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PARENT AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR  
YOUTH WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM THE  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING

By

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B.A., Eastern Kentucky University, 1996  
M.A., Eastern Kentucky University, 2002  
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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development  
Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

December, 2021

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A Dissertation Approved on

November 19, 2021

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, teachers, and my family community of Harlan County. My parents had limited opportunities to attend college so they chose to make sure I had the opportunity to pursue my goals. They supported my teachers by always being in the schools through volunteering, fundraising and encouraging other students to pursue their goals. My extended family encouraged college, travel and learning for me which made the difference in being confident to move away from home and try new things. My teachers who created opportunities in a small town through their dedication and hard work to their profession were true inspirations. I so appreciate having the opportunity to grow up in a small community named Harlan in southeastern Kentucky that is an example of true support for all kids that have dreams and ambition.

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## ABSTRACT

# PARENT AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING

Rachel Baker

November 19, 2021

Since 1990, and with subsequent amendments in 1997 and 2004, the secondary transition provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have required special educators to plan, coordinate, and deliver transition services for secondary-aged students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The experiences, social impacts and economic opportunities for employment continue to be monitored at both a federal and state level as part of expected outcomes for public secondary schools. The purpose of this instrumental case study was to examine the alignment of current research with current practice of transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities. The study surveys teachers and interviews parents of student with intellectual disabilities to identify activities and experiences that occurred during their transition phase of exiting high school. The data sources are then compared and aligned with the research on the evidence-based predictors for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The findings show that while most of the evidence-based predictors are part of the transition process, some predictors are not



implemented or timely for educators and parents to have consistent experiences. This study discussed the triangulation of the data from multiple resources to examine what predictors are implemented, training for teacher and experiences of families as they move toward post school outcomes for employment. The study discusses the implications of school policies, practice and future implications for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Life is full of transitions, but some transitions are more difficult than other transitions (Galambos & Leadbeater, 2000; Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). Transition issues are challenging for young adults, yet issues that are even more difficult exist for young adults with intellectual disabilities (Harrison et al., 2017). As the journey of living with a disability begins, families, schools, and communities are instrumental in shaping the lifelong impact a disability will have on the life of a young person. Beginning with early childhood experiences, the interactions and attitudes of others begin to influence families and the individuals living with a disability. Early intervention services are structured around medical needs, parental support, and understanding a diagnosis.

As children grow, the services expand to examining informal and formal educational practices around childhood developmental milestones. With each new milestone comes transitional activities leading toward the inclusion of families of children with disabilities. With every new transition, children and their families find themselves expanding into new and perhaps unfamiliar support systems, including social services, medical systems, extended family systems, and school supports. From birth to adulthood, families with a child with a disability inevitably question and explore what supports and services are available. Halpern (1992) has defined the transition from high school to post-secondary education or employment as “a floundering that occurs for at

least the first several years after leaving school as adolescents attempt to assume a variety of adult roles in the communities” (p.203).

Transition planning seeks to develop plans for students based on the needs stated in their Individualized Educational Program (IEP). Optimally, specific activities and resources ground this process. Educators face many challenges in developing and implementing transition programs as they work to determine what practices lead to improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Test, 2009). The concern is both the understanding of the evidence-based practices for transition planning and the consistent implementation of opportunities by educators are lacking. While guidance documents are in existence for schools to follow, the development of individualized transition plans may be based on limited knowledge of resources and transition activities of those developing the plan.

Research suggests that current practices in transition planning are not successful at preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment after high school (King, 2017). Postsecondary education enrollment and employment rates for students with disabilities are substantially lower than rates for students without disabilities (U. S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019). This is in spite of recently amended legislation requiring high schools to provide transition planning to develop college and career readiness for each student. In 2017, national data showed only 23% of adults with intellectual disabilities work, compared to 73% of people without disabilities (Winsor et al., 2019). The national report on employment services and outcomes through 2019 for Kentucky reports that 74% of people employed have no disability, with 34% of people with disability employed and 25% of people with intellectual disability employed (U. S.

Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019). With the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation being the comprehensive support agency for people with disabilities during and after high school, low rates of case closures suggest that individuals with disabilities are not gaining or maintaining employment once exiting high school. The data from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation also reveal a decrease of case closures due to employment outcomes of people with intellectual disabilities from 2009 to 2016 from 9.7% to 7.6% respectively (U. S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019).

Most of the existing follow-up studies of youth in special education do not disaggregate by disability (Baer, Daviso, Flexer, Queen, & Meindl, 2011). Characterized as a “missed opportunity”, scholars operationalize disability as a unitary construct with little differentiation by specific disability (Gerber, DeArment, & Batalo, 2014). Disaggregated data would be more meaningful, and targeted practices and procedures affecting post school outcomes could be more effectively utilized (Gerber et al., 2014). Determining which schools produce the most positive employment and postsecondary education outcomes occur by individual demographics including disability category, which is missing among existing research studies. As schools focus on inclusive practices within school programming, research in special education has shifted focus from in-school activities and classroom structures to investigating the outcomes of such approaches when students exit high school to post-secondary education and employment.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Social agencies, medical providers, and communities at large have a stake in the outcomes of individuals with disabilities. The inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities is beneficial to empowering our employment structures, small businesses, volunteerism, and tax system (Linkow et al., 2013). The capacities of adults with



intellectual disabilities to contribute to the employment base may alleviate the need for some social systems that maintain support to young adults with intellectual disabilities. Stakeholders in the process include businesses, educators, advocacy groups, families, and politicians affected either through personal experiences or through their interest in supporting the common good. The business industries employing adults with intellectual disabilities benefit by additional staff support to increase productivity, increase employee diversity, reduction of costs for employee benefits through government supplements, and an increased applicant pool. The relationship of employment and disabilities is complex and requires a keen knowledge of the law and regulations designed to protect and promote this particular population with intellectual disabilities.

With increasing demands of successful transition to employment for high school students receiving special education services, schools are accountable for transitioning youth per requirements for students' Individual Education Programs (IEPs) as outlined in the transition section of Indicator 13 of Individual Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Transition policy and planning is required for all students who qualify for special education within all 13 categories of disability as identified through IDEA (2004). Through annual authentic assessment and transition interviews with students with disabilities, special educators are required to develop IEP goals for employment, independent living, and college or training and provide evidence of progress towards those goals (IDEA, 2004).

In addition, Indicator 13, the section of IDEA that focuses on transition requirements for schools, calls for a detailed course of study for each year of high school which may last until the student is age 21 depending on the disability. This course of

study includes courses wherein a student will learn the skills necessary to meet the postsecondary employment and education goals and an increased student role in order to foster self-determination (IDEA, 2004). Focusing particularly on personal preferences for transition that involve a series of structured brainstorming sessions to map out an individual's goals, needs, resources and ongoing support services (person-centered planning), studies show this planning process is positively linked with improved employment outcomes and higher wages (e.g., Brooke, Revell & Wehman, 2009). Personal preferences may also include attending college programs and independent living depending on the interests of the individual. IDEA rules for special education indicate that the transition planning process must begin at age 16 or even age 15 if the student will turn age 16 during the span of the Individual Education Program (IDEA, 2004). However, despite the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, transition practice and postsecondary school outcomes for young adults with disabilities continue to be a focus due to the persistent low rates of employment and college enrollment (U. S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my instrumental case study was to examine the alignment of current research with current practice of transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities in a school district consisting of six high schools with programs for students with intellectual disabilities. This study focused on the transition process from school to employment, exploring the alignment with evidence-based predictors. The research study provides insight into the district's current transition programming, parent's knowledge of evidence-based predictors used in individual transition programming, and the teacher's capacity to align and address evidence-based predictors for employment of

students with intellectual disabilities. The goal was to produce findings that may be useful to educators, educational leaders, schools, parents, and support agencies to make transition an improved process that aligns experience with research on evidenced-based predictors and their implementation.

### **Research Questions**

This study answers the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?

**RQ2:** What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ 3:** What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ4:** How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in admissions and release committee documentation?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical disability theory (CDT) serves as the theoretical framework for this research design. In order to understand the research design for critical disability theory, the history of this framework provides multiple and sometimes conflicting views. Historically, researchers examined children with disabilities through both social and medical models of disability. Recent research in the field focuses on an inclusion model, which supports the influence of environment on a child's development (Rees, 2017). Disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives (World Health

Organization, 2011). In this model, a person's activities are limited not by the impairment or condition but by environment and barriers are consequences of a lack of social organization (Goering, 2015).

Since the beginning of social, cultural and economic models of disability in the early 1990's, the political landscape has shifted disability theorists and activists have drawn attention to the missing parts of disability knowledge (Hall, 2019). Disability studies largely focuses on achieving political inclusion for disabled people. To that end, work done under the auspices of disability studies often uses the language of civil rights, minority politics, and liberal justice frameworks (Hall, 2019).

Critical disability theory is an evolution and an intersection analysis developed from other identity-based areas of study including race/ethnic, feminism and sexuality studies (Schalk, 2013). Critical analysis of the phenomena of heterosexism, sexism, and racism, therefore, must refer to the insights of disability theory in order to achieve their goals. Critical disability theory and its nuanced approach to vulnerability and power is a key ingredient of critical theory more generally (Schalk, 2013). Critical disability theory has built upon the early work of disability studies and produced a body of contemporary knowledge that boasts sophistication and nuance. Critical disability theory has integrated an abundance of perspectives drawn from inside and outside of the disability experience. Critical disability theory, thus borrowing or at times the basis for other oppressive groups (Goodley, 2019). While critical disability studies started with separate studies of disability and ability, it has clearly reached a stage of theoretical maturity in which disability marks a simultaneous and dual process of interrogating disability/ability; disableism/ableism (Goodley, 2019).

Over the last decade, the evolution of critical disability theory is intertwined in the works of Ellis (2018) concludes “disability disrupts this normative order and other fragile boundaries and concepts, which are woven around the autonomous independent subject-wellness, ableness, perfection, competency, causation, productivity, and use value” (p. 639). Accepting all bodies as vulnerable and unstable opens space for cancelling the dominant norm and all its "deficits" (Shildrick, 2012). Denaturalizing disability and impairment are part of the analysis, politicization, and intersectional understanding of disability sought by critical disability theorists (Tremain, 2017).

Early research on children with disabilities is characterized as adhering predominantly to an environmentalist view in which the child is shaped by the contingencies of the immediate environment (Sameroff, 1985). In contrast, Bronfenbrenner's model views the child as influencing and contributing to the environmental context, while indirect, second-order effects (e.g., parental employment) are explicitly acknowledged and addressed in the understanding of developmental change. The ecological view does not conceptualize development as unidirectional, neither centering developmental competencies in the child nor focusing entirely on the environment for the explanation of poor developmental outcomes of children with developmental problems (Sontag, 1996). The ecological model attends to multiple risks, both constitutional and environmental, and the systemic, reciprocal nature of child and environment influence--an intuitively appealing paradigm for special educators (Sontag, 1996).

The emergence of critical disability studies is testimony to the maturity of a field that has built upon foundational knowledge and recognizes that complex socio-political

times require an opposite response (Goodley, 2019). The politics of disability intertwine with many other politics, including those associated with racism, sexism, transphobia, colonialism, classism, developmentalism, and heterosexism (Goodley, 2019). Disability studies, working in tandem with the disability rights movement, shifts the focus from the medical model and correlational intervention on disabled people to increase “fit” in society to the “rigidity, faultiness, deficits, and pathological structures” in society itself (Linton, 2005, p. 518). For example, Linton (2005, p. 522) writes,

Disability studies’ project is to weave disabled people back into the fabric of society...as full citizens whose rights and privileges are intact, whose history and contributions are recorded, and whose often distorted representations in art, literature, film, theater, and other forms of artistic expression are fully analyzed.

There are seven elements of CDT: the social model of disability, multidimensionality, valuing diversity, rights, voices of disability, language, and transformative politics. My study will relate to five of the seven elements of critical disability theory: social model of disability, valuing diversity, rights, voices of disability, and transformational politics as I examine the role of employment in the lives of adults identified with intellectual disabilities. I chose to use only five of the seven due to their relationship to the social structure, politics and outcomes of employment of individuals with disabilities. Multidimensionality and language elements are not strongly related but encompassed in transformative politics and voices of disability.

The social model of disability views disability as a social construct rather than an inevitable consequence of impairment. Disability is a complex interrelationship between impairment, individual response to impairment, and the social environment that interacts

with the individual with a disability. The social disadvantage experienced by disabled people results from the physical, institutional and attitudinal environment, which fails to meet the needs of people who do not match the social expectation of “normalcy”.

In terms of valuing diversity, disability is similar in nature to gender, race, sexual orientation and ethnicity. For critical disability theory, being identified, and identifying, as a disabled person is central to understanding one’s self, one’s social position with its opportunities and limitations, and one’s knowledge of the world. CDT recognizes and welcomes the inevitability of difference and conceives of equality within a framework of diversity. Any systematic response to disability, which purports to make disability invisible, is inherently incapable of effectively protecting the rights of disabled people to be full participants in their communities.

In reference to rights, the focus is the educational rights of individuals and families as it relates to education and preparation for post-secondary employment. The rights established for school and the rights afforded through the Americans with Disabilities Act differ in the components of accountability, employer responsibility and the enforcement of support agencies to promote success. The fourth, which involves the voices of people with disabilities, provides voice for those with disabilities to express their perspective, giving others the opportunity to understand and value the life of those with disabilities and not engage in a sympathetic view of suffering and a life of less meaning and joy. Disability is no less than another component of an individual’s life nor something to overcome.

The fifth element examines the policies that surround the continued need to address the system that marginalizes a population perhaps unintentionally, through the

educational and social policy development. Critical disability theory is intentionally political in that its objective is to support the transformation of society so that disabled people in all their diversity are equal participants and fully integrated into their communities. CDT provides a conceptual framework to understand the relationship between impairment, disability and society and to inject disability interests into all policy arenas.

This study framed the experiences of individuals with disabilities and their families into social structures that view disability as a defect or a new approach to accommodating differences for those seeking employment. The theory involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations (Schalk, 2017). CDT is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power (lessness), power over, and power to (Devlin & Pothier, 2006).

### **Significance of the Study**

Scholars and practitioners define transitions not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of community adjustment, personal choice, autonomy in adult life, and as an interagency planning and implementation process (Francis, 2018). When informed by research, teachers, educational leaders, and support staff members have the opportunity to bring about systems change and result in new vocational and residential opportunities for young adults with disabilities (King et al., 2017). Much of the research on transitions is quantitative in nature, examining the postsecondary outcomes through the analysis of statewide survey and questionnaire data. Although quantitative research efforts are



valuable, they do not provide perspectives or detail the process that families and individuals with disabilities go through as they move from a student centered planning process to an adult living and working process. Qualitative studies may seek to understand how individuals and families construct meaning of their lives in terms of work, independent living and social engagement. The required demands of inclusive school services are not replicated legally or modeled in our communities (Linkow et al., 2013). This lack of enforcement and implementation of community inclusion creates difficulties in the navigation of services for adults with disabilities.

Equally important to discover in transition inquiry are the perspectives of young adults with disabilities and the families who presumably support them as they make this transition. Qualitative studies have sought to understand how people with disabilities construct meaning of their lives in institutions (Wehman et al., 2014) and in community settings (Leonard, 2016), but there has been less attention on understanding on how all participants involved in the transition experience perceive the transition process. The importance of understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants in the transition process cannot be overly emphasized (Leonard, 2016). However, few, if any, research studies have attempted to discover how all involved participants experience and view the transition process (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Unless we begin to understand the process of transition and how it is experienced and responded to by those who are living it, we will continue to implement it unsuccessfully (Martinez, 2012).

One important aspect of my study was to explore the experiences of families involved with the transition process from school to adulthood for a child with an intellectual disability. Research suggests that families struggle with the process of

coordinating agency work as compared to the collaborative process prior to graduation between school and families (Linkow et al., 2013). This outcome relates to the interagency collaboration for families within the community support system. The school community builds relationships over time but the concerns from families is how is this same type of relationship established with the transition agencies in order to continue building around employment, social needs and inclusion practices within the larger community. From the parent's perspective, a systemic transition process on the part of school and adult agency staff, especially those responsible for coordinating transition, to continually inform and educate families about existing and potential quality adult services (Francis, 2018). Understanding the purposes of so many different agencies and coordinating the specific services needed is overwhelming.

As disability awareness and policies continue to grow, additional research is needed in such areas as achievement gaps, appropriate school support services, and transition programming to promote inclusive communities and educational practices. My study examined the school community and community agencies involved in the work of transitioning youth with intellectual disabilities to employment. My study provides evidence of the current transition planning process and strategies, seeking to improve the employment outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are in the context of my study:

**Competitive integrated employment** is work performed on either a full- or part-time basis in which individuals are compensated for their work and included in a typical work setting with co-workers without disabilities. The compensation paid must be at or above

the set minimum wage, but not less than the wages paid to individuals who are not disabled and performing work that is the same or similar.

**IEP (Individualized Educational Program)** is a document that defines the individualized objectives of a child who has been determined to have a disability or requires specialized accommodation, as defined by federal regulations.

**Kentucky Post School Outcomes Study (KyPSO)** monitors the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and met criteria for employment and/or continued education.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** is the regulation in federal law that requires students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

**Post-secondary transition** is a set of coordinated students centered activities designed to facilitate the student's movement from school to post school activities, including employment and education.

**Resource classroom** is a class consisting of no more than 10 special education students taught by a certified special education teacher.

**Supported employment** is a model of employment that provides people with severe disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support that is necessary for success in a competitive work environment.

**Teacher Capacity** is the perceived abilities, skills, and expertise of teachers in a school or district, or their ability to progress and improve.

**Transition Readiness** is students being able to enter and succeed in entry-level postsecondary courses without remediation or enter the workforce possessing the knowledge and technical skills needed for employment in their desired career field.

### **Organization of the Study**

I organized my study as follows: Chapter 1 includes the introduction, purpose, statement of research questions, rationale for the study, scope of the study, definition of terms, methods, data sources, and organizational summary of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on teacher attrition and quality. Chapter 3 is an explanation of the research methodology used, data collection, and procedures of this study. Chapter 4 presents the descriptive narrative of the study's results and an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes my study's major findings and includes recommendations for future research and policy implications.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this qualitative study, I provided insight into the district's current transition programming, parent's knowledge of evidence-based predictors used in individual transition programming, and the teacher's capacity to align and address evidence-based predictors for employment of students with intellectual disabilities. Specifically, I interviewed families of student with intellectual disabilities that have experienced the planning and implementation of the transition process and teachers that have provided services and received professional development. My goal was to produce findings that may be useful to educators, educational leaders, schools, parents, and support agencies to make transition an improved process that aligns experience with research on evidenced-based predictors and their implementation.

### **Research Questions**

After reviewing the existing literature, identifying gaps within the existing research, the following research questions guided my inquiry:

- RQ1:** What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?
- RQ2:** What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?
- RQ 3:** What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ4:** How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in admissions and release committee documentation?

I organized my review of literature into sections that begin with a brief historical perspective of legislation and employment policies for youth and adults with disabilities. The second section provides information on employment options and measurements of outcome for schools and communities. In the third section, I discuss the role of school inclusion practices and their role in the achievement gap for students with intellectual disabilities. This section examined the connections of school inclusion with inclusion in employment and community. The fourth section identifies the evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The fifth section connects critical disability and its use in educational research followed by a section of critical disability theory and its application to employment outcomes. Each of these topics provided support for my research questions and methodology.

#### **US Employment Policies for People with Disabilities: An Historical Overview**

Thirty-five years ago, Congress enacted the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibited discrimination based on disability in employment and other aspects of community life. Since then, public policy demonstrates growing support for the employment of people with disabilities. Employment of people with disabilities is not only a civil rights issue, as it has its roots in the 1970s, but also has sent precedent and practical implications for modern day society. As medical technology and assistive technology improves, persons with disabilities living longer experience improved quality of life that enable employers to hire skilled workers needing mild to moderate adaptations

on the work site. Increasing job opportunities for people with disabilities saves the federal and state government money by reducing dependency on cash and medical and disability benefits (Linkow et al., 2013).

For people with disabilities, employment provides economic self-sufficiency, an opportunity to use their skills, and more active participation in community life. Nevertheless, a striking employment gap persists between Americans with and without disabilities. At nearly 20 percent of the population, people with disabilities are one of the nation's largest minority groups (U. S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019). Yet the most recent U.S. disability employment statistics show that only 30% of people with disabilities are participating in the workforce, compared to 73% of people without disabilities (U. S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019). The focus on engaging our disability population in our economic structures would improve employment rates, productivity, and reduce government dependency programs, not to mention the improved quality of life for people with disabilities.

In 1975, Congress (US DOE, 2010) enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The original purpose of IDEA was to meet the individual needs of, and improve results for infants, toddlers, children, and youths with disabilities and their families (US DOE, 2010). The goal of IDEA is to provide children with disabilities the same opportunity for education as those students who do not have a disability. The primary purpose of IDEA is to provide students with a disability a free, appropriate public education and to give parents or legal guardians a voice in their child's education. Originally named the Education of Handicapped Children's Act, schools were now accountable to identify and provide appropriate services to children with disabilities to

assist in graduating high school. However, the original IDEA did not specifically address support for students with disabilities in terms of transition planning from high school to postsecondary options.

In 1990, Congress revised and renamed the act to the Individuals with Disability Education Act with an emphasis on post-secondary transition added in 2004. IDEA 2004 builds upon the amendments and reauthorizations of 1983, 1990, and 1997, clarifies the concept and position of transition, and strengthens the future-focus of special education services. The principal purpose of special education as stated in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) as to “prepare [students with disabilities] for further education, employment, and independent living” within a national policy aimed at “ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities” (Carter et al., 2013).

The federal government added transition planning as a mandated component of IDEA in 1990 with improvements in 1997 and 2004 (IDEA, 2004). In an effort to improve educational and occupational outcomes for individuals with disabilities, the version of IDEA reauthorized in 2004 requires that upon turning sixteen years old all students identified with disabilities must have a transition plan in place, including a summary of performance document, to help generate sustaining post-secondary school outcomes, including employment and post-secondary education (IDEA, 2004). In order for the transition plan to be implemented by age 16, the process of developing the plan must start at least one year earlier (34 C.F.R. 300.520 [20 U.S.C. 1415(m)]). The field of special education and, more specifically, transition has expanded over the past three decades due to innovative practices in schools, federal legislation, policy changes at the



local and state levels, and self-advocacy efforts, which has affected the delivery of transition planning in schools (Carter et al., 2013). The integration of post-secondary transition shifts the school's focus on students being college and career ready as they begin to enter the current workforce.

Shifting the focus from the legalities that surround services for people with disabilities to employment and educational outcomes requires a review of the outcomes and research for services of people with disabilities. The special education transition movement began in the 1980s as a response to problems identified by post school follow-up studies of students with disabilities (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985). Early studies in the 70s examined the relationship of rehabilitation services and vocational success with the mentally retarded (e.g., Brolin, 1972). Efforts to obtain information on employment status of former special education students who had graduated in the early 1980s, Mithaug, Horiuchi and Fanning (1985) conducted a statewide quantitative study in Colorado, which included information from former students with a variety of handicapping conditions. The information in these early studies is difficult to compare due to the changing nature of disability categories however, the study creates foundational focus on outcomes for students with disabilities. Large numbers of special education graduates remained unemployed or underemployed and experienced a quality of life remarkably different from their nondisabled peers. As far back as 1985 (Hasazi et al.), findings suggest that certain educational and vocational experiences are more likely to predict successful employment outcomes.

The longitudinal study by Blackorby and Wagner (1996) prompted by the findings of Hasazi, examined trends in the employment, wages, postsecondary education,

and residential independence of youth with disabilities in their first 5 years after high school. Data indicated strong gains in all four outcomes over time. In all areas, however, youth with disabilities continued to lag behind their peers in the general population. Several differences between youth in certain disability categories emerged regarding employment, postsecondary education, and movement toward independence over time. The studies identified poor post school outcomes but also investigated the relationships between post school outcomes and the components of high school transition programs. These early studies created the groundwork for exploring educational outcomes and experiences. The special education community and the public were alarmed to learn that important adult outcomes such as employment, independent living, and community integration remained unattainable by many youths with disabilities (Blackorby, 1996). The research conducted in the 80s began to focus on identifying promising transition practices to improve the rates of employment of students exiting high school into successful post-secondary employment or education (Test, 2009).

In 2010, President Obama issued Executive Order 13548, directing executive departments and agencies to improve their efforts to employ federal workers with disabilities. In 2013, the regulations that implement Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were updated. Among other changes, the new rule strengthens affirmative action provisions that aid federal contractors in their efforts to recruit and hire qualified people with disabilities.

In July 2014, the United States Congress enacted the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. The legislation includes a focus on increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities, defined as full- or part-time work

at minimum wage or higher that is fully integrated with co-workers without disabilities and compensated by wages and benefits similar to what people without disabilities receive for the same work. The law also requires the allocation of 15% of public vocational rehabilitation funds to help people with disabilities transition from school to adult work life. In December 2014, the Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)—a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring people from certain target groups, including people with disabilities who are referred by state vocational rehabilitation agencies was enacted. The federal initiatives improve the school-based programming because of their linkage to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) which is federally and state mandated in all public schools. The focus on post-secondary transition shifts schools focus on students being college and career ready as they begin to enter the current workforce.

With this shift, supported through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation funding and WIOA (Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act), many transition teachers believe they do not have the time, resources, or knowledge to develop community jobs or support students in the workplace (Morningstar et al., 2010) . Often, school programming does not focus on job placement until students are 18 or older, during the “community-based” phase of a student’s educational experience. Even then, potential jobs are often limited to those occurring exclusively during school hours when job trainers and transportation are available. Given the limited opportunities during the school day for employment, employment options are limited for youth with intellectual disabilities.

### **Employment Options and Measurement of Outcomes**

School programming at the high school should be the stepping-stone of employment for youth with intellectual disabilities. There are two types of successful

employment outcomes for students with disabilities as measured by federal and state indicators: competitive integrated employment (CIE) and supported employment.

Competitive integrated employment is work performed on either a full- or part-time basis in which individuals are compensated for their work and included in a typical work setting with co-workers without disabilities. The compensation paid must be at or above the set minimum wage, but not less than the wages paid to individuals who are not disabled and performing work that is the same or similar. The pathways for students to achieve competitive integrated employment involves practices and experiences that enhance both social and academic skills. The pathways to achieve CIE include supported employment models, customized employment, and internships/work-based learning models.

Supported employment is a model of employment that provides people with severe disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support that is necessary for success in a competitive work environment. Implementation of supported employment involves four phases: (1) getting to know the job seeker, (2) job development and matching, (3) training and support, and (4) job retention services (Wehman, 2018). Most individuals in a supported employment program receive services from a community-based service provider. Generally, community-based service providers offer vocational assessment, locate or develop jobs, and provide job skills training. Most providers have job trainers who work at the job site and help the client learn job tasks, identify job modifications including assistive technology, and work with the employer to solve behavioral or social problems.

Customized employment is for those with significant disabilities, and specifically targets adults who would benefit from additional customization of job responsibilities beyond those naturally occurring within the labor market. Customized employment is a well-defined discovery process in which the employment specialist and job seeker engage in a process of identifying the individual's strengths, interests, and preferences. The outcome of that process then drives the identification of employment opportunities where unique job descriptions are created that match both the employers' and employees' needs and interests. The implementation steps include job carving, job negotiation, job creation and self-employment. There is very limited evidence-based research on customized employment as an intervention to improve the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities (Wehman, 2018).

The last pathway for achieving CIE includes internships and work based learning. These models are included in the programming for students with intellectual disabilities in secondary school programming. Often this model is implemented through community based instruction and job coaching prior to exiting high school. Direct, hands on work experiences prior to exiting high school enable students with disabilities to learn not only job skills but also to acquire the "soft skills" that greatly facilitate (Wehman, 2018).

Determining where the most positive employment and post-secondary education enrollment outcomes occur and with which school characteristics and individual demographics including disability category, is missing among many studies. Baer et al. (2011) studied the occupational and educational outcomes of 409 students with intellectual disabilities and no other category in a Great Lakes state. Baer et al. were interested in understanding the impact of inclusion, career and technical education (CTE),

and work-study programs on post-school outcomes. They were particularly interested in determining if there was a significant relationship between CTE and work-study programs and full-time employment or post-secondary education and inclusion. The findings concluded that enrollment in career and technical education for students with intellectual disabilities in this study did not significantly predict outcomes as found in national studies.

Educational programs use supported employment through a variety of job coaching opportunities for students during their last few years of high school. Wehman (2014) suggests that supported employment is an effective service for enhancing the vocational rehabilitation outcomes of young adults and provides valuable information for policy makers, health care providers, rehabilitation counselors, and educators. Since its inception, supported employment has assisted people with significant intellectual disabilities achieve positive employment outcomes. The purpose of Wehman's quantitative study was to examine the effect of supported employment intervention on the employment outcomes of transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities served by the public vocational rehabilitation system using a case-control study design. The findings provide clear support for the effectiveness of supported employment as a vocational rehabilitation service for promoting successful employment closures for young adults with intellectual disabilities. Wehman (2014) found that the impact of supported employment was especially strong for youth who were Social Security beneficiaries, special education students, and individuals with intellectual disabilities or autism who were high school graduates. In fact, there was approximately a 20% difference in employment rates between those who received supported employment

and those who did not for both of these subgroups. These findings call attention to the particular effectiveness of supported employment for those transition-age consumers receiving SSI or SSDI benefits.

In Wehman's study, 55% of young adults with disabilities reported having continued on to postsecondary school since leaving high school. They were less likely to enroll in postsecondary school, however, than were their same-age peers in the general population, of whom 62% ever had attended post-secondary school. The researchers found that 71% of students with disabilities had a paying job at the time of the interview other than work around the house. They were as likely to have a paid job at the time of the interview, as were their same age peers in the general population, of whom seventy-one percent reported currently having a paid job.

Eighty-five percent of students with disabilities engaged productively in the community either through being engaged in employment, postsecondary education, or job training since leaving high school. They were less likely to engage in these activities than were their same-age peers in the general population, of whom 95% reported being engaged in employment, postsecondary education, or job training since leaving high school.

Thirty-six percent of young adults with disabilities were living independently at the time of the interview. Living independently was living alone or with a spouse, partner, or roommate. Young adults with disabilities were less likely to be living independently than were their same-age peers in the general population, of whom 44% were living independently at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview, 60% of young adults with disabilities had a checking account, and 45% had a credit card in his

or her name. They were less likely to have a checking account or credit card than were their same-age peers in the general population, of whom 71% and 55%, respectively, reported to have achieved this level of financial independence.

To expand the work of Baer (2011) and Wehman (2014), the Kentucky Post School Outcome Center develops and oversees the administration of the Kentucky Post School Outcome Study, a longitudinal investigation of the post school outcomes of Kentucky youth with educational disabilities during the final year of high school and one year after high school exit. This report provides information on response rates, representativeness, and reliability of the data. In accordance with requirements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the KyPSO monitors the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and met criteria for employment and/or continued education. There are three categories of measurement for successful outcomes within Indicator 14: higher education defined as full time or part time enrollment in college, higher education and competitive employment defined as a part time enrollment with a minimum of working 20 hours, and full time competitive employment, training program or other educational programming. My study will utilize the statistics from the KyPSO to examine the outcomes of students with intellectual disabilities within the state and local school district.

In accordance with requirements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the KyPSO monitors the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had Individual Education Programs in effect at the time they left school, and met criteria for employment and/or continued education. Table 1 identifies the three categories of measurement for successful measure of outcomes within Indicator 14.



*Table 1. Indicator 14 categories of measurement*

I14A: Higher Education	Enrolled in full-time or part time employment in a community college (2 year program) or college/university(4 or more year program for at least one complete term...in the year since leaving high school
I14B: Higher Education+ Competitive Employment	At or above the minimum wage...with others who are non-disabled...for an average of 20 hours a week...(includes military employment)...for 90 days total...in the year since leaving high school
I14C: Competitive Employment + Other Education and/or Other Employment	Other Education: Enrolled in full-time or part time employment in a community college for at least one complete term...in an education training program (e.g. Job Corps, adult education, or technical school that is less than a 2 year program)...in the year since leaving high school  Other Employment: have worked for pay or been self-employed (including work in a family business, farm, ranching, catering services, etc.)...for 90 days total...in the year since leaving high school

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2; 2007) Wave 3 data indicated that 72.6% of youth with disabilities continued to live with their parents after high school, 9.9% lived alone, and 0.5% lived in a group home or assisted living facility. Post school education data indicated that only 7.7% were attending a 4-year college or university and 12.8% were attending a 2-year community college. Post-school employment data were more favorable for youth with disabilities when compared to previous years, indicating that 55.1% of youth had a paid job a year or more after high school. With the stated outcomes from 2007, the Kentucky Post School Outcome Center (KYPSO) provided an opportunity to examine the practices in schools that lead to the outcomes. The report (KYPSO) provides data to examine group and individual high

school programming received prior to graduation that may lead to the outcomes. This direct relationship between outcome data and school programming gives researchers data on the impact of inclusive instructional practices and classroom settings for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Predictors of Successful Transition to Work**

Although findings of quantitative studies examining post-secondary outcomes for students are valuable, they fail to describe and detail the processes and activities that individuals undergo as they make a transition from school to adult life (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Gallivan-Fenlon (1994) sought to discover how young adults with disabilities, their families, and service providers transition from school to adult life. Eight main themes emerged from the data. These themes include: differing future expectations for young adults with disabilities; inconsistent implementation of special education curricula and lack of inclusive educational practices; lack of transition related knowledge; hastily and poorly coordinated transition planning; a prevalence of restrictive views on employment and community living opportunities for adults with disabilities; low levels of family participation; outcomes of unemployment and isolation for most young adult participants; and significant benefits of supported employment and community inclusion (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994). In Table 2, the themes on how transition from school to adult life is experienced and understood by particular young adults is listed below and identifies the implementers responsible during the planning and implementation process:

*Table 2. Themes of Implementer Responsibilities*

Themes	School Teams	Transition Team Responsibility	Family Responsibility
Future expectations	X	X	X
Consistent implementation of school curriculum	X		
Inclusion practices	X	X	X
Lack of transition related knowledge	X		X
Hastily and poorly coordinated transition planning	X	X	X
Restrictive views on employment and community living opportunities	X	X	X
Low levels of family participation			X
Outcomes of unemployment and isolation for participants		X	X
Significant benefits of supported employment and community inclusion		X	

Transition has been defined not only in terms of employment, but also community adjustment, personal choice and autonomy in adult life, and as an interagency planning and implementation process that when engaged in properly, will bring about systems change and result in new vocational and residential opportunities for young adults with

disabilities (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994). The existing gap between how transition services implementation is needed to guide schools in developing appropriate programs that promote successful transitions to adult life and employment.

In the field of special student populations, research has identified evidenced based secondary transition predictors for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. According to Test and Mazzotti (2009), there are 16 evidence-based predictor categories correlated with improved post school outcomes in the areas of education, employment, and/or independent living.

The first of the predictors focuses on career awareness. Career Awareness refers to the process used by an individual to form a work identity. It is ongoing and spans a lifetime. Career development begins with a person's earliest awareness of the ways in which people make a living and continues with focused career exploration to decide on a career path. The ongoing nature of career development includes changes in employment, career advancement, and/or changing the focus of the career path.

The next predictor involves the integration of community experiences. Work experience could include a variety of activities or strategies that place the student in an authentic workplace such as work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment while in high school, when the pay is competitive and paid directly to the student by the employer, is highly correlated with improved post school outcomes. Other community-based experiences have been shown to improve functional skills and the achievement of success in adult life. These include activities occurring outside of the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills.

Another component for predicting post-secondary success exit exams/graduation requirements. In order to be a state with a high school exit exam, the state must require students to pass, not just take, state exit exam to receive a high school diploma, even if students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grades. The exams are a state mandate rather than a local option. In other words, the state requires students in all school districts to pass an exit exam (such as a state assessment or end-of-course exams) or to pass an exam the student chooses from a list of state-approved assessments to meet this requirement, rather than allowing districts to decide whether to make the exams a condition of graduation.

In relation to academic experiences, another closely aligned predictor involves the inclusion in the general setting. Participation in inclusive settings during the school years provides opportunities to prepare for integration into the adult community. Inclusion in general education requires students with disabilities to have access to general education curriculum and be engaged in regular education classes and whole school activities with peers w/o disabilities. Inclusive practices refer to engagement and participation, not simply access to an environment.

Moving from school setting to the wider landscape, the fifth predictor involves interagency collaboration. As a youth moves towards graduation, a variety of agencies, organizations and people can and should become part of the transition team. Adding agency partners and others to the team provides the youth with the support of a network of people who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to achieve their specific post school outcomes. Interagency collaboration and coordination is a clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process. It promotes cross

agency, cross program, and cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth. Student support includes both formal and informal networks of people (e.g., family, friends, educators and adult service providers). Research indicates that having a network of people that provide support and resources, regardless of the formal or informal nature of that network enhances the likelihood of success. These networks promote individualized planning and services to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs.

In terms of academic, the opportunity for occupational coursework is a predictor as it relates and supports career awareness. Individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways develop occupationally specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals.

The seventh predictor involves paid work experience. During the high school years, participation in real life work experiences that closely resemble adult environments is a predictor of successful adult outcomes. Work experience could include a variety of activities or strategies that place the student in an authentic workplace such as work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment while in high school, when the pay is competitive and paid directly to the student by the employer, is highly correlated with improved post school outcomes.

Another component of the research references the role of parents. Parent, guardian or other caretaker participation is essential to an individual's ongoing success. Involvement means parents /families/guardian are active and knowledgeable participants

in all aspects of transition planning. Parental impact also encompasses the expectation of the family. Expectations include parents' and families' planning and articulating an expectation that their child will be employed in integrated settings in the community after high school.

As a predictor and a part of the requirements of IDEA (2004), the research shows the development of a program of study for students. Program or course of study is defined, as "an individualized set of courses, experiences, and curriculum designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals" (NSTTAC).

Another predictor aligns with individual growth as an advocate and skills of determination. A successful adult reflects self-management and direction, often referred to as self-determination. Many skills can support the development of self-determination such as the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, and take initiative to reach goals, and accept the consequences of actions.

Eleventh in the list of predictors includes self-care and independent living. Self-care and independent living skills are also skills necessary for adults to function effectively and safely in the community and as part of the community. These include skills such as personal management needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and managing decisions about healthcare/wellness needs.

Social skills development involves the "soft skills" for employment, which is often part of students' IEPs. Social competencies are critical to successful participation in adult community life. Employers report that inability to meet the social expectations of the community and workplace remains as a top reason why employees, disabled or not,

lose their jobs. Social competencies are skills, behaviors, and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal and written communication). The development of such skills should reflect in a plan based on individual assessment. Instruction and support are provided using proven methods that align with the youth's learning style and needs. Youth who do not easily generalize concepts from one environment to another are likely to need repetition of instruction on specific social skills in a variety of situations and environments. Some youth may require ongoing prompts and supports for the appropriate use of social skills expected in a variety of environments. In collaboration with social skill development are experiences of a good support system albeit natural or implemented by agencies. Students who had support from self–family–friend network to find a job were more likely to be engaged in post school employment.

Part of the research by Test and Mazzotti examines the development of a comprehensive transition program both forward thinking and reflective of all of the predictors. The transition programs prepares students to move from middle school/high school to adult-life, utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living.

At different stages of development in the transition, vocational evaluations are also a necessary area of programming. Vocational assessment is the process of gathering information about a student's interests, abilities, and aptitudes as they relate to his or her vocational potential. The Center for Innovations in Special Education has established



seven components in the vocational assessment process. These include cognitive skills, sensory/motor skills, perceptual skills, learning preferences, vocational skills and development, career awareness and development, knowledge of jobs, job requirements and rewards, aptitude strengths, and employment challenges.

Finally, the last predictor is development of a work-study opportunity. Work-study is a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction.

### **Inclusive Instructional Practices and Settings in Schools**

Given this list of predictors, part of successful employment relates to the academic skills acquired by students with intellectual disabilities while the other part relates to the soft skills needed for employment such as strong work ethic, positive attitude, communication skills, time management, problem solving, team membership, confidence, and adaptability. For students with intellectual disabilities, these skills translate to developing individualized systems of communication, functional reading and math skills, and opportunities for focused social skills and soft skill development.

In reference to the outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities, the environment utilized throughout a student's time in high school provides the preparatory experiences for post-secondary employment therefore it is important to examine the high school experience of inclusion prior to employment. An area for reference is the least restrictive environment, which is an element of determining where a student with an intellectual disability would best receive a free, appropriate public education. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a regulation in federal law (IDEA, 2004) that requires

students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students remain in regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. The intent of LRE is to ensure that students in special education are included in the general education class as often as possible. Although the principle of educating children with disabilities in the LRE seems very clear, there is much debate as to the definition of LRE and how to implement the principle in school settings (Marx, 2014).

In the literature, there appears to be two opposing ideologies concerning the LRE: One holds that the LRE is always the general education setting. The second ideology holds that the LRE is the setting in which a child's needs can best be met (Marx, 2014). The least restrictive environment is the continuum of services for students identified with special education services.

The placement or LRE of special education students should be determined based on the post-secondary goal identified in the Individual Education Plan. For expected achievement outcomes, the delivery of special education services is the main area of focus. Students with disabilities primarily receive instruction in either general education settings or a resource special education setting. In general education, students are educated and receive services in a setting with students with and without disabilities.

Several models exist for service delivery including the use of co-teaching models in general education to support the achievement of students with disabilities. Co-teaching is one approach for helping students with disabilities access a rigorous general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment while receiving support from two certified

teachers (Conderman, 2014). Co-teachers share unique responsibilities through co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing to provide evidence-based and value-added instructional practices. Co-teaching is a service delivery model that includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher working jointly to provide instruction to students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom. In co-teaching models, the special education teacher and general education teacher collaborate in planning instruction, making accommodations, and implementing instructional strategies, as well as monitoring and evaluating student learning.

A resource setting is smaller and is only composed of students with disabilities. The purpose of a resource class is to provide students with disabilities specialized instruction within a smaller class setting in order to meet each student's unique learning needs. In this service delivery model, students with disabilities receive the majority of their instruction within the general education class during the school day, and may be "pulled out" of the general education class for one or two class periods for instruction in a resource class. Most students with mild disabilities are under one of three types of resource models: categorical, cross-categorical, and non-categorical, with cross-categorical being the most popular.

Categorical resource rooms serve only students with one specific type of disability. Cross-categorical programs provide instruction to students within several different disability categories. Generally, students with mild intellectual disabilities, autism, learning disabilities, and behavioral disorders are together in this type of resource class. Non-categorical classes include students who may not be identified as being disabled or are in schools that do not categorize students by specific disabilities.

Resource teachers preferred to utilize detailed intervention programs designed for students with disabilities, such as direct instruction and learning strategies instruction. Direct instruction is a comprehensive curriculum that includes classroom management practices and instructional methods that focus on teaching skills in small sequential steps, providing frequent and immediate feedback, with teacher and student interaction. Numerous learning strategies practiced in resource classes can optimize student learning and generalize skills across settings and people. A learning strategies approach includes teaching techniques and rules to aid students in solving problems and completing tasks independently. Instructional activities in resource rooms using learning strategies include activities such as guided practice, peer instruction, modeling, teacher feedback, and task analysis (Mercer & Mercer, 2005).

With schools continuing to develop appropriate placements for students, the outcomes of these placements should provide students with intellectual disabilities skills that lead to successful employment. Part of successful employment relates to the academic skills acquired by students with intellectual disabilities while the other part relates to the soft skills needed for employment such as strong work ethic, positive attitude, communication skills, time management, problem solving, team membership, confidence, and adaptability. For students with intellectual disabilities, these skills translate to developing individualized systems of communication, functional reading and math skills, and opportunities for focused social skills and soft skill development. As a result of the continuum of services for students with disabilities and the current accountability system in Kentucky, disability populations are measured by academic assessment scores, transition readiness and graduation rate. The expectation for schools is

continuous monitoring and development of inclusive programming to improve the achievement scores of students with intellectual disabilities using academic assessments.

There are two categories for students with intellectual disabilities: mild mental disability (MMD) and functional mental disability (FMD). The Kentucky Alternate Assessment was developed in 1990 as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 to provide schools and programs with a valid and reliable means of assessing the instruction provided to students with significant disabilities categorized as FMD (i.e., for the less than one percent of the total student population for whom traditional assessments would be an inappropriate measure of progress). In 2011, all content areas of the Alternate K-PREP were represented by attainment tasks and the Transition Attainment Record (TAR) for students in grade eleven. These assessments continue to meet federal requirements for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Alternate K-PREP has two components: Attainment Tasks (AT) and the Transition Attainment Record (TAR). The Transition Attainment Record is a checklist, which evaluates the student's readiness in reading, mathematics and science. Students with intellectual disabilities that do not fall in the one percent of FMD are categorized as MMD and expected to take the same assessments as all students.

The achievement gap between students with intellectual disabilities as compared to other areas of disability and students without disabilities continues to increase and impact inclusive programming in schools. While research and practice-based methods, techniques and adaptive technologies have been widely developed and implemented, recent research shows little change in this gap over the last decade. The last survey of

state assessment tests in reading and math from the National Center for Educational Outcomes shows that the achievement gap in special education according to grade level remains between 32% and 41%. The lack of movement on scores means that students with disabilities gained no ground on closing the wide achievement gap between themselves and students who do not have disabilities (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). The same outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities is wider and the academic measures adapted for FMD programming do not show improved scores for academics, college and career readiness. In reference to graduation rate, the FMD population is zero percent because this population is considered dropouts regardless of any academic growth or transition readiness.

Other research on school programming has shown most students with disabilities spend more than 80% of class time in general education classes (Riviera, 2014). Students with intellectual disabilities spend less than 20% of their time in general education classes. Most research has found significant gaps in academic performance between students with intellectual disabilities (MMD) and those without disabilities (McMahon, 2016). For example, five percent of students with disabilities performed at or above proficient in reading compared with 36% of students without disabilities on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2005 (Swanson, 2008). Further, students with intellectual disabilities did not perform as well as the general youth population in the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Swanson, 2008). However, inclusion has been associated with a variety of positive outcomes, such as improved academic and social outcomes among students with disabilities (McMahon, 2016).

Many reforms in special education focus attention on where instruction should take place, versus instructional approaches proven successful in meeting the educational needs of students with intellectual disabilities (Volonino, 2007). The questions that surround special education include not only identifying evidence-based practices that improve the learning outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities, but also determining how and where the diverse needs of students with intellectual disabilities can be served. Schools have been faced with determining how best to provide students with intellectual disabilities greater access to the general education curriculum, while also ensuring that specialized instruction is provided to meet the individualized needs of students with exceptionalities. To accomplish these goals, schools have shifted away from providing special education services to students with intellectual disabilities in traditional pull out models (McDuffie, 2009).

Research on special education instructional practices and settings is somewhat limited. The research examines best practices but there is little research on the implications of the practices in different settings. Special education populations receive protections through legal requirements yet sometimes the research for those requirements is more about rights than about the actual impact of the legal requirements. The combination of instructional practices and appropriate setting (LRE) continue to have little research that balances both practices. Schools have an uneven implementation of best practices for inclusion and teacher training for working with students with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion is particularly complicated because of its implementation in different ways, depending on the needs of the students. Not all students can be included in the exact same ways; that is, a student with an intellectual

disability may not benefit from a regular education classroom, regardless of curricular supports.

The research around instructional practices and LRE for students in special education continues to be an area of discussion in school districts. Schools continue to examine policies, programming and opportunities for marginalized populations in our district. The disparities and gaps in academics that exist among standardized testing scores (MAP, ACT, PSAT) that exist for our population with intellectual disabilities continues to grow in reading so our instructional practices and opportunities for change in our schools is essential to closing the achievement gap. As schools focus on inclusive practices within school programming, research in special education has shifted focus from in school activities and classroom structures to investigating the outcomes of such approaches when students exit high school to post-secondary education and employment. This shift has prompted research for examining school programming and practices compared to research based predictors for post-secondary success.

With a national effort to examine and improve the transition outcomes for youth with disabilities, transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, and employment have been a complicated and challenging process for students with disabilities. There have not been clearly established sets of practices and scope of responsibilities for state and/or federal agencies to lead collaborative efforts among secondary schools and postsecondary education, rehabilitation, and other adult service systems (Johnson & Sharpe, 2000).

The role of the family in the collaboration and life long process is crucial marker to assist with a successful transition. According to Kohler (1996), successful transition



planning includes family involvement. This necessary component includes involving families in the transition planning process and empowering families to take a role in the process (Kohler, 1996). There are five essential components to consider while preparing teachers to work with secondary students with disabilities. These include facilitating parental involvement, engagement, and support for post-secondary outcomes, encouraging parent involvement in transition planning, understanding student perceptions of family support, promoting positive parental expectations for post-secondary employment and education; and implementing parental training in transition (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). Partnerships between families and transition service providers not only improve transition services and outcomes for youth with disabilities, but also are essential for families to develop the knowledge and skills that will be needed to continue in an appropriate support role for their adult son or daughter with a disability (deFur, 2012).

A review of research on parent knowledge of the transition process reveals that even when information is provided often in transition planning meetings or admission and release committees, parents may still not understand the information related to the student needs (Lindstrom et al., 2007), and professionals fail to connect families with needed community agencies. Lindstrom et al. (2007) conducted transition-related research through in-depth interviews with 133 individuals, including young adults with disabilities, high school teachers and other school staff, parents, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and employers. Parents identified, as one of the top four priorities, utilizing transition services and post school supports by connecting students with the appropriate services and supports found in community agencies (Lindstrom et al., 2007).

In a similar qualitative study, (Hetherington et al., 2010), the focus was on the “lived experiences” of adolescents with disabilities and their parents in transition planning. Results indicated that parents consistently felt like outsiders in the transition process and when they received information from schools, they felt it was “too little, too late” (Hetherington et al., 2010). These findings correspond with Lindstrom et al. (2007) because they demonstrate the importance that parents place on possessing relevant information and becoming active participants. Youth participants with advocate parents, those playing an active role in planning and support, tended to transition more successfully to work, earning higher wages and/or higher skill occupations, while youth participants with protective or removed parents did not fare as well (Lindstrom et al., 2007). Parents of young adults with intellectual disabilities are primary advocates who experience with their son or daughter the transition to post-school life. Parents are intermittent participants in transition research (Davis & Beamish, 2009).

According to Davis and Beamish (2009) over the past 20 years, parents have continued to report low family participation in the transition process and poor coordination of transition planning. These parents of adults with disabilities also identify concerns with unemployment, restricted levels of participation in community activities, and prevalence of dependence upon families (Davis & Beamish, 2009). The research on this topic within the United States mostly concentrates on parent and student involvement in transition planning, systematic national data collection, and development of surveys about transitions (Davis & Beamish, 2009). With one of my research questions focusing on parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors, I reviewed research on parent

knowledge of transition process but no research on parent's direct knowledge of the evidences based predictors.

As part of my study, a focus included teacher capacity to implement the new changes that enhanced the role of transition planning and responsibilities for teachers. Despite these new changes, students with disabilities continue to face post-secondary outcomes in which they are less prepared for adulthood than their peers without disabilities (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2011). This discrepancy may be due, in part, to secondary special educators feeling unprepared to plan for and deliver transition services (Li, Bassett, & Hutchison, 2009). Studies have shown that secondary special educators lack knowledge and skills that hinder their abilities to implement effective transition practices (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009). Consequently, teachers who are unprepared to plan and deliver transition services may be inadvertently contributing to the poor outcomes of students with disabilities (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2010).

Recent survey research indicates that many transition specialists and teachers are not fully prepared to implement secondary transition evidence-based predictors effectively, and many have indicated that they are unaware of established evidence-based predictors that contribute to post-secondary success (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2013). Based on the current research on teacher preparedness for implementation of evidence-based predictors, districts and schools must ensure that teachers are fully prepared to provide effective secondary transition programs and practices, student-level evidence-based practices and systems-level predictors of students' post-secondary success (Cook, Cook, & Landrum, 2013).

## **Critical Disability Theory and Its Use in Educational Research**

The theoretical underpinnings for my research study was critical disability theory. In order to understand the approach for critical disability theory, the history of this framework provides multiple and sometimes conflicting views. The task of critical disability theory is to analyze disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon (Hall, 2019). Critical disability encompasses the lived experiences and attempts to transform the circumstances under which an oppressed people live through critical intersectional analysis (Hall, 2019). The stated purpose of critical theory is to develop the intellectual tools with which people can understand their world and seek to change it for the better.

In my early readings, traditional theory aimed at understanding and explaining the world with little focus on the interaction. Horkheimer's critical theory, grounded in positivism, examined the researcher and the thing being examined as being engaged in an interactive relationship (Horkheimer, 1972). Horkheimer contrasted what he called traditional theory with critical theory, which he proposed as a theoretical approach to provide an account of the social forces of domination that takes its theoretical activity being connected practically to the object of the study. Unlike traditional theory, critical theory makes no claim to be normatively objective – its purpose is to explain oppression and to transform society with the objective of human emancipation (Horkheimer, 1972).

Early research on disabilities have been characterized as adhering predominantly to an environmentalist view, in which the child is shaped by the contingencies of the immediate environment (Sameroff & Feil, 1985). In contrast, Bronfenbrenner's model views the child as influencing and contributing to the environmental context, while

indirect, second-order effects (e.g., parental employment) are explicitly acknowledged and addressed in the understanding of developmental change. The ecological view does not conceptualize development as unidirectional, neither centering developmental competencies in the child nor focusing entirely on the environment for the explanation of poor developmental outcomes of children with developmental problems (Sontag, 1996). The ecological model attends to multiple risks, both constitutional and environmental, and the systemic, reciprocal nature of child and environment influence--an intuitively appealing paradigm for special educators (Sontag, 1996). Critical disability theory is able to challenge traditional disability studies and engage in transformative, intersectional, and coalitional critical work (Hall, 2019).

Beginning in the 1960's, disability activists and theorists began to develop new conceptions of disability, noting that by focusing only on the biological or functional condition of the individual, existing models failed to recognize the role played by society in limiting and enabling people (Sontag, 1996). Rather than seeing disability as inherent in an individual, these new approaches see disability resulting from attitudes and conditions within society. Under the social model, socially constructed barriers, including both societal attitudes and physical and policy structures that serve to exclude or "disable" individuals, cause disability. Marcia Rioux, for example, distinguishes between 'environmental' and 'human rights' models (Sontag, 1996). The former model focuses on disability as the result of individuals reacting with social, political and economic barriers in their environments and on identifying and removing barriers to participation and inclusion. The environmental model has been criticized as being not sufficient on its own since it does not adequately consider impairment and does not give weight to the

embodied experience of persons with disabilities (Chaney, 2012). Critical theory is interested in the social relation of the human subject to the historical conditions of production or alienation (Hall, 2019).

Rioux's human rights model looks beyond particular environments to examine broad systemic factors that keep some people from participating as equals in society including: income and social status, social support networks, social environments, physical environments and impairment (Chaney, 2012). This human rights model emphasizes the role that social attitudes and systems that appear neutral on their face play in creating and perpetuating disadvantage. Under this human rights approach, impairment is recognized to the extent necessary to design accommodations to permit persons with disabilities to achieve substantive equality (Chaney, 2012).

Disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities (Mertens, 2009). Disability research has moved through stages of development, from the medical model of disability (sickness and the role of the medical community in threatening it) to an environmental response to individuals with a disability (Mertens, 2003). Now, researchers using a disability interpretive lens focus on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect. As a human difference, its meaning is derived from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals), and it is simply one dimension of human difference (Mertens, 2003). The goals of disability theory in the research process reflects in the types of questions, how the data collection will benefit the community, the communication process and how the data is reported in a way that is respectful of relationships.

Critical disability theory's use in educational research is vitally important in examining the social model and voice for disabilities. In early childhood, we begin to recognize the differences in students. By naming both disableism and ableism, we recognize the complex ways that disableism and ableism interlock and collude to produce processes of exclusion (Goodley, 2019).

We build a system of what we reward based on normed expectations of school. We recognize and categorize strengths and weaknesses in academics and social structures. Schools are the beginning of the early tenets of disability theory, determining disability from abilities. The challenge of equity begins to form in classrooms, social activities and community roles. The challenge of inclusion begins with the underpinnings of discrimination, exclusion and worthiness. This perspective challenges able-bodied supremacy and the oppression that arises from restricting economic and social benefits to persons with disabilities, which are redistributed as privileges to be negotiated (Gillies, 2014).

Research has produced a consistent set of predictors of in-school activities that positively correlate with post school success in education, employment, and independent living along with evidence for new practices to include psychological empowerment, self-realization and technology skills (Mazzotti, 2020). The notion that offering academic opportunities, access to general education opportunities and employment is a privilege freely given to those without disabilities is fundamentally skewed. Critical disability theory is the framework to examine how schools created gaps in education and employment for those with disabilities. Educators and communities must determine if these poor outcomes are a result of lack of evidence-

based practices, equity or fundamental civil rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The educational experience presents with expected outcomes, which provides researchers the opportunity to examine the system of practices for those with intellectual disabilities to meet those outcomes. As educational leaders explore equity in or schools, educators must recognize the need for evidence-based practices to be implemented for all students.

### **Critical Disability Theory: Its Application to Employment Outcomes for Students with Disabilities**

Critical disability theory asserts that persons with disabilities ought to have equal access to all aspects of social life and opportunities, including education and employment. It is expected that human rights legislation and government incentives would enable persons with disabilities to be meaningfully engaged in the labor force; however, the existing lower employment rates for persons with disabilities suggest that there are still obstacles to overcome, both in the workplace and in the community at large (Hall, 2019).

The transition from school to work is a pivotal point in many students' lives, since it is related to their economic and psychosocial well-being. The employment interview process also poses barriers that oppress persons with disabilities (Duckett, 2000). Problems can surface regarding whether to disclose a disability, either before or during in an interview. Many choose to conceal it, since disabilities are typically associated with a deficit and persons with highly visible disabilities are particularly discriminated against (Duckett, 2000). Many interviews incorporate ability tests, pre-employment medical tests, and health-related questions, which can disadvantage persons with disabilities



(Duckett, 2000). Duckett undertook a qualitative study that found persons with disabilities felt anxious and manipulated while being interviewed, suggesting that employers ought to utilize more ethical, rather than simply technical methods of interviewing. Interviews can be a beginning to recognize social construction of disability in order to deconstruct and dismantle harmful and stereotypical notions of disability. It is also necessary to move towards more humanistic and empowering perspectives of disabilities, such as the human rights approach to disability, which views disability as an inherent part of society where the responsibility of disability is shared among society

Despite the fact that almost all jobs can be performed by disabled people, provided that the work environment is supportive, the employment rates of working-age disabled people fall behind their non-disabled peers in developed and developing countries alike (WHO, 2011). Productivity norms, discrimination and prejudice in the workplace, and disincentives to work produced by benefit systems, all affect disabled people's working lives and opportunities. Insights from critical disability studies ask what is a worker, what counts as 'work', and how social class, race, gender and culture of work shapes these questions. People with disabilities have undertaken labor that has traditionally been undervalued in capitalist societies – care work, emotional labor, community projects and rehabilitation, for example. Disability thus provides a vantage point from which to critique practices and values that have normalized in the workplace (Hall, 2019). As students transition into work, researches must recognize that school communities operate differently than the larger work community and young adults with intellectual disabilities shift into employment opportunities founded in perceptions of disability.

### **Summary of Literature Review Findings**

Progress toward competitive integrated employment (CIE) for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities over the last 40 years has been mixed (Wehman, 2018). Despite evidence showing that supported employment interventions can enable adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to effectively get and keep jobs, national rates of competitive integrated employment remain below a third of the working-age population. Given that competitive integrated employment and supported employment are an inclusive setting for adults, it makes sense student experiences in high school should foster the skill development needed to be successful in a fully inclusive work environment. Despite decades of evidence showing the efficacy of supported employment for promoting CIE, those outcomes have not been achieved as well for people with the most significant disabilities (Wehman, 2018). Previous research is primarily quantitative studies identifying the gaps in educational achievement and employment. My study will examine the transition process and program delivery to identify the relationships between the predictors and research from the perspectives of families and teachers. The ability to link experiences and employment for students with intellectual disabilities will improve the lives of those seeking employment.

Much of the research that exists around student transition is in the form of quantitative studies that examine the post school outcomes using surveys and questionnaires designed for statewide efforts to study or assess outcomes. Although quantitative research efforts are valuable, they do not provide perspectives or detail the process that families and individuals with disabilities go through as they move from a student centered planning process to an adult living and working process. Qualitative studies may seek to understand how individuals and families construct meaning of their

lives in terms of work, independent living and social engagement. This lack of enforcement and implementation of community inclusion can create a difficult navigation of services for adults with disabilities.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of my study was to examine transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities. The research provided insight into the district's current transition programming, parent's knowledge of evidence-based predictors used in individual transition programming, and the teacher's capacity to align and address evidence-based predictors for employment of students with intellectual disabilities. The study examined the current practices of six urban high school's processes, programming, strategies and teacher professional development and their alignment with evidenced based predictors for supporting successful post-secondary outcomes for young adults with intellectual disabilities. Four research questions guide my study. They are as follows:

**RQ1:** What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?

**RQ2:** What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ 3:** What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ4:** How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in admissions and release committee documentation?

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to describe and justify the research methodology chosen for my study. This chapter will set forth the research process used to answer the aforementioned research questions. In terms of structure, the organization of Chapter 3 is as follows. First, my study begins with research methods and design by presenting and rationalizing the selection of my research design (a qualitative case study) and the limitations of this analytical strategy. The next section discusses the strengths and limitations of a qualitative case study. The next section is the context of the qualitative case study followed by the data sources and data collection procedures. The study leads to a description of the process of data analysis followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations connected to this research study. When a scholar-practitioner is undertaking research in the school or district that employs them, it is important to discuss the process by which the researcher explores positionality and relationship with the topic, teachers, students, schools, and district in which the study will take place. Lastly, there is a discussion of the strategies used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings produced.

### **Research Methods and Design—Qualitative Case Study**

Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive to establish patterns or themes (Creswell, 2012). The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2012). This study was an instrumental case study examining the planning processes of families of youth with intellectual disabilities, alignment with evidenced based predictors for

successful outcomes, and teacher capacity for implementation and alignment of research and practices. The intent of an instrumental case study is to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern in a case or cases to best understand the problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, from a Yinian outlook, case study researchers “maximize four conditions related to design quality: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. How investigators deal with these aspects of quality control” (Yin, 2002, p.19) is highly crucial in every step of the case study research. Yin continually suggests that emerging researchers should keep these four “yardsticks” in their mind in every phase of their inquiry process to ensure the quality in their investigation. From a Yinian point of view, case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case or cases conforming to the aforementioned definition by addressing the “how” or “why” questions concerning the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2002).

An instrumental case study approach will develop a deeper understanding of the family’s knowledge of the transition process planning process in reference to employment, transition and education after high school. This approach offers an opportunity to investigate the complex social issue of employment of students with intellectual disabilities, which consists of multiple variables such as parent knowledge, teacher capacity and district programming to understand how we can improve our post-secondary outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. My case study provides a reflective assessment of the teacher capacity to align and implement evidence-based predictors. The interviews will enable the family to voice how schools can align their systems to meet their needs through the family planning process. The findings will offer insights to possible changes for schools and districts to collaborate with families

through rich conversations and mutual understandings of the transition process. The approach will give meaning to each participants' roles and provide a basis perhaps for future research around transition program improvement. The documentation and narratives from the planning process with families will help guide change while offering a vivid portrait of improving the knowledge and life of our students.

A qualitative research design grounds the study. This research design enables researchers to answer specific research questions and to identify questions that require further exploration (Creswell, 2011). Additionally, the use of a qualitative research design supports several assumptions that together define the research questions. My study was instrumental case study involving a group of individuals with intellectual disabilities who experienced a phenomenon (transition planning and transition to employment). According to Stake (2005), an instrumental case study allows researchers to gain an insider's view of an issue or concern. Constructivism is built upon the premise of a social construction of reality (Searle, 1995). One assumption to which researchers can subscribe is that the individuals who encounter the situation, circumstance, or phenomenon (Creswell, 2011) construct realities. According to Yin (2018) a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

I selected an instrumental case study design to investigate how families construct meaning from the transition process and how teachers use a framework for developing a

successful transition for students with intellectual disabilities during planning and implementation in relation to the evidence-based predictors. While knowledge is constructed, individuals often attach different meanings to the same phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). One advantage of this approach will be the participants [parents and teachers] sharing their stories and reflecting on the process of planning for transition to employment will construct a meaning from their experiences. The discussions with participants will describe their reality to enable me to understand the participants' experience.

A framework will include all the themes that emerged from data analysis. Yin suggests that returning to the propositions that initially formed the conceptual framework ensures that the analysis is reasonable in scope and that it provides structure for the final report (Yin, 2002). One of the drawbacks of a conceptual framework is that it may limit the inductive approach when exploring a phenomenon. To safeguard against becoming deductive, researchers are encouraged to journal their thoughts and decisions and discuss them with other researchers to determine if their thinking has become too driven by the framework (Baxter & Jack, 2008) The reflective process will depend on the structured ethical reflection values identified as challenges throughout the study.

With these findings, educational leaders and special education practitioners may apply them to transition programs in order to meet the needs of individuals that are similar in not only disability area but also other demographic similarities such as poverty, ethnicity and support services. Their experiences give context to the areas for growth and development in my district and community. My research focus is a comprehensive examination of our district's transition process in relation to the needs of



our families and communities expected outcomes for education and employment of our students.

### **Strengths and Limitation of Qualitative Case Studies**

Qualitative case studies are recognized as a viable means of conducting empirical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), but have been misconceived as being research that was limited solely to conducting fieldwork (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) defines case study as an empirical method investigating a contemporary phenomenon in depth, within its real-world context and specifically when the lines between the phenomenon and the context are not clear. Case studies, therefore, do not just examine the studied phenomenon, but also considers the contextual implications of the phenomenon. Case study research is an approach having its own logic of design and techniques for collecting and analyzing data (Yin, 2018). The limitations of case studies are based on rigor of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018), confusion with “non-research” studies, inability to generalize from case studies, and the time and effort involved (Yin, 2018). Some concerns are due to poor quality designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A most recent impact on my study included the COVID 19 virus and the impact on employment. The unemployment rate both nationally and locally has increased as part of this pandemic. During this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, employment rates have declined for all people, but one may find the unique jobs created through job carving and supported employment have been eliminated as non-essential. At this time, the district that serves as the context for this study is collecting the 2019-2020 school year data through the KyPSO, so a comparison can be made of the impact (if any) on the employment rates of adults with disabilities.

With governmental limitations on business operations and some redirection of monies from incentives to unemployment in both large and small business, the employment rate for adults with disabilities may show a decrease in employment. My study reviews employment statistics, the state of economic development in the nation as well as local industry is crucial. Employment rates fluctuate at times, affecting the labor force as a whole. When examining any national or local trends data, I must consider the types and number of jobs available for customized employment. Employment opportunities are specific to the local economy, thus the employment base for adults with disabilities can be limited. As our labor force becomes more technical, it becomes increasingly important to improve adaptive technology for improved access.

In addition, the quality of the research depends largely on the researcher. My experiences may influence the result of the research in terms of interpretations through interviews, familiar documents and relationships to participants. Participants may have misperceptions of my role in research in relationship to my district responsibilities thus, influencing their ability to feel comfortable and share openly and honestly their experiences. My own personal and political beliefs and values on improving outcomes and direct experiences with employers, educators and parents could influence the data. I recognize that the ability to repeat the qualitative research is difficult. In qualitative research, I must accept the uncontrollable factors “because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting and it is extremely difficult to replicate studies” (Wiersma, 2000, p. 211). Although the same types of parameters may be used, the participants such as parent, teacher and student circumstances will have some varying characteristics. Some components that can be repeated include disability category, professional development

opportunities, and consistency of reviewing recent research on employment outcomes and predictors using the same standard of measurement.

Finally, a limitation may include the results of Kentucky Youth One Year Out (YOYO) from the Kentucky Postsecondary Outcomes to determine postsecondary success. Although the data require statistical analysis and training for interviewers, the results are surveys with self-reported data from students or families of youth with disabilities. As part of the process, schools may have lack of data due to inability to contact youth one year out. Some students with intellectual disabilities are considered dropouts if receiving an alternate diploma, moved due to attending other educational institutions or have entered into institutions. I must also consider the data was from one state with certain demographics, which were adults with intellectual disabilities in Kentucky.

### **Context of the Study**

My study provides guidance on future planning processes and teacher training for creating a smooth and successful system for successful employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Lexington community houses the second largest school district in Kentucky and offers a variety of supports for students with intellectual disabilities. The community provides post-secondary education services through both colleges and universities. The community has four large pre-employment training facilities for after high school supports as well as an abundance of services for supported and customized employment through the state Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The school district is located in an urban area serving approximately 40,000 students with over 5,000 students identified with disabilities. The district

consists of six high schools and five program schools that provide services for students with intellectual disabilities with identified transition services. At the high school level, there are approximately 1,300 (26%) students with identified disabilities and 297 (.09%) identified with an intellectual disability. The specific school system for review is due to allowing for a large enough sample for data collection.

### **Data Sources**

Through this case study, I explored the experiences of multiple families with a child with an intellectual disability currently in the last year of high school either graduating or exiting with a diploma. Informants included students and their families educationally identified as having an intellectual disability through the eligibility determination process for special education. Participant criteria included final year of high school programming due to aging out or graduating, eligible for special education services due to an intellectual disability, and currently receiving services in special education with a post-secondary goal for employment. After review of the criteria requirements, the sample size included 24 students based on the review date of the sample of current enrollment. The sample included 20 teachers from each school with varying years of experience in transition planning.

My study aligned with a more functional solutions model of critical disability theory which views disability in a practical perspective that identifies the limitations due to disability, with the intent to create and promote solutions to overcome those limitations. This model aligns with the models of developing skills for competitive integrated employment with not only natural supports but also innovative and technological supports to improve employment opportunities.

I drew upon three data sources in my study: semi-structured interviews, participant and district surveys, and document analysis. I reviewed teacher's levels of professional development that involve transition through review of professional growth plans, district trainings, and professional development surveys, which may result in a follow up interview. I also used survey data collected by means of the state administered TELL survey which collects data on professional development and instructional resources.

Other documents for post-secondary outcomes review, included student IEP's, conference summaries, curriculum documents, predictors of success, ARC documents, and student transcripts. Using these documents, my study identified common themes of parent and teacher knowledge about evidence-based predictors that result in successful employment outcomes.

### **Interviews**

For this case study, I used a semi-structured interview to collect data (See Appendix A). I derived the questions from the process of developing an Individual Education Program (IEP), which IDEA legislation proscribes. The interview focused on the activities and participation of families in collaboration with the school to develop a comprehensive transition program for their child. The interview data gathered information about the activities offered by the school in terms of the predictors for post-secondary employment. The interview also gathered information on their expectations and roles of the school in preparing their child for employment after high school. As critical disability examines the meaning, nature and consequences of disability from a social perspective, the interview process reflected on the social model of disability by

structuring data procedures to give voice to families and educators of those with intellectual disabilities in the process of transition to work (Hall, 2019).

## **Surveys**

In this case study design, I administered a district survey to teachers to gather information on professional development participation (See Appendix B). The survey consists of ten questions to identify current practices and professional development opportunities that exist to guide transition planning and activities to be implemented with students with intellectual disabilities. The survey was administered for the previous two years to assist in identifying professional development needs concerning transition needs for teachers. Some questions helped identify the role of participants in the transition process giving perceptual data about roles and responsibilities in the process and planning.

An additional source of data for professional development and instructional resources included the results of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Kentucky survey which is a state administered survey given to all licensed educators statewide. The TELL Survey originates from extensive work by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission (NCPTSC) beginning in 2001 (TELL, 2020). The NCPTSC conducted a literature review and analyses of state and national survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics' School and Staffing Survey in order to understand the factors contributing to teacher satisfaction and employment trajectories (NTC, 2013b). Based on these efforts, the NCPTSC identified the following areas: time, empowerment, leadership, decision-making, and facilities and resources as related to future employment plans. The TELL Survey incorporates these

constructs and includes others logically and empirically linked to outcomes of interest, teacher retention and student learning. These constructs include student behavior support, community support, and instructional practices and support. TELL Kentucky includes questions on the following topics:

- Community Engagement and Support
- Teacher Leadership
- School Leadership
- Managing Student Conduct
- Time
- Professional Development
- Facilities and Resources
- Instructional Practices and Support

As part of my study, I examined the results of the study for each high school in the district from the 2015 and 2017 administration of TELL to identify the professional development and instructional resources that relate to my study.

*Validity and Reliability.* This section will describe the approaches used by the NTC to demonstrate reliability and validity used analysis to verify the stability of the instrument across survey populations. The external validity testing conducted for the TELL Survey assesses the structure of the response scale and the alignment between survey items and broader survey constructs (NTC, 2013b). Based on the external study finding that some survey constructs are more stable if broken into multiple constructs, an additional construct was added resulting in eight constructs. The external review analyzes reliability using both the Rasch model person separation reliability and

Cronbach's alpha. The Swanlund (2011) study concludes the survey is capable of producing consistent results across participant groups (NTC, 2013b).

NTC conducts factor analyses to group variables with similar characteristics together. NTC performs confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using principal components analysis and varimax rotation procedures, in order to verify the actual structure of the data reflects the expected structure from previous validity studies (NTC, 2013b). NTC conducts internal analyses of validity and reliability to verify the stability of the instrument across survey populations as promoted by industry standards found in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). The reliability analyses for TELL Kentucky produce Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.86 to 0.95. All eight alpha coefficients are high and above 0.70 confirming internal consistency of the TELL Kentucky Survey constructs (NTC, 2013). Statistical tests of validity include conducting factor analyses and reliability tests include generating internal consistency estimates.

## **Documents**

Documents for review included professional growth plans of teachers and district and school professional growth. Student IEP's, conference summaries, curriculum documents and ARC documents as well as student transcripts were reviewed to assess transition activities and process during the student's exiting year of high school. The document information was aligned with the predictors of success as identified in research of Test and Mazzotti findings. Using these documents, my study identified common



themes of parent and teacher knowledge about evidence-based predictors that result in successful employment outcomes.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection for my study included the collection of interview data, survey results, the examination of district documents, and possible follow-up interviews to assist in clear understanding of teacher survey results.

### **Interviews**

The purposeful sampling approach allowed for reviewing documents at different stages to gather perspectives of families in the process of post-secondary employment planning. Patton (2015) provides the following description of purposeful sampling:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry...Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding. (Patton, 2015, p. 169)

I used purposeful sampling for the selection of participants from district records of exiting youth. Purposeful sampling allowed me to include variables such as ethnicity, race, socio-economic, gender, and representatives from all areas in the district. Participants were parents of students educationally identified as having an intellectual disability through the eligibility determination process for special education. The participant's criteria included final year of high school programming due to aging out or graduating, eligible for special education services due to an intellectual disability, and currently receiving services in special education with a post-secondary goal for employment.

I developed interview questions to assess knowledge of parent participants of evidence-based predictors. The questions followed the outline of the individualized education program to provide a framework for the interview questions and coding data for transition planning. Each interview was conducted over a single session and recorded with a tape recorder as well as a computer to ensure that the recording was captured. These were used to generate transcripts for coding purposes from the recordings. I paused “to reflect, calibrate and re-categorize the themes as they emerge from the transcripts. The analysis and interpretation ... will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place (Saldana, 2016). In a similar process, I used training documents and surveys for teachers concerning the participation in professional development on evidence-based predictors. After I reviewed school documents and data sources, a survey was conducted to gain knowledge of the evidence-based predictors currently in use by high school teachers.

Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Louisville. The IRB approval was submitted to Fayette County Public Schools requesting access to the participants’ information, data and documents to be reviewed for my study. Once both parties for my study approved, I began by gathering and reviewing data sources provided by the district with reference to special education documentation, teacher professional development and growth plans, TELL survey results and participants that meet the criteria for interview.

Once a list of the eligible participants for interviews were determined, I conducted a purposeful sampling of the possible candidates for interview. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the

purpose of the inquiry...studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding (Patton, 2015). Once the sample size and set was determined, I contacted each participant through email to determine their interest in participating. If interested, I conducted phone calls to answer any questions participants had concerning the study.

### **Surveys**

The survey information tool was developed and sent electronically to all teachers in the district that provide transition activities to the identified population. A brief introduction of the research and purpose of the tool was given prior to teachers completing the survey questions. The survey responses were collected and examined to identify trends using a coding system to categorize professional development, experiences and activities relating to transition programming. This result was then compared with existing documents to support the implementation of the activities for the students identified in the sampling.

After I coded the interviews and surveys, I then aligned both data sources with the evidence-based predictors to determine which predictors both parents and educators in the transition planning process evidence. The data also determined the lack of training or information that exists in the current transition process and programming in the school district.

### **Document Collection**

Documents for review included professional growth plans of teachers, district and school professional growth, student IEP's, curriculum documents, ARC documents, and student transcripts. Each document is specific to the identified student and was reviewed using a document divided into sections to include professional growth plan activities,

transition goal and activity, curriculum activities, conference summary discussions, and student transcript courses. Once the document was completed for each participant, I identified overlapping themes, activities, professional growth and coursework.

### **Data Analysis**

In the data analysis, critical disability theory is the reflective lens with roots in the cultural and social structure of the disability population. The elements relevant to the data analysis include voice and social model. Employment and expectations of inclusion will varied among participants. Based on the current social model, each participant did see the role in employment of adults with intellectual disabilities differently. I was aware of the level of inclusion as an expected outcome. The perceptual data of parents and educators was reflected in the common themes assessed from the data as well as priori themes existing in the elements of critical disability theory. The expectations from parents and teachers are part of the social role of young adults with disabilities. The structure of the interviews and survey questions provided a voice of possible change, continued practice or reduction in the desire for employment an acceptable practices for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Critical disability theory is structured to improve the conditions under which those with disabilities are viewed and valued in our economic structures. The prior themes of the predictors of employment may help to accelerate the initial coding phase but I will also be sure to remain aware that the data may or may not be reflective of the elements of critical disability theory. These themes were part of the data analysis, as employment is part of the social structure of adults with disabilities.

Analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions

of a study (Yin 2002). A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2016). The purpose of coding is to assist in finding patterns or commonalities from the data that would then establish direction for aligning outcomes with practices. A pattern can be characterized by similarity (things happen the same way), difference (they happen in predictably different ways), frequency (they happen often or seldom), sequence (they happen in a certain order), correspondence (they happen in relation to other activities or events), or causation (one appears to cause another) (Saldana, 2016). My background will provide some basic codes for common language and services provided in post-secondary planning but will need to modify throughout the process as new codes will emerge and anticipated categories re-organized. Saldana finds, “our analysis and interpretation – our study’s findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place” (Saldana, 2016). The opportunity for basic codes and new codes to emerge from the research provides an opportunity for “both code my own data and allow others’ to cast a wider analytic net and provide a “reality check” for my interpretation” (Saldana, 2016).

Once the data was gathered, I used deductive coding. My background allowed me to have some basic codes for common language and services provided but I modified as I went because new codes were added and anticipated categories re-organized. I used open coding to organize the raw data of responses and documentation that attempt to answer or coincide with the research questions. The “reality check”, as cited by Saldana, was established when the actual coding identifier the researcher creates changed through the

interpretation of others review of transcripts. Once I began the process, my goal focused on emerging themes and categorizing the information through axial coding.

As part of the data analysis process, I used word and phrase repetitions when scanning through primary sources to build a common language from respondents. Once completed, I compared the words and phrases most commonly used with the findings of the document review and interview qualitative data with the evidence-based practices. Using the comparison data, I then categorized the coding under the different evidence-based practices to examine any relevant gaps in process and practice in the planning phase of transition. Anticipating that there may be additional information or lack of information based on my knowledge of the process, I discussed these findings in reference to the evidence-based predictors as either omissions or information expected to be mentioned in the process.

To analyze the data a manual coding identifies patterns and relationships. Axial coding is a qualitative research technique that involves relating data together in order to reveal codes, categories, and subcategories. Axial coding was used to breakdown the themes found in each participant's documents. The axial coding allowed me to examine the interconnectedness and linkages of the data. The axial coding was a combination of an initial breakdown of the documents with comparisons by two other coders to determine and identify themes. The goal was to identify emerging themes and categorizing the information through axial coding using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with lines to identify phrases that relate to the research questions. The spreadsheet had categories for line, text, open coding, axial code reader, and axial code reconciliation. The axial coding allowed me to examine the interconnectedness and linkages of the

data. Triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking of the data established the credibility of the interviews and coding of the data.

After themes and subcategories were analyzed, selective coding was utilized to classify emerging concepts into themes that align with the research questions. Selective coding provided a story of the processes to the actual evidence-based predictors to identify possible gaps to lead to critical assessment of alignment of transition programming. Once alignment or misalignment was gleaned from the coding, comparison with teacher professional development provided a picture of the organization's capacity to implement the current research on evidence-based predictors successfully with district and school programming through teacher training and student/family transition planning.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics has become an increasingly important phenomenon and the ethical requirements to study have been emphasized extensively (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Social science research does entail gathering data from people and about people. Therefore, moral principles require that research participants and respondents must be protected, have confidence in their response and participation, advocating the excellence of research, guiding against anomalies or misconduct that might replicate on the organizations and to deal with predicaments that keep reappearing during the course of the research (Creswell, 2011). The ability to communicate informally to build trust, give feedback on the planning process and participate in an atmosphere of openness for meaningful discussions was essential during the interview process. Along with the interview structures for gathering data, the researcher used a structured ethical reflection tool to explore biases or theories concerning possible findings and recalibrate perceptions

of gathered data. The SER process allowed for the identification of core values and allows the researcher to examine the ways in which the specified principles such as courage, equality, leadership opportunity, respect and social responsibility will be embodied throughout the research (Stevens, Brydon-Miller, & Raider-Roth, 2016).

The benefit of this type of research was the opportunity to document and share the perspectives and experiences of marginalized populations. The ability to shift the mindset of those with limited knowledge of the struggles of adults with disabilities brought forth an opportunity for all to experience the challenges and achievements, and even enhance the lives of those with disabilities. I minimized the risk the participants took to share such intimate successes and failures as a family by establishing mindful practices that allowed interviewees to withdraw whenever they are uncomfortable.

As I continuously reviewed my ethical approach to research through my structured ethical reflection, it was important to me to temper my passion with the social stigma that creates inequity among those with disabilities. The structured ethical reflection guided me in identifying my core values and beliefs and examining their impact of my research. With my data analysis, I revisited my ethical reflections to ensure the alignment of my findings or assumptions are pure in thought and are reflective of the disability communities' values and experiences. The emotional component was certainly part of living with a disability but there must be a means to approach the participants without sympathy but creating a normalcy for the identified group for employment.

The disability is recognizable and creates obvious limitations in employment however; limitations are not inabilities. Limitations must be the challenge our businesses accommodate through accessibility and success for individuals that approach work task



differently. Promoting accessibility and alternative approaches to work will create the inclusivity and purpose for all individuals. The purpose of my research was to lend a voice to a marginalized population that can be included if given opportunity and accessibility through creative and innovative options. I worried that my research outcomes would show a need for change or concluded that employment was not an option for all. The levels of employment and intervention for some adults with disabilities may be challenged at a level that is difficult to modify or resolve. For educators, research may show our current practices are not aligned with resulting in meaningful employment, which may result in shifts that make educators uncomfortable or uncertain about supporting employment. I continued meaningful reflection throughout my process while seeking information through a lens of social justice and equality for the world of disability inclusion. My dissertation is a product of continued growth toward inclusive practices for those with intellectual disabilities in employment and makes an impact on the social attitude toward improving the value of adults with disabilities.

### **Process for Exploring Researcher Positionality**

Definitions of families has changed considerably from a traditional view of two parents and their biological children living together in a household to any number of interpretations in the modern world. The word family conjures up many mental models of the makeup of the family unit. Even though the modern definition of family has changed considerably, the dreams of success and independence we have for our family members have remained constant. We want our children to be safe, have a good job, have their own family, be independent and have opportunities to pursue their personal

dreams and passions. For some families each of these goals become complex when dealing with a child with significant disabilities.

The primary challenge facing schools and communities for this population is developing programming that promotes inclusive practices and successful post-secondary outcomes for these students with intellectual disabilities. Many school districts struggle to address inclusive educational issues surrounding populations of students with intellectual disabilities. The challenge for educators is balancing programming to improve academic skills, independence and advocacy for students with intellectual disabilities. For students with disabilities, an important factor affecting social and academic outcomes is the policy and practice of school inclusion (McMahon, 2016). The research on employment and high school programming outcomes is important to provide guidance on activities that promote aligned outcomes for families, schools and students with intellectual disabilities.

Reflection on my relationship to participants and the research was essential in connecting to the issues, struggles and triumphs for a marginalized community. Being a part of the system challenged my ability to be objective in assessing the current system for both strengths and weaknesses. The objectivity examined the strengths and weaknesses of the current system strongly rooted in social beliefs about the value of adults and children with disabilities may challenge the current transition process established in Fayette County Public Schools. My role in the school community taught the power of listening and reflecting before planning and problem solving. The process was more powerful than the answers. My organizational role demanded total involvement and active commitment, while the research role demanded a more detached, more theoretic, objective and neutral observer position as mentioned by Coughlan (2005).

Qualitative researchers are not always emotionally removed from and controlling of the research process, nor are they always openly sharing and seeking collaboration (Glesne, 2016). Disability research is personal for the participants and the participants are part of a certain social structure with social issues of discrimination and a marginalized population. I have worked with students with disabilities for twenty-five years as an educator, counselor and administrator. I am trained in conducting focus groups and working with families and teachers to elicit meaningful responses to well-constructed interviews questions and surveys. My personal experiences with disability programming provides a level of understanding and sense of community with participants but can challenge my beliefs about the roles of educators and parents in the disability world. Reflexivity is the social sciences concept used to explore and deal with the relationship between the researcher and the object of research. Ronald Pelias (2011) describes reflexive writers as, “ethically and politically self-aware, making themselves part of their own inquiry and all writing is “positioned” and within a stance (Creswell, 2018). Reflective knowledge has to do with normative states in social, economic and political realms. It concerns a vision of what ought to be, what is right and what is wrong and arises through the process of consciousness-raising and conscientization (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). My reflective process both in interviews and coding, required me to become more detached from the organization to allow for a more organic perspective on the transition issues reviewed.

Milner (2007) developed a methodological framework to assist a researcher in examining self and positionality through four separate components. Through the four components, researching self, researching the self in relation to others, engaging in

reflection, and shifting from self to system researchers can examine their own racial and cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This framework is important in all research whether the research involves issues of race and culture or not. As Milner (2007) states, there could be unseen and unforeseen dangers related to race and culture within a research that overtly appears to have no racial or cultural elements. Researching the self allows a researcher to become aware of perspectives, positions, and philosophies that are known, unknown, and unanticipated. Researching the self in relation to others demands that the researcher reflect on the self as relates to the racial and cultural perspectives of the community and people involved in the study. It is important for a researcher to listen to self, to others, and self as it relates to others in order to provide evidence of accuracy within the research. Engaged reflection allows the researcher to reflect on what is occurring among the community and people of the study from a racial and cultural standpoint. Through engaged reflection, the voice of the researcher and the participants are protected in the study. Shifting from self to system removes the researcher from the personal and individual level in order to consider policies, institutions, and society systematically for the researcher to view their research in a broader context.

As a researcher, self-awareness played an important role in the focus of my research within the disability population. The passion and personal experiences with families allowed me a level of understanding and sense of community with participants, but challenged my own beliefs about roles of educators and parents in the disability world. My role in this community allowed me a unique perspective, which can be an advantage or disadvantage in some ways. As I tried to shape my dissertation into a clear area of focus, my personal beliefs came into play about inclusion and current research

findings. Glesne (2016) believes qualitative researchers are not always emotionally removed from and controlling of the research process, nor are they always openly sharing and seeking collaboration. Disability research is personal for the participants and the participants are part of a certain social structure with social issues of discrimination and a marginalized population. Ronald Pelias (2011) describes reflexive writers as, “ethically and politically self-aware, making themselves part of their own inquiry and all writing is “positioned” and within a stance (Creswell, 2018). Being a part of the system challenged my ability to be objective as I scrutinized the system for both strengths and weaknesses. The objectivity to examine the weaknesses of a system strongly rooted in social beliefs about the value of adults and children with disabilities challenged the decisions and pathways we have pursued in recent years. My view attempted to capture the values of a family struggling with social security benefit reductions, adult care systems lacking caring providers, medical disability and everyday care for an individual with a disability. The value of education and everyday survival do not always rank the same for educators and families of children with disabilities. Reflection on my relationship to participants and my research was essential in connecting to the issues, struggles and triumphs for a marginalized community. My personal and professional experiences were challenged and strengthened through listening, interpreting and examining the findings. My part in the disability community taught me the power of listening and reflecting before planning and problem solving. The process was more powerful than the answers.

My reflective process both in interviews and coding challenged the perspective of my role as an insider and required me to become more detached from my organization to

allow for a more organic perspective on the transition issues reviewed. My organizational role demanded total involvement and active commitment, while the research role demanded a more detached, more theoretic, objective and neutral observer position as mentioned by Coughlan (2005).

In addition to reading Milner's article (2007), I reflected on the comparisons with the disability framework. Similar in some ways, researchers use a disability interpretive lens to view disabilities as a dimensional difference, not a defect (Creswell, 2012). Siebers (2008) claims that disability studies can change our basic assumptions about identity, ideology, language, politics, social oppression, and the body. The research in disability theory is multilayered in research as culture and race can affect the experiences of people with disabilities. In exploring the social theory of disabilities, the researcher needed to examine the alternative view, which is relevant to educators, that disabled people do not have a defect but who can function effectively provided they are given necessary tools, alternative techniques, modern training and positive societal attitudes. Research views disability through the seven elements of critical disability theory: the social model of disability, multidimensionality, valuing diversity, rights, and voices of disability, language, and transformative politics.

Opportunities for those with disabilities has been a focus for many years among educators as districts are providing data on the gaps between students with disabilities as compared to students without disabilities. Many school districts focus on equitable opportunities for all students through vision and mission planning. With this in mind, a natural consequence of this focus is to examine the approach educators use to create and reflect on these equitable opportunities. Historically, special education has been a largely

specialized educational field with limited research around processes and approaches used to create employment opportunities or offer educational benefit beyond the school years. Throughout my career, educators and researchers have acknowledged the gap that exists between students without disabilities and students with disabilities. As I enter my twenty-third year as an educator, I have observed from the sidelines the outcomes for students with disabilities. My career has included positions as a general education teacher and a special education teacher, a guidance counselor, a principal and currently an associate director of special education. I have had the opportunity to work with families at all grade levels in settings that include classrooms, meetings, community functions and facilities, and employment sites. In each of these, I have observed educators to have a willingness to engage the families of students with disabilities yet also a hesitancy of knowing how to create equitable opportunities that engage and provide an inclusive environment both educationally and socially. My interest in working with youth with disabilities began early in my career from a desire to manage and find solutions for educators that were inclusive but balanced with the unique needs of families and students with disabilities.

As an experienced educator, I am profoundly aware of the perspectives of families, educators and employers when discussing employment opportunities of young adults with disabilities. My view may not capture the values of a family struggling with social security benefit reductions, adult care systems lacking caring providers, medical disability and everyday care for an individual with a disability. The value of education and everyday survival do not always rank the same for educators and families of children with disabilities. Reflection on my relationship to participants and my research was

essential in connecting to the issues, struggles and triumphs for a marginalized community. My part in the disability community teaches me the power of listening and reflecting before planning and problem solving. The process is more powerful than the answers. The research study focused on examining the planning and process invested in our young people with disabilities as they transition into a more inclusive world of work. The study focused on the process of high school planning, the opportunities in high school and the capacity of teachers to align and implement evidence-based practices to create successful post-secondary outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Strategies for Ensuring, Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

Validity in qualitative research indicates consistency and trustworthiness regarding activities and events associated with the phenomenon as signified by the study results explored in the research (Golafshani, 2003). The validity of the research is maintained through continuous examination and intra- and inter-coder reliability with a second and third individual for examining patterns and relationships within the documentation. Research notes and coding will be maintained throughout the study for a continuous loop on coding verifications of the document reviews. The validity of the same format of documents, interviews and reflection on professional growth plans, individual education programs and definitions of evidenced based outcomes will provides structure for the findings. The researcher's continuous examination of ethical reflections to remain neutral to the outcomes allow exploration of biases or theories concerning possible outcomes.

It is important for the researcher to consider validity and trustworthiness in order to guarantee the reader can have confidence in the findings of this study. Creswell and



Poth (2018) offer that validation is “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher, participants, and the readers” (p.259). Creswell and Poth (2018) further state that that extensive time in the field, thick description, and closeness of the researcher to the participants also add to the validity of a study. In order to do this, I have employed accepted strategies to document accuracy within this study.

Through my development of a structural ethical reflection (See Appendix D), I identified several values to guide my study. Authenticity guided my study with the genuine intent to provide voice and improve the quality of transition practices for participants, families and educators. In choosing current employment research and examining the data, I promoted transparency through open reflection about the data provided and flexibility for improvement. By utilizing interviews, the data was a collection of voices directly from the disability community.

Quality criteria for all qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Reflexivity is an integral part of ensuring the transparency and quality of qualitative research. The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternative criteria for qualitative research. The table below assist in defining each criteria based on (Kortsjens, 2018).

I established credibility through my personal involvement in the disability community. My knowledge of the transition process and established relationships with community and individual transition programming provided confidence in my interpretation of the nuances of disability studies and persons with disabilities. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness included prolonged engagement and the data collection

procedures that promote the use of triangulation through interviews, document examination and surveys results with an intended follow up to get feedback or clarity concerning the data collection.

*Table 3. Lincoln and Guba's (1985 ) Definitions of Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research*

Credibility (internal validity)	The confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views
Transferability (external validity)	The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents.
Dependability (reliability)	The stability of findings over time. Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study.
Confirmability (objectivity)	The degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I will include techniques throughout the phases of content analysis: the preparation, organization and reporting phase. The preparation phase includes data collection method, sampling strategies and selecting the unit of analysis (Helvi, 2014). My preparation phase has consisted of multiple revisions of research questions, and review of sampling with refinement of sources that would provide the richest data for individual experiences. The organizational phase included categorization and abstraction, interpretation, and representativeness. My personal involvement in the disability community and transition process development aligned my research to evidence-based predictors for categorization, which limits wide interpretation and structures the study around evidence of these predictors in the participants' reporting

in the data collected. Finally, the reporting phase structured the systematic and logical record the findings and provided a full analysis of the process to address transferability.

Transferability, which is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. As the researcher, I maintained an awareness of my possible bias due to me familiarity and direct involvement in transition processes for individual with intellectual disabilities. Because of this, my focus to ensure accurate data collection and reporting is representative of all perspectives by including any negative or gaps in the district process. The purpose of the study was to improve the process so being open-minded is essential to growth and improvement for future programming. Furthermore, the reporting of the content analysis process should be based on self-critical thinking at each phase of the analysis (Helvi, 2014).

Finally, the dependability of a study is high if another researcher can readily follow the decision trail used by the initial researcher. To check the dependability of a qualitative study, one looks to see if the researcher has been careless or made mistakes in conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings and reporting results. Dependability was ensured through techniques of description of the study's data collection and robust descriptions of my participant's reported experiences. The data collection was reviewed for correctness in all content analysis phases. Confirmability structured an interpretation derived from the research categories identified as evidence-based predictors.

### **Summary**

Although current policies promote the employment of adults with disabilities and provide incentives for employing adults with disabilities, the data clearly showed the

connection of school and employment is not resulting in sustainable outcomes in competitive or supported employment models. Educational systems must ask themselves what is missing in this connection of knowledge, practice and implementation. As an educational system, our students with intellectual disabilities must receive meaningful planning and activities to be successful in employment. Federal policies and procedures meant to guide and promote successful transition to employment for young adults with intellectual disabilities can only highlight the issue of low employment rates, while future research must examine the process of missed opportunities or connections to employment.

The significance of my study was grounded in federal and state policies by outlining specific guidance on supporting capacity building for districts and schools to align with evidence-based predictors that improve the outcomes for the educational system and individuals with intellectual disabilities. My study differed from previous research that primarily examined outcomes of all disabilities and the services after high school using only outcome data without the examination of the knowledge and ability of teachers and parents to plan and implement evidence-based predictors. With limited studies on transition planning and alignment with evidence-based predictors, districts, school and families will continue to experience outcomes that limit the potential and marginalize the value of individuals with disabilities.

Qualitative research is the opportunity to document and share the perspectives and experiences of marginalized populations. The ability to shift the mindset of those with limited knowledge of the struggles of adults with disabilities brings forth an opportunity for all to experience the challenges and achievements, and even enhance the lives of

those with disabilities. The risk the participants take to share such intimate successes and failures were minimized by establishing mindful practices that allow interviewees to express their insights. The findings of my research should lend a voice to a marginalized population that can be included if given opportunity and accessibility through creative and innovative options.

The disability creates obvious limitations in employment however; limitations are not inabilities. Promoting accessibility and alternative approaches to work will create the inclusivity and purpose for all individuals. The levels of employment and intervention for some adults with disabilities may be more difficult to modify or resolve. For educators, research shows our current practices are not resulting in meaningful employment, which may result in shifts that make educators uncomfortable or uncertain about supporting employment. The goal of research involving adults with disabilities should seek to improve employment opportunities and influence the social attitude toward improving the value of adults with disabilities.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities. I focused on the transition process from school to employment, exploring the alignment with evidence-based predictors. I sought to provide insights into the district's current transition programming, parents' knowledge of evidence-based predictors used in individual transition programming, and the teacher's capacity to align and address evidence-based predictors for employment of students with intellectual disabilities. I examined the current practices of six urban high schools' processes, programming, strategies and teacher professional development and their alignment with evidenced based predictors for supporting successful post-secondary outcomes for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

As part of my study, I collected data about the district's current transition programming, parent knowledge of evidence-based predictors used in individual transition programming, and the teacher's capacity to align and address evidence-based predictors for employment of students with intellectual disabilities. In this chapter, I detail the findings of the instrumental case study methodology conducted to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?

**RQ2:** What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ 3:** What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ4:** How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in admissions and release committee documentation?

In Chapter 4, I provide the analysis of my interview transcripts, teacher surveys, and documents to ensure consistency with the case study methodology. Additionally, I coded the data to identify alignment with the evidence-based predictors for post-secondary success in employment. Finally, I discuss the process used to analyze the transcripts and teacher interviews, consisting of two levels of analysis: (a) deductive coding using pattern matching techniques and (b) inductive coding using In Vivo techniques. Throughout the different levels of analysis, I used continuous comparisons to filter the data further, cross reference the finding from each group and documents, until specific themes began to emerge from the data to begin alignment with the evidence-based predictors. In this chapter, I also include the findings from the interviews, teacher surveys and document comparisons to provide a cross comparison of the information. Tables assist in the understanding of the various codes and emerging themes. The following chapter is divided into three main sections: (1) Research positionality (2) Data Collection and Analysis which incorporates the interviews, survey and document reviews comparison and (3) Findings from a thematic analysis that corresponds to each of the four research questions.

### **Research Positionality**

As I prepared for my analysis, it was important for me to review my own positionality as it relates to my research topic and the context in which my study took

place—a district in which I serve as an educational leader. To that end, I undertook two processes by which to explore my researcher positionality. The first was a Structured Ethical Reflection (SER, See Appendix D). In so doing, the researcher seeks to center oneself within a set of values, know the setting and participants in the study, identify aspects and levels of power among stakeholders, examine the relationships among stakeholders, and anticipate ethical issues that may arise (Stevens et al., 2016). The ethics and values I explored throughout the process included open-mindedness, flexibility and social responsibility.

When beginning my interviews, I worked to be open-minded about what opinions and expectations parents expressed concerning the experience they had in the school system. I wanted to make sure my biases and assumptions about employment did not interfere with listening to the goals and expectations parents experienced through the transition process. By maintaining openness during coding of the transcripts and teacher surveys, I was able to let the results be organic versus forcing congruency with my own beliefs about how the transition process should occur.

As a second value, flexibility proved to be important in the interview process. I sought to listen without interpreting or leading the parents to answers. The conversation was genuine and even extended into general information the parents wanted to provide as an overview at the end. I was able to set aside my anticipated outcomes to the questions and let the participants share their voice about the transition process.

Finally, my third value, was social responsibility, As I reflected on each interview specifically, I was mindful of how to represent each family. I was unsure on sharing too much specific in terms of struggles and experiences with the agencies after high school



and focused more on the predictors. My research focus was alignment with research however many of the experiences shared were personal supports needed beyond the school programming. These personal stories add a voice to the findings that go beyond simply defining a process for transition but focusing on the experience to be encouraging and impactful.

Furthermore, I engaged in a process of exploring my professional, racial, and cultural awareness, consciousness, and positionality as I conducted my research (Milner, 2007, See Appendix E). Examples of these self-reflective questions included: (1). Does my research allow my current training and bias to be open to my findings? (2). Is my current thinking open to all perspectives? (3). Am I careful to let my research speak to the social injustices surrounding disabilities? (4). How do I attend to my own beliefs and convictions about the role of disability in employment (Milner, 2007). While planning for my interviews, I reflected on my approach for establishing a genuine and trusting environment in which participants can provide their perspectives on the phenomenon under study, noting on the importance of displaying active listening and understanding. I attempted to do this by talking with participants about my purpose and genuine interests in incorporating all voices in the research to develop better outcomes in the community rather than justify the current process of transition (Milner, 2007).

As part of the process, once interviews were complete, I engaged in the process of reflection to reflect about myself in relation to others. Researchers can acquire evidential truth in research when they value and listen to self, to others, and to the self in relation to others (Milner, 2007). All researchers, in terms of representation, both researchers' and research participants' voices, perspectives, narratives, and counter narratives are

represented in the findings of the study (Milner, 2007). All researchers must understand and examine one's own perspective and biases towards education and disability culture in order to eliminate preconceived ideas of outcomes for those with disabilities in employment.

I had no direct relationship with any of the parent participants I interviewed that would have caused a conflict of interest or insertion of bias into the research process. The teachers completed a survey and were encouraged to ask any questions at the beginning. The teacher surveys were anonymous thus allowing me to view the research without bias of having a direct working relationship with participants. With parent participants, I attempted to form a meaningful and trusting relationship with the research participants so the responses could be genuine and inform my research of their perspectives and concerns with the current transition process. As the Associate Director of Special Education, it was important for me to find the information needed to help develop a system that bridges gaps in preparing families, students and teachers to address needs as it pertains to successful transition individuals with intellectual disabilities into employment.

To ensure credibility, I engaged in a reflection of personal biases and acknowledged them throughout my review of multiple data sources. My coding process provided an opportunity for clarity in terms of thought processes during initial data analysis and subsequent coding. Transferability resulted from the alignment with the a priori codes and use of the evidence-based predictors. After the coding process, my fellow coders would actively engage in conversation about the alignment of transcripts and surveys with the evidence-based predictors. This discussion provided me an

opportunity to review the descriptors of each predictor to ensure interpretation consistently. The process allowed me to identify the core values and examine my values throughout the process of my research. The continual reflection helped me maintain focus on the process, my research questions and any biases' that could create misinterpretation, misunderstanding or lack of authenticity in providing the voice of participants. By using multiple data sources, I was able to triangulate the findings from each data source. This research opportunity provided clarity of the process experienced by parents and teachers in preparing students with intellectual disabilities to navigate the world of employment.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Overview**

The purpose of my instrumental case study was to examine the alignment of current research with current practice of transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities as reported by parents and their students. My study focuses on the transition process from school to employment, exploring the alignment with evidence-based predictors. The data sources I drew upon for this research study included semi-structured interviews with parents of students with intellectual disabilities, teacher surveys, and school-based documents (e.g., professional development plans, transition meetings, and individual education programs of students).

I completed the process in phases, beginning with identifying the families that would be eligible to participate. My first phase began with interviewing families. Phase 2 included contacting teachers of students with intellectual disabilities to complete a teacher survey (See Appendix B) in order to collect data on evidence-based predictors as it relates to the current transition programming. My final phase was gathering and reviewing the documentation of transition for each of the students. This documentation

included the student's individual education program, transition meeting notes, and post-secondary goal and transition services.

With each phase, data were collected with the process for analysis the same in order to then cross reference and code the findings for overall themes concerning the evidence-based predictors for successful employment alignment with current practice. The process for data analysis consisted of transcribing and coding all of the interviews in order to begin determining emergent themes. The teacher surveys and document reviews were structured the same without the need for transcription. First-order coding as described in Chapter 3, used a deductive process to match previously determined priori codes and match phrases or find patterns based on prior literature review (Saldana, 2016).

I used axial coding with two other coders due to my familiarity with the process to ensure interpretation and coding were similar and not interconnected based on any of my own bias. This coding process assisted in establishing the credibility of the themes as they emerged with the triangulation of multiple data sources. After this process, I used selective coding to classify emerging concepts into themes that align with the research questions. Selective coding will begin to provide a story of the processes to the actual evidence-based predictors to identify possible gaps to lead to critical assessment of alignment of transition programming. The coding allowed me to glean alignment or misalignment with a priori codes as I compared teacher professional development to provide a picture of the organization's capacity to implement successfully the current research on evidence-based predictors with district and school programming through teacher training and student/ family transition planning. To capture the process thoroughly, I employed Microsoft Excel and NVIVO 12.

## Interviewee Profiles

At the beginning of the process, 24 families were eligible for interview based on the criteria. The criteria included families of students educationally identified as having an intellectual disability through the eligibility determination process for special education. The participant's criteria included final year of high school programming due to aging out or graduating, eligible for special education services due to an intellectual disability, and currently receiving services in special education with a post-secondary goal for employment. After a review of each of the 24 candidates, 13 families were eligible based on students having a transition plan including post-secondary employment. As part of the study, students would be interviewing that were exiting. Due to COVID 19, three returned for a supplemental school year, which then allowed nine families to be eligible for interview. Of the nine families, six agreed to participate in an interview. The interviews with the families took place at a time convenient for them and their former student. The breakdown of participants is included in Table 4 with their identifier, race, gender, socio-economic status, and student school of enrollment.

*Table 4. Demographics of Interview Participants*

Parent	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Socio-economic status	Student school of enrollment
A	White	M	Free/Reduced	Lafayette High School
B	Hispanic	F	N/A	Paul Laurence Dunbar High School
C	Multiracial	F	Free/Reduced	Henry Clay High School
D	White	F	N/A	Bryan Station High School
E	White	F	Free/Reduced	Tates Creek High School
F	AA	F	N/A	Bryan Station High School

Notes: AA=African American; M=Male, F= Female, N/A=Not Applicable

## Teacher Surveys

At the beginning of the process, there were 20 teacher eligible throughout the district to participate. Of the 20 eligible, participants returned surveys, yielding a 45% response rate (See Table 5). Each teacher was sent an informed consent document so for research purposes, I know who was willing to participate but the answers were entered anonymously on a Google form and then sorted through a Google spreadsheet. I used the same coding process to look for emerging themes among the teacher responses.

*Table 5. Demographics of Teacher Participants*

Teacher	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	School
A	White	Female	Bryan Station High School
B	White	Female	Bryan Station High School
C	Hispanic	Female	Frederick Douglass High School
D	White	Male	Frederick Douglass High School
E	White	Female	Lafayette high School
F	White	Female	Paul Laurence Dunbar High School
G	Other	Female	District
H	White	Female	District
I	African-American	Female	District

## Document Review

For the study, I examined specific documents in order to inform the findings for specific research questions. In Table 6, I have identified the documents that I drew upon, indicating which I utilized as data sources for my specific research questions.

*Table 6. Documents Reviewed*

Research Question	Documents Reviewed
RQ1: What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?	Teacher professional development Student individual education programs (IEPs) Post-secondary goals and transition activities
RQ2: What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of	Teacher professional development

success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?	
RQ 3: What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?	Teacher professional development
RQ 4: How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in the admissions and release committee documentation?	Student individual education programs (IEPs) Post-secondary goals and transition activities Conference summaries Transition plans/meetings

For document review, I examined individual education programs of the identified students, teacher professional development, conference summaries and post-secondary goals and activities (transition plans) to answer research question. The purpose for examining these documents was to enrich the individual interviews and survey information as part of the overarching theme of transition planning process.

**The Alignment of High School Programming with the Evidence-based Predictors of Employability of Students with an Intellectual Disability**

The interview process provided parents the opportunity to give feedback and reflect on their children’s high school experiences and the world of employment afterwards. All parents indicated that school should have programs that match up with employers’ opportunities and skills students gain throughout high school to assist in navigating employment in the community. The parent participants identified community experiences, parental involvement, social skills and student support. Parent A and Parent D believed more experiences with employers outweighs the students continuing with academics in the school setting. Parent A stated, “The opportunities my child needed is more community participation and find the right fit for her...she is very social and enjoys

being around people and interacting with them.” This statement expressed the desire to work on social skills and community experience. Parent A went on to say, “I wished I had more knowledge about all the programs and appreciated the teachers working with her early on.”

One of the common experience shared by all interviewees was that all students are different and need to experience a variety of opportunities. For example, Parent E discussed the unique challenges to having their child employed, stating:

I really fought back with the school that my child was not able to do these things. I had given up on her in so many ways myself and resigned to the fact that she would be at home. The school transition kept finding creative jobs for her to participate in to be out in the community and she was so happy after each of those workdays. I knew I needed to be more involved to make sure those days happened after high school.

All of the parents mentioned one of the predictors, parent involvement, through statements about having to become the case manager after high school. Parent F reflected, “You know the school staff was a great model of what I now have to do to keep things going for my kid. I am now the advocate for my kid’s community opportunities.”

A potential explanation for parents’ focus on the specific four predictors of community experience, parental involvement, social skills and student support may be the development of employment expectations collaboratively with the school. The early discussions of transition planning connect with parent role after high school and the role of the adult with a disability’s relationship to a new environment of employment that requires social and skilled navigation (Mazzotti & Test, 2009).



Teacher surveys produced evidence of the current practices in transition and identification of any current or future needs for implementing the evidence-based predictors of post-secondary employment for students with intellectual disabilities. The survey focused on teachers sharing their insights about experiences with employment, school based instruction and professional development. Overall, there was consistency of training and implementation among the following predictors: career awareness, community experiences, exit exams, inclusion, program of study, self-advocacy and self-care, social skills, student support and transition programming. Although all teachers noted a concern with interagency collaboration, Teacher D mentioned the additional need for interagency collaboration by “having more community agencies interact with my students on a regular basis (or at all). I think this requires more community partnerships. Also more personal partnerships or mentorships.”

The document review included student individual education programs, transition meetings, and post-secondary goal writing with transition activities. The documents reviewed consistently provided notations for career awareness, community experiences, exit exams, inclusion practices, interagency collaboration, parental involvement, program of study, self-care and self-advocacy, social skills discussions of student support and transition program. There was mention of occupational courses in two of the six documents as this plan was specific to two of the students attending our career and technical education programs. None of the documents discussed the need for paid employment prior to exiting high school, but noted this as part of all of the post-secondary goals in each individual education program.

With the triangulation of the three data sources, most of the predictors were part of the transition program planned for the district schools. In comparison with all 16 predictors, occupational courses (a medium effect size) and paid work experience (small effect size) were not indicated other than in two of the six students individual education programs and transition activities. It is important to note the description of occupational courses includes remedial or traditional academics, personal finance, community access, behaving responsibly, goal-setting or problem solving. Although the data did not indicate occupational courses specifically as part of the transition process, many of the descriptors are embedded in the programs students participate in. However, streamlining the descriptors of occupational courses predictor as part of the transition process may be a next step to improve transition programming. In Table 7, I identify the evidence-based predictors and the sources providing evidence for each predictor. For the interviews and surveys, I identified the predictors for each participant and document source.

Table 7. Evidence-based Predictors

Evidence-based Predictor	Parent Participants						Teacher Participants									Documents			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	PD	IEPs	CS	TPs
Career Awareness							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Experiences	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exit Exam							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Inclusion in general setting	X		X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Interagency Collaboration			X		X	X										X	X	X	X
Occupational Courses								X			X						X	X	X
Paid Work Experience																			
Parental Involvement	X	X	X	X	X	X											X	X	X
Program of Study			X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-advocacy/ Self Determination	X			X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Care/ Independent Living			X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Social Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Transition Program	X						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vocational Evaluation																			
Work Study			X		X														

Notes: PD=Professional Development; IEPs=Individualized Education Plans; CS=Conference Summaries; TPs=Transition Plans; X=Present in data.

## **Teacher Capacities for Addressing the Evidence-based Predictors of Employability of Students with an Intellectual Disability**

When discussing what teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively, parents focused on the experience of their families with the school level transition programs. Overall, the parents spoke positively about the relationships and knowledge of their child's teacher concerning transition planning. Parent A mentioned the guidance from teachers in transition activities stating, "At home, I have to think about hearing all of this when she entered high school...the interests were recognized and we supported her with flashcards and independent work so she could go to a job and work."

Parent C indicated

Teachers reviewed everything in the transition meeting to look at interests, school classes, and everyone was ready to answer my questions. My child was able to have teachers learn her interests and skills that could help in the work world. She worked at jobs throughout the school, which showed the teachers were willing to seek out things for her to develop skills.

Parent E stated emphatically her surprise that,

Special education wasn't only academic but life skills opportunities with job training was really beneficial. My dream for my child is something social with a little variety in her job, she does love to eat so maybe she is expressing her interest in the food industry. The atmosphere is so important. The outside agencies really struggled more than the school in looking at job placement and they seemed to default more to care than job fit.

Teachers consistently identified preparedness for many of the predictors although concerns about implementing some of the predictors for specific students were noted in their responses. Teacher H felt prepared for the following from school opportunities: career awareness, community experiences, Inclusion, interagency collaboration, parental involvement, program of study, self-advocacy and self-care, independent living, social skills, transition program, vocational evaluation. She also indicated a number of supportive processes as helping in her preparation for implementing transition programming. These included Moderate Severe Disabilities (MSD) classroom checklist, post- secondary transition outcomes such as Employability Skills Attainment Record (ESAR) and Career Work Experience Certification (CWEC), employment training for students, vocational training, community based instruction, daily life skills outcomes, focus on functional academics for grade 14, community involvement based on volunteer opportunities for students and families. Teacher I mentioned the training opportunities provided were supportive for implementation. These included transition cadres, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) workshops, coop trainings on post-secondary outcomes and community resources, trainings that address skills in the area of self-advocacy, social skills, daily living skill, state and national conferences that provide sessions on evidence-based practices (EBP) indicators, and vocational trainings that focus on customized employment.

In comparing teacher survey results and documents, professional development programming from district and educational coop level showed at least monthly sessions provided to teachers around community based instruction, career planning, curriculums for social skills and vocational tasks, interagency information and

transition planning for individual education programs. In Table 8, I have identified the evidence-based predictor along with the participant and the document of evidence.

*Table 8. Teacher Capacity for Evidence-based Predictors*

<i>Evidence-based Predictor</i>	<i>Teacher survey participants</i>									<i>Documents</i>	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	S	PD
Career Awareness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Experiences	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exit Exam			X						X	X	X
Inclusion in general setting	X	X		X		X		X		X	
Interagency Collaboration								X		X	X
Occupational Courses		X				X				X	
Paid Work Experience											
Parental Involvement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Program of Study	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Self-advocacy/ Self Determination	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Care/ Independent Living	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Social Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support											
Transition Program	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vocational Evaluation								X		X	
Work Study	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	

Notes: PD=Professional Development; S=Survey results; X=Present in data.

### **Missing in Action: Teacher Capacities for Addressing the Evidence-based Predictors of Employability of Students with an Intellectual Disability**

Parent interviews were all positive about teacher planning and providing information concerning transition. All parents indicated that teachers shared information with them and provided a planned program for their child as they exited high school. One element was consistent across the parent interviews—commentaries on when to begin the planning and life skills instruction. Parent C commented:

Life skills were so important, but I felt like I had to balance that with academics. I don't know that the teachers were able to do both. Time seemed limited in the school day to do things in the community and also be involved in school classes.

Parent D described the process as “the teachers had all the information but I was unsure when to do what and I think they were so busy trying to get things done that meetings were limited”. Parent A believed the teacher “was always working to get them involved in school activities and socializing with other kids...trying to make sure they were part of the school.” Educators must also understand how to embed skill development and opportunities for students to practice within academic course content as well as throughout other aspects of their day (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014).

Teachers yielded a variety of results in terms of teacher preparedness for implementing evidence-based predictors. Teachers A and C expressed a desire to know more about employment opportunities. Teacher C acknowledged a need for “more time available for experience with working with various people (generalizing skills with other supervisors)”. Teacher G mentioned having “a professional growth opportunity that would assist me would be to have a better understanding of how some of our employment agencies and technical schools work to possibly scaffold teaching to better fit that part of transition preparation.” Five out of six teachers expressed confident in implementing predictors but identified a need for deeper knowledge and specific resources about the predictors.

At the systems level, teachers must be prepared with the knowledge and skills to identify methods to provide meaningful transition experiences that result in employment (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014). This includes preparing teachers with information about how to allocate resources at the school and community levels, work with community partners, and conduct community mapping to determine opportunities and

available resources to facilitate transition programming for students with disabilities.

Teacher C expressed the need for

In-depth training on writing the goals and planning for post-secondary as an incoming teacher would be very helpful. I have learned a lot since coming to Fayette County as far as transition planning and learning what is available to students. A more streamlined location of this information would be great.

As indicated by this previous statement, access to professional development must be readily available and easy to access for teachers preparation. Teacher D also was interested in

Any professional growth opportunities where I can gain knowledge on the resources available to students after the exit high school. I feel as though I have a lot of knowledge on the names of different programs, but not a lot of knowledge on what each program offers. I would like to know more about what each program offers so I can help parents to determine what after high school option would be best for their student. Teacher C indicated a “professional growth opportunity that would assist me would be to have a better understanding of how some of our employment agencies and technical schools work to possibly scaffold teaching to better fit that part of transition preparation.” Specifically, teachers must be prepared to integrate school and work based career development experiences into the curriculum. In addition to understanding the predictors, teachers must be prepared to provide employment skill training to ensure that students with disabilities have the skills to gain meaningful, competitive employment in post school life.



In comparison of teacher survey results and documents, professional development programming from district and educational cooperative-level showed training opportunities for the predictors. The in depth knowledge for implementation was not among any of the specific trainings offered. Community based instruction training provided a more how to process along with the trainings for exam administration. I was not able to interpret from the trainings if the process of implementation was provided to teachers through a strategic implementation model. The trainings were not sequential in nature or a model for on-going feedback. The documents identified a program (called Unique) adopted by the district that provides a transition passport for housing activities and student generated documents. Unique includes career assessments, vocational tasks, program of study, self-determination, social skills and vocational tasks.

### **The Incorporation of Parent Knowledge**

All three data sources analyzed provided layers of feedback concerning the incorporation of parent knowledge in the transition process. The parent interviews were most insightful about how they participated and what parts of the transition process were most meaningful. Parent A believed

My input was given at every meeting and the communication was good and given well in advance. I did have more of a role in the transition meetings prior to the ARC meeting. It was more relaxed and conversational than our annual meeting. The parent involvement predictor is an essential component in the transitioning process and empowers families to take a role in the process (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014). Encouraging parent involvement in the transition process is meaningful only if the parent is knowledgeable and can provide input and expectations for their child's outcomes.

Parent C acknowledged, “Input from me was important because I had to know what to expect. I won’t say that my expectations and the school’s expectations always aligned but I did feel heard.” Parent involvement has operationalized as follows:

“Parents/families/guardian are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child” (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014, p.27). Parent D recalled

As a parent, I show up but then I am asked questions and even shown videos of jobs my daughter can try. The things I watch her do in the community is amazing at times. It is important she is doing the things she sees others doing so she can be a part of things and appear to have some life after high school.

Teachers must be prepared with the knowledge and skills to provide information to parents about all aspects of the transition process, establish a school to community pipeline, establish on-going communication with families, and ensure the school staff members’ knowledge related to providing culturally competent transition planning.

Parent knowledge and experiences differ with the experiences of those without disabilities. Although teachers and parents are both advocates, the outcomes are supported parents carrying forward into a larger community. Teacher C described the experience as recalling:

My student is a focus moving into life but I find communities are not as accepting. Inclusion in a school can be easier than inclusion in life. I include my parents in writing the plan, meeting the people that come next and then trying to get all those services in line while explaining to a parent next steps are difficult but we do have a solid plan.

The teacher survey included a specific question about incorporation of parent input. One response included the following from Teacher A

Parent input and involvement is extremely important in helping with the success of the student's successful employment...helps with keeping the student on track and making sure they are reporting to work, being responsible and doing their part to be successfully employed. At a school level, parent transition meetings ... gives the family the opportunity to discuss their plans/long term outcomes for their students, also, gives the student the opportunity to share their post-secondary goals/desires with the team. Coming together as a team (teachers, therapist, employment trainers, community, and resource providers) provides the parents with extra support and encouragement to know they don't have to try figure this all out on their own.

This description provides a meaningful context for the roles of parents in school meetings, an opportunity to enhance the experience from a member to a participant.

*Table 9. Parent Input*

<i>Evidence-based Predictor</i>	<i>Sources of Evidence</i>			
	IEPs	CS	TPs	TSs
Career Awareness	X	X	X	X
Community Experiences	X	X	X	X
Exit Exam	X			X
Inclusion in general setting	X	X	X	
Interagency Collaboration	X	X	X	X
Occupational Courses		X		
Paid Work Experience				
Parental Involvement		X	X	X
Program of Study	X			X
Self-advocacy/ Self Determination			X	X
Self-Care/ Independent Living	X	X	X	
Social Skills	X			X
Student Support	X	X	X	X
Transition Program	X	X	X	X
Vocational Evaluation	X	X		

Work Study				
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Notes: IEPs=Individualized Education Plans; CS=Conference Summaries;  
TPs=Transition Plans; TSs=Teacher Surveys. X=Present in data.

Throughout the document review, each parent was present in multiple meetings for transition planning. Conference summaries and transition meeting notes indicated parent involvement. The process within the document indicated parent input throughout as part of after high school planning. Each individual program provided contact to a parent resource center ran by a parent of a child with a disability. This center is part of the Fayette County Public schools. In Table 9, I listed each evidence-based predictor along with identifying which document sources showed evidence of parental input and on which evidence-based predictor.

### Findings from Thematic Analysis

After the transcripts were coded using pattern matching, the themes that emerged were then categorized under each of the evidence-based predictors. The survey results were analyzed using the same process of pattern matching and then categorized under each predictor to determine the types of professional development provided to assist teachers in their capacity to implement the evidence-based predictors for employment.

*Table 10. Categorized Evidence-based Predictors*

Predictor	Community Experiences	Home Supports	School Programming
Career Awareness			X
Community Experiences	X		
Exit Exam Requirements for High School			X
Inclusion in general setting			X
Interagency Collaboration		X	X
Occupational Courses			X
Paid Work Experience	X		
Parental Involvement		X	
Program of Study			X

Self-advocacy/Self Determination	X	X	X
Self-Care/ Independent Living	X	X	X
Social Skills	X	X	X
Student Support		X	
Transition Program			X
Vocational Evaluation			X
Work Study			X

In order to capture my results from all data sources, I reviewed the predictors and categorized them into which research base (interviews, surveys or document review) the predictor may be implemented to show alignment with the evidence-based predictors. For example, exit exam requirements would be implemented in the schools but not through home or community experiences. This categorization assists in explaining which themes emerged under each data collection process. Table 10 provides an overview of how each predictor was categorized under community experiences, home supports, and/or as school programming when discussing my findings. Some predictors emerged in more than one category.

After reorganizing the predictors into three categories (community experiences, home supports and school programming), I was able to organize my results into findings under each research question. The following table details the cross referencing of the predictors as it relates to the research questions.

In analyzing the information to inform the programming for transition planning, several areas show a need for improvement in order for programming in the district to align with research. As a school begins the process of organizing around these predictors and incorporate them into the school based transition program, the data shows a need for

a structured system for families and teachers with intentionality on educating all participants.

### **Community Experiences**

This category included the predictors of paid work, self-advocacy, self-care, and social skills. Not all parents and teachers reported paid employment opportunities, but they reported that all other areas had been addressed. The most prevalent concern among parents included social skills instruction while in the community and at home. All parents mentioned how important social skills instruction was as their child exited high school to make sure they could access opportunities in the community. All teachers reported this was a daily activity in school but was not a specific professional development and would be nice to have a common curriculum for working with students on these and other behaviors.

*Table 11. Research Question Resource Findings*

Research Question	Interview	Surveys	Documents
RQ1: What elements of high school programming align with evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?	Community Experiences Parental involvement Social skills Student support	Career awareness Community Experiences Exit exams Inclusion in general setting Program of study Self-advocacy Self-care Social skills Student support Transition program	Career awareness Community Experiences Exit exams Inclusion in general setting Interagency Collaboration Parental involvement Program of study Self-care Social skills Student support Transition program
RQ2: What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?		Curriculum alignment Training on community resources Career awareness Interagency collaboration Parental involvement Social skills instruction Work study Transition program	Curriculum alignment Training on community resources Career awareness Interagency collaboration Inclusion in general setting Parental involvement Social skills instruction

		Exit exams Inclusion Program of study	Work study Transition program
RQ3: What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?		Strategies for parent involvement Training for self-advocacy Student support Self-care/ Independent living Paid work experience Occupational courses	
RQ 4: How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in Admissions and release committee documentation?	Transition meetings Daily report of behavior Emails	Transition meetings (discussions of resources, financial planning, opportunities in the community) Daily reports about student behavior Family work opportunities	Data collection Transition activity identification Community or family support Outside agencies

## Home Supports

This category included the predictors of interagency collaboration, parental involvement, self-advocacy, self-care, social skills, and student support. The most prominent information from all three data sources was the lack of interagency collaboration. Although noted in documentation, both teachers and parents reported a need for more understanding, knowledge and activities to supports teacher and families in streamlining the opportunities with support agencies. Parents reported little time to meet and follow through with agencies as well as no follow up once they contacted the agency. All parents reported that they did not realize they would have limited contact or lack of a case manager role after high school. In working with the school, parents reported the case manager seemed to be the one that would assist with questions or resources. Four of

the parents reported that they had no idea the next steps even though all through school they felt the teachers had always prepared them and answered their questions.

In reference to this same predictor, all teachers reported following the prescribed process and providing information to families but still felt they had little knowledge of making sure students and parents received needed services as they exited high school.

### **School Programming**

This category included the predictors of career awareness, including exit exams, inclusion in general setting, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, program of study, self-advocacy, self-care, social skills, transition program, vocational evaluation, and work-study.

In cross-referencing all three data sources (interviews, surveys, and documents), all data suggested that transition meetings occurred, but the information or structure of the meetings were different without a common agenda. In reviewing school programming predictors, all were evidenced in each transition meeting other than occupational courses. The occupational courses were replaced with a more individualized system of employment training or coaching which is closely aligned with a work-study.

In analyzing the survey data and the relationship to research questions two and three concerning teacher capacity for effective implementation, teachers were consistent with some predictors and others were unfamiliar to them. For example, all teachers reported professional development for career awareness, community experiences, interagency collaboration, exit exams, inclusion, parental involvement, program of study, social skills, transition program and work-study. In my analysis of surveys, the ones all



teachers reported, the district has specific trainings for each of these predictors upon review of professional development trainings offered from the district.

The identified predictors reported as lacking include occupational courses, paid work experience, parent involvement, self-advocacy, self-care, vocational evaluation and student support. In my analysis of the surveys of the participating teachers, six of nine reported parental involvement as required and lacking for teacher capacity for implementing the predictors. This predictor appeared in both the results of research question one and two. The predictor of occupational courses was not reported as required or lacking by any teacher. Self-advocacy was reported by four of nine teachers as lacking with self-care reported among four of nine teachers as lacking capacity to address this predictor. Vocational evaluation was reported by all nine teachers as lacking although two of nine teachers discussed the importance of this predictor. The two teachers discussed the importance of employers to be on board to value the student vocational qualities. The role of employers being able to evaluate how to incorporate those with disabilities into existing job responsibilities was evidenced by five of the teachers. They mentioned having no idea how to evaluate a student's vocational skills and to match them with specific jobs. The last predictor reported as lacking was student support. All teachers reported student support as a concern. The barriers mentioned for student support included transportation, medical needs, safety, financial planning, living arrangements and family belief in their child being employable. This information identifies areas that teachers need initial or more professional development to address the predictors.

## **Chapter 4 Summary**

After a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts, document and surveys, the voices of families and teachers began to shed light on the operational use of the evidence-based predictors for post-secondary in transition programming for students with intellectual disabilities. Through the priori codes and pattern building of the data sources, the comparison of the interviews, teacher surveys and document review revealed the transition process to emphasize some predictors as well as the lack of others being accessible to families. The process also revealed the expectations of families and teachers without all of the needed training and opportunities to lead to post-secondary success. Using the tenets of Critical Disability Theory (CDT), the stated purpose of critical theory is to develop the intellectual tools with which people can understand their world and seek to change it for the better. Critical disability encompasses the lived experiences and attempts to transform the circumstances under which an oppressed people live through critical intersectional analysis (Hall, 2019). Because of the shared experiences of these families and teachers in Fayette County Public Schools, implications and recommendations are provided in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In an effort to align current practice with current research for transition programming to promote successful transition to employment, families were interviewed, teachers surveyed and documents were reviewed in Fayette County Public Schools. The voices of the families and teacher were essential in framing the current program and future work needed to improve the outcomes of employment for students with intellectual disabilities. Through the interviews, the parents provided valuable insights into their experiences, allowing for the district, its educational leaders, and teachers to understand how system of supports may need to improve or refocus continued efforts toward students' gainful employment after high school. The voices of teachers shaped the picture of the efforts both inside and outside of the classroom to improve the outcomes for their students. This chapter presents a summary of the implications, recommendations for future research, and conclusions related to the research questions. The specific research questions guiding the study included:

**RQ1:** What elements of high school programming align with the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability?

**RQ2:** What teacher capacities are required to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ 3:** What teacher capacities are lacking to address the evidence-based predictors of success for employability for students with an intellectual disability effectively?

**RQ4:** How do teachers incorporate parent knowledge of the evidence-based predictors of success for employability in transition planning as evidenced in admissions and release committee documentation?

### **Summary of Findings**

“I want my child to be recognized for what they can do; not just the things they can’t do. I am aware of the typical milestones my child will not meet. I was told that many years ago.” This statement emphasized in my interview with Parent C encompasses the journey to seeing abilities not disabilities. All journeys have obstacles and opportunities but the experience lived is the voice that is often not recorded and examined. This study sought to explore the experiences, knowledge and training for families and educators surrounding one of life’s biggest transitions, education to employment. My research reveals a system that, while well intended, is not achieving the successful outcomes for our disability population. Transition for students with disabilities are intertwined with both broad and individualized issues that make specifics plans difficult to measure.

By applying and reflecting through the tenets of critical disability theory, this disability framework was vital in in shaping research questions aimed at examining and improving a system of transition to improve opportunities and the quality of life for those with intellectual disabilities. Critical Disability Theory provides for a lens of ability in employment instead of an inability lens. The employment opportunities individuals with disabilities experience are far different from the typical population. These opportunities are limited, unstructured, and dependent on a school system and government agencies to promote the advantages of hiring a diverse population that include individuals with disabilities. These individuals require supports and interventions that some businesses

are not willing to provide and for which some school systems are willing to provide the legal compliance only.

### **Implications for Policy**

Through this study, the voices of families and teachers revealed a strong need for a systemic approach to transition programming. Although special education deals with a level of individualization, a uniform approach for all students is needed and then a system of support for those individual characteristics to be addressed through meaningful engagement opportunities for families, teachers and community members. Partnerships between families and transition service providers not only improve transition services and outcomes for youth with disabilities, but also are essential for families to develop the knowledge and skills that will be needed to continue in an appropriate support role for their adult son or daughter with a disability (deFur, 2012). Research has produced a consistent set of predictors of in-school activities that positively correlate with post school success in education, employment, and independent living along with evidence for new practices to include psychological empowerment, self-realization and technology skills (Mazzotti, 2020). The educational experience presents with expected outcomes, which provide researchers the opportunity to examine the system of practices for those with intellectual disabilities to meet those outcomes. As educational leaders explore equity in our schools, educators must recognize the need for evidence-based practices for all students.

The reality of all students not having the access or opportunity to experience academic and social life through a similar lens of their peers needs to be a focus for any school district. Schools could learn lessons about building true partnerships by bridging

the gap between school and community resources. As schools, we often times invite the community in but as students exit, schools need to experience the community outside of the four walls of academia. One of the ways to implement would include offering job training classes at different community centers or job sites with teachers on site. This model would promote teachers working with students in the community and community visualizing the benefits of skill building on site.

As the participants shared their experiences and moments of reflection, their voices shaped the findings beyond the alignment with research. Their voices brought the predictors to life in a way that promotes a need for in depth discussion about a framework that challenges the current structures of academic experience in high schools. Their voices were encouraging about the personal relationships of teachers and families but highlighted the lack of knowledge of teachers and families to navigate the interdependent system of supports after high school. Despite the lack of understanding or ability to navigate supports after high school, their continued perseverance to improve conditions and opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities persists.

I also discovered barriers that families continue to face in employment after high school. Although the intention of the system is for students with intellectual disabilities to enter the next phase of life, the barriers that exist often drive these individuals into the social service systems instead of employment. The participants in this study focused more on the experiences in high school and the planning process than the outcome that existed for their child. The participants understanding of the process often had them reflect that they should have known more, paid more attention to the process or just internalized all the opportunities they didn't take advantage of while in high school. The

participants provided a voice that is essential when we engage parent in school processes. The participant's reflection gave insight to being aware of intentionally planning the transition through a sequence of events that are timely and collaborative.

### **Implications for Practice**

My research provides insight for any school or district that desires to improve their outcomes and processes for students with disabilities as they begin the planning for employment after high school. This research has given me the opportunity to look at the transition process through the lens of families and teachers as they plan, create opportunities and address barriers for kids with intellectual disabilities in Fayette County. Recommendations for Fayette County will be discussed first, along with recommendations for school districts across the country.

As this case study pertains to Fayette County Public Schools, it is important to offer recommendations as it relates to policies and practices for special education populations. As mentioned before, transition processes are based on federal requirements as part of IDEA implementation. As a result, schools are charged with developing a system of activities to promote employment for students with intellectual disabilities after high school. As part of implementation, schools should consider the training and resources needed to implement a program that uses evidence-based predictors as the foundation of the transition program.

The district should examine the outcome data and develop goals among each predictor ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate in each predictor to the extent possible. It is essential that districts develop policies for inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in all transition processes and ensure their ability to participate through the use of educating employers, training teachers and engaging

parents. Fayette County does support students to explore opportunities through technical programs, specialized programs and community based opportunities, but none of these programs promote an individualized program related to supported employment or job coaching for students with intellectual disabilities. The programs are designed for certain students with inclusion of students with disabilities being more of a “student fit the program” model instead of a “program fit the student” model. Inclusion is not simply a concept but a purposeful design that enhances the abilities of students not emphasizing the disability of a student. One recommendation would be to train teachers and support staff on supported employment opportunities that exist in the school district and the community. Fayette County Schools is one of top employers in the county, yet we have limited number of people working in our district with disabilities. Our current recruitment office could work with local agencies to increase our number of employees with disabilities working in Fayette County Public Schools. Our district offers internship programs for all students at each public high school. Fayette County Public Schools could work to train the staff setting up internships to implement job placement for students with disabilities.

Our district’s human resources department employs an associate director of minority recruitment and retention along with an equity department. From a policy standpoint, the district should expand its definition of equity to be inclusive of individuals with disabilities. Our policies focus on race alone, which is a limited lens when addressing equity. People with disabilities have a long history of facing discriminatory practices in employment beginning with the application and interview process. Fayette County Public schools trains on culturally responsive teaching and cultural bias with



limited mention in the current training of the disability community and the biases that exist among those considered able bodied.

Fayette County's current District Strategic Plan and Comprehensive District Improvement Plan, identifies the need to "close the gap" for students with disabilities but the focus is primarily academic while little is mentioned about improving graduation rate and employment outcomes for those with disabilities. The plans are not specific enough to encompass intentional goals to address specific populations such as those with disabilities. Academics, as mentioned in the plan, is only one of the evidence-based predictors for post-secondary success. Although the plan is developed based on district data, which includes those with disabilities, the plan does not list specific strategies or structures for students with disabilities. In reflection on the information from families and teachers, a strategic plan should be developed to address the specific ways inclusive practices will be implemented and measured or the district.

As the literature surrounding predictors of successful post-secondary employment shows, this is not an issue specific to Fayette County. As the diversity increases and technology advances in the workforce, employers and educators must be willing to shift and adjust. A recent television series was developed titled, *The Employables* (A&E, n.d.). The purpose of this program was to examine and promote the experiences of young adults with disabilities in the workforce. The creation of this type of series exposes the need to develop policies and procedures in schools and communities to promote the employment of those with disabilities. Schools and community agencies should be collaborating, expanding and developing opportunities that support the disability community in employment. By examining hiring practices and employer needs, an

opportunity emerges to move a large population from government assistance to supported and competitive employment.

In this study, all participants discussed a desire for their student or child to be employed. The resources are available in our schools and communities but a focus on streamlining these services is not evident. From a school perspective, the opportunity for change and alignment with research can shift current transition programming to a more structured and cohesive system that improves the outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research is necessary to improve the outcomes for those with intellectual disabilities. Future research should involve examining the outcomes of different disability categories to expand on which predictors are most effective. Research that expands and examines the transition activities needed and when is most appropriate for each predictor to be implemented would assist in continuing to align research with school practice. Other marginalized and underrepresented populations can benefit from this research as the research sought to address the inequities of those that may not so easily fit into employment.

For future studies, I would recommend more in depth interviews with parents concerning specific indicators and possible interviews about the process of transition at each grade level. Throughout my interviews, each parent discussed that the school did a good job, but they also each responded with not knowing what and when should they implement certain transition activities. I think future studies could attempt to capture specific timelines for activities that meet the needs of the child with a disability.

People with disabilities have experienced discrimination, inequities, marginalization and limited representation in the work force. As a society, we can easily ask ourselves who we work with that has a disability. This alone brings voice to a population that may barely exist in employment. In my research, a common theme emerge among participants which was how do we improve. In my readings, I remember a statement about if we live long enough, we may all be part of the disability community. In the end, “There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more” (Hansel, 2017).

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Explain your understanding of activities/ predictors that lead to successful employment for students with intellectual disabilities.
2. What predictors do you think will improve student outcomes for employment?
3. What opportunities would have been useful for you as a parent for successfully transitioning your child into employment?
4. What relationship do the discussions of transition with teacher have with the predictors of employment you use at home?
5. How are parents opinions/thoughts incorporated into the process and activities that lead to successful employment?
6. What skills have you noticed (child's name) has been able to do in the last two years while in high school? What skills does your child need to develop to be successful?
7. Do you think high school has prepared your child for work after high school? In what ways?
8. When your child graduates/graduated, what type of workplace/site do you see your child participating in?
9. In terms of work, what agencies assisted you with work options for your child and how did they assist with finding a work placement for your child?
10. What was the process for finding a fit for your child in terms of work? What would you like their days to look like in terms of activities or work?



## APPENDIX B: SURVEY

1. What professional development opportunities have you participated in that relate to the evidence-based predictors? (Google form will list each evidence-based predictor)
2. What professional growth opportunities would have assisted you in developing a transition plan for your students as they relate to the evidence-based predictors?
3. What elements of your current classroom practices align with the evidence-based predictors?
4. How are parents opinions/thoughts incorporated into the process and activities that lead to successful employment?
5. In working with parents, what structures do you use in transition planning with parents?
6. As a teacher, what professional trainings or development have you been a part of that has assisted with improving transition opportunities for your students with intellectual disabilities?
7. In reflecting on your educational experience of preparing students to exit high school into employment, what activities/ predictors do you think are most valuable in preparing students for successful employment?
8. What predictors of successful employment do you think will improve student outcomes for employment?
9. What opportunities would have been useful for you as a teacher for successfully transitioning your students into employment?

10. What are the most common expectations of parents when transition planning for their child successful employment after high school? What barriers do parents perceive as their child transitions to employment after high school?

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

### **UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYMENT PREDICTORS AND OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING**

#### **Summary Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship in the transition planning process with the evidence-based predictors for successful employment for students with intellectual disabilities. The study will look at the perceptions and roles of families and teachers in the transition process. Participants will find it useful to share their experiences with transition through high school to employment opportunities as they align to the evidence-based predictors found in research. Participants may develop an understanding of their role in developing skills for students with intellectual disabