabilities, ages nineteen and up, who had registered with the disability services in office at the college in which they were enrolled. The students were asked for their demographic information and to participate in a Self-Advocacy Measure for Youth (SAMY) survey. The researchers asked them as to what frequency their involvement in their IEP meetings was. There was a substantial difference in SAMY scores in those who did not attend or did not offer feedback within the meeting compared to those who had participated and offered feedback throughout. Those who reported participating in and leading their meetings scored high in the SAMY showing they were better equipped with the skills needed to connect with staff about their disability and ask for needed accommodations (Hengen, 2020). This proves that if students are not involved in their IEP meetings and special education planning, they are less likely to ask for eligible accommodations at the postsecondary level and will therefore set themselves up for

frustrations that can lead to withdrawing from their college program and not meeting their career goals (Hengen, 2020).

Impact/Evidence of Improvement

A variety of research studies have been conducted to determine which transitional skills training programs have been effective in providing their students with high-incidence disabilities with proficient and effective self-advocacy instruction to ensure the likelihood that these students will request postsecondary accommodations. Self-advocacy has been proven an essential skill for students with disabilities' college achievement.

Postsecondary students were studied in the Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution (SACR) training program. Researchers Campbell and Roessler (2000) found that the SACR program taught students with various self-advocacy behaviors and conflict resolution strategies. The SACR training was given to 26 postsecondary students across the country with disabilities enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges whose college institutions confirmed needing accommodations. The study consisted of the implementation of paper and pencil self-reports and audio-recorded role-playing of the students practicing self-advocacy behaviors and conflict resolution strategies. When compared to their 24 postsecondary student control group, Campbell and Roessler's (2020) research study offered evidence that the eight-hour SACR training program proved to show that the students who participated in the training, growth in self-advocacy skills as well as conflict resolution strategies (Campbell et al., 2020).

Another program that offered knowledge in increasing self-awareness and knowing one's rights to receiving accommodations was given to 52 college students. The study's student participants were those with low incidence disabilities from four Midwestern colleges who had already been serviced through their Disabilities Support Services office at their currently enrolled postsecondary institution. This pilot program provided a knowledge-based online tutorial (KBOT) that provided instruction towards increasing self-awareness and a face-to-face skill-based training program that equipped the students with

information related to their rights to receive accommodations at the postsecondary level (White et al., 2014).

A pilot study implemented by White et al., 2014 found that the students revealed a significant increase in knowledge and skills-based learning, indicating their new ability to request accommodations and ask for disability services in college. A social validity survey taken by the study's participants reported that although satisfaction was a bit lower with the online tutorial than the workshop training, the students were overall satisfied with and would recommend the program to the other students with disabilities. White et al. further reported that students in high school would benefit from this training, and "the intervention would be of value for university and college personnel working with students." (p. 237)

Although not a complete resolution, the authors find that this program is key towards helping students with disabilities acquire the knowledge to request accommodations in an academic setting. After meeting with school staff who had the study's participating students enrolled in their courses, it was consistently reported that students had advocated for themselves and requested accommodations (White et al., 2014).

A research study executed by Lopez, et al. (2019) showed a modified version of the research-based Self-Advocacy, and Conflict Resolution Training (mSACR) program for postsecondary students, given to a group of high school students was effective in providing efficient self-advocacy skills training. The mSACR program offered a combination of self-advocacy skills training that offered direct instruction and the assigned execution of role-playing scenarios to practice requesting eligible or universal college accommodations. Lopez, et al. (2020) study asked five high school students, ages 14-17, to participate in the mSACR program and qualitative analysis.

The mSACR program study indicated that the methods used to provide self-advocacy skills training positively impacted the students' ability to identify their needs and request accommodations. The five students maintained between 71-100% of the 14 skills taught during this program after 2 to 6 weeks

of exiting the intervention program. In addition, 8 to 14 of the skills taught during the program and had no prior experience doing so (Lopez, et al., 2020).

Post-mSACR program execution and assessment, the students' indicated that they now had the skills to request accommodations and would prefer to advocate for themselves now in high school and the future within their post-secondary institution. They also reported that although they could recall various skills taught within the program, remembering all 14 target behaviors was challenging (Lopez, et al., 2019). The belief that the mSACR program would positively impact the students with high-incidence disabilities' ability to identify their needs and request accommodations was proven effective (Lopez, et al., 2019).

Receiving a special education teacher's perspective based on their experiences with teaching students with disabilities transitional skills, Meade (2017) developed a study to determine what essential skills needed to be taught to secondary students with high functioning disabilities to have positive outcomes postsecondary level. It was determined that self-determination skills, school, and family, or interagency collaboration were mainly used to ensure the postsecondary success of students with disabilities.

Meade received these findings by asking 40 special education teachers to participate in a 2 step survey that asked them how instructing and practicing self-determination skills, maintaining school and family collaboration, and involving interagency collaboration have on the completion rate of students with disabilities, as measured by on-time graduation. The second section of the survey asked educators what challenges were presented to effectively present these strategies to their students with disabilities (2017).

Based on the results of the literature reviewed, Chapter III will provide evidence from a variety of studies that if students are knowledgeable of their disability-related needs, the resources and supports are available at the postsecondary level, practice self-advocacy skills including asking for help when needed

and building confidence, they are more likely to complete their college programs. The statistics of many research studies reviewed during this report also show proof that students who advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level are more likely to succeed.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

Although the research has been implemented, studies investigating the difference between students who do and do not advocate for themselves at the postsecondary level have been a topic of high interest since the 5-year long National Longitudinal Transition Study occurred between 1985-1986 (NLTS). The NLTS and other valid studies have found that when students with disabilities request and advocate for needed accommodations with their post-secondary institution of choice, they are more likely to complete their college programs.

There are various reasons that students with disabilities who have received special education services and support under the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) do not receive the support they need at the college level. Research findings indicate many of these factors involve students with high-incidence disabilities who do not advocate for themselves and ask for services.

It is proven that students involved in their IEPs are more likely to register their disability or struggles with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) and that students transitioning to postsecondary institutions have not always attended their IEP meetings. The Hadley (2006), Lighter (2012), and Daly-Cano et al. (2015) studies report that students are more likely to register with their postsecondary institutions' Office of Disability Services (ODS) if they had attended their secondary IEP meetings. Hengen and Weaver's (2006) study supported the importance of IEP involvement by reporting a substantial discrepancy between the knowledge of self-advocacy and disclosing their disabilities from the students who had participated in the decisions of their IEPs and those who had not. When the IEP team involves the student with their educational plan and educates them on the importance of asserting for themselves and what accommodations they are eligible for at the postsecondary level, students are more likely to succeed in college.

Lack of advocating for oneself or refraining from registering as disabled in college has also resulted in students not receiving adequate transitional services support to prepare them for requests for accommodations at the postsecondary level. Stang et al. (2009) found that most of the teachers who were questioned within their study had not introduced or infrequently taught self-advocacy, leadership, self-awareness, and self-knowledge skills. Kim et al. (2021) reported that students are more likely to request assistance at the postsecondary level if they receive specific practice and instruction on self-advocacy skills. Quinlan, et al. (2012) agreed with this and added that part of building advocacy skills is educating students on the importance of self-efficacy or the confidence that success in postsecondary schooling is possible. Quinlan, et al. (2012) indicated that self-efficacy is built by informing the students of their rights and the types

of support they can receive at the postsecondary level. When they are aware that the institution offers support to students with disabilities, they are more likely to ask for assistance Kester et al., 2021. White, et al. (2014) study found that a program that provides specific self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills-based training to students with disabilities would increase the confidence in high school students with disabilities and prepare them to be strong and willing self-advocates initially within their postsecondary setting.

Other studies reported that although they knew of their rights for support, post-secondary students with disabilities were afraid of the stigma associated with being identified with a disability (Kim et al., 2021). Quinlan et al. (2012) agreed and added that students were less likely to complete their college programs if they were afraid of being treated differently. According to Kim et al.'s study, students have reported they are apprehensive about disclosing their disabilities in college as they are fearful of the stigma that comes with it. Kim et al. confirmed within their report that if students are provided with proper self-advocacy and self-efficacy skills practice.

Due to statistics indicating that students with low incidence disabilities, predominantly those with learning disabilities (Newman, 2011), are less likely to complete their college programs, researchers have concluded that effective secondary transitional services are key to preparing these students to request accommodations enabling postsecondary success. Studies, including Newman and Madaus in 2015, have shown that it is key to provide secondary students with building advocacy skills and educating them about what accommodations and services they are eligible for at the postsecondary level to prepare them for college goal attainment. Another study held by Newman, et al. in 2019 supported Newman's 2011 results. They also reported that

most students with disabilities are not succeeding at the postsecondary level as they are not learning practical strategies to request the support they need.

Many studies have been done on various training and skill programs developed to build students' knowledge of their needs and disability, awareness of available postsecondary accommodations, confidence, and willingness to request support initially. These findings constitute evidence that students benefit from effective, research-based practices to help them advocate for themselves presently and within their future post-secondary endeavors.

A number of studies have been conducted asking current and previous postsecondary students with disabilities what they felt was important to learn the skills needed to succeed in college. Hadley's and Hengen and Weaver's studies, both implemented in 2006, reported that students communicated that had they been prepared with self-advocacy skills and received support from their professors or other school staff, they would have been more likely to succeed within their college program. Those who reported they had asked for accommodations (i.e., to take tests outside of class) had helped them overcome their struggles (Hadley, 2006). The students who had overcome barriers in college indicated they could build self-advocacy skills at the secondary level, and those skills had also been acquired while being involved in their own IEP meetings (Hengen et al., 2006).

Although secondary staff needs to prepare their students for the transition to postsecondary education, Mambaloe et al. (2020) concluded it was equally crucial for postsecondary faculty to connect with their enrolled students with disabilities to ensure their knowledge of the importance of communicating their disability and requesting support from their

educators. Students' likelihood of success in college will increase if staff is supporting students at every educational level.

Limitations of the Research

The goal of my research report was to determine if students with learning disabilities receive accommodations and support after high school at the postsecondary level. While looking for articles to review, few included the specific population of students with learning disabilities. Hence, I decided to broaden my research towards determining whether students with high incidence disabilities (predominantly those with learning disabilities who may or may not have disclosed their disability to their post-secondary institution) were receiving accommodations and support in either 2-year or 4-year colleges/universities.

I searched for evidence of the number of students with high incidence disabilities who disclosed their disability requested accommodations to their post-secondary institution's disability services office and other faculty. I was also driven to determine if secondary teaching staff were offering transitional services to students that prepared them the self-advocacy skills needed to disclose their disabilities or request support at the college level. Whether they had or had not received transitional services, I also sought out why students with high incidence disabilities did not disclose their disabilities, request accommodations, and ask questions when learning content was unclear. When searching for this information, I chose research articles and studies developed or written within the last 20 years at the latest to ensure relevancy.

Besides focusing on high incidence disabilities, I chose to hone in on studies that involved students who had received special education services and had an IEP at the secondary level. I also limited my searches to the more defined category of self-advocacy versus

self-determination, which involves a variety of life skills. These motivational strategies build self-efficacy and self-actualization.

Although much research has involved students showing self-advocacy when needing support at the postsecondary level, there have been limitations within each study I reviewed for this research project. The limitations in the studies examined included limited and selective populations and/regions, small sample sizes, unreported ages of students being assessed, non-random samples, anecdotal evidence, limited longitudinal research, and old that did not provide present-day relevancy and skewed data.

While looking for articles to review, there were not many that included reports of research or evidence-based transitional services curriculum/programs that included building knowledge of eligible accommodations and self-advocacy skills instruction. There was also a limited amount of studies conducted on secondary transitional programs.

Although many studies offered results from students regarding their knowledge of their 2-year or 4-year college accommodations, whether they disclosed their disabilities, how successful they were with self-advocacy, and self-determination strategies/programs they had been instructed with. If they had received secondary services of self-advocacy skills practice, including details regarding their rights at the postsecondary level, only a select few included longitudinal data. Many of these same studies assigned students scripted, role-play, or prompted scenarios, or postsecondary staff asked to participate were instructed to resist students' accommodations to make it more challenging to receive support that may not have offered real-life situational experiences.

Among the limited selected populations arranged for many research studies, cultural background, race, and socio-economic status may have provided a lack of diversity and possibly skewed or inaccurate data. Data also may have been inaccurate as disability categories and differences in disability legislation vary from state to state or country to country. Some studies were limited to a set of students with one particular disability.

In one particular study I reviewed (Newman, 2019), secondary teaching staff had reported whether their students had received transitional services training while the students and their parents had reported the postsecondary information. Students may not have received identical transitional skills-based training, so the results may have been skewed as they attended different secondary schools.

Inflated responses from interview questions or Self-report assessments of students indicating a higher percentage of students who received accommodations or had disclosed their disabilities may have equally skewed results. Responses could also have been affected by the students' disabilities, inflated bias, or socially desirable responses.

Lastly, research was often conducted to determine whether hypotheses were accurate, but other sections of their report offered literature review information that may or may not have been accurate.

Implications for Future Research

Further research on actual case study longitudinal data should be emphasized to obtain accurate, relevant information regarding self-advocacy skills at the postsecondary level. Additional research should be conducted on students with high incidence disabilities to determine whether students are requesting accommodations from multiple teachers throughout

the school year, eliminating the need for unnatural prompting and determining if students are maintaining their pre-instructed and practiced advocacy skills. Longitudinal data could also evaluate long-term outcomes on grades/testing results, self-advocacy, other self-determination skills, and college program completion.

Sample sizes on the research article information obtained were relatively small, so further research that includes larger populations of students with high incidence disabilities would offer a broader perspective of students' self-advocacy needs. In addition, in gathering research of the smaller sample sizes, many of the students had registered with their postsecondary disability services office and disclosed their disability to the college they were enrolled in. A more extensive and more diverse set of participants would offer a broader perspective of students' overall self-advocacy skills at the postsecondary level. Future research into studying students with high-incidence disabilities who did not register with their disability services office or disclose their disabilities can be accomplished by conducting longitudinal research that follows high school students into postsecondary education. Future research could be expanded into investigating the size, location, various types and degrees of accommodations provided, and culture of each college institution to determine whether the quality of services result in higher academic success.

Implications for Professional Application

The intention of performing the research reported within this study was to supply secondary and postsecondary teachers and their institutions with the resources and knowledge to perform effective transitional services that promote future self-advocacy. Students with learning and other high-functioning disabilities were of personal and professional interest in this research

project. Although students with low-incidence disabilities (including low functioning autism, physical or orthopedic impairments, traumatic brain injuries) tend to receive accommodations and support at the postsecondary level, students with high-incidence disabilities (including learning disabilities, high-functioning autism, and other high-functioning disabilities) commonly do not accept these services. Effective transitional services, including various instructional content, practice, and training, could provide these students with necessary self-advocacy skills within their 2-year or 4-year colleges. Equipped with fidelity, instruction including effective presentations, role-play activities, performance assessments (self or staff assessment), and observation of real-life situations that require self-advocacy are vital to providing students with the means to self-advocate and promote success within their college programs. Involving students with their IEPs has also been instrumental in giving them the confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to advocate for themselves in college. School staff should be informed of how important this is to their students' future success.

This project's research has proven the importance of effective self-advocacy instruction at the secondary school level to prepare students for post-secondary ambitions. It also provides the evidence that instruction offering current skills to equip students with disabilities with the skills needed to advocate for themselves in high school, within their everyday personal lives, and for present job opportunities also prepares them with these skills for their future. Special education teachers could work with students who currently have IEPs and special education services to request accommodations from their general education teachers in high school and other professionals with whom they currently or will potentially interact to prepare them for life beyond their secondary programming proactively.

Being that IEP and special education supports within secondary schools are diligently provided, and students must request support and disclose their disabilities with their college's disability services office staff, high school faculty should be educating their students they will be solely responsible for requesting support at the college level. There is still hope if they have not received effective transitional services at the secondary level. It is also vital for college staff to be aware of the difference between students' eligibility for IEP services in high school versus support received at the postsecondary level. With this knowledge, disability services staff can instruct and provide authentic practice with university professors, so students gain experience requesting and negotiating academic accommodations.

Involving parents and caregivers with their child's IEP development to know the importance of advocating for oneself at the postsecondary level is a large part of ensuring parent involvement in promoting self-advocacy in college. Research has shown that parents or caregivers are proponents in teaching students how to advocate for themselves in their college of choice properly.

Conclusion

The research gathered from this written thesis report surrounding the effects of self-advocacy on postsecondary students with disabilities indicates that they are not always asking for eligible accommodations. Studies have shown that students with disabilities are not requesting support at the postsecondary level as they have not been involved in their IEPs and know their needs, they are not advised at the secondary level what they are eligible for at the postsecondary level, they are afraid of the stigma they will carry on to college, and they have not

received the proper self-advocacy skills instruction and practice to have built the confidence to ask for needed support or assistance.

Studies have shown that when students with disabilities learn the importance of self-advocacy, they are more likely to succeed at the postsecondary level. Research reports that when special education teachers supply their students with effective transitional services that include a variety of methods, including frequent direct self-advocacy instruction, real-life situational role-play, practice requesting support within actual circumstances, as well as support and encouragement from their parents and caregivers, are more likely to be given the knowledge and confidence to ask for assistance at the college level.

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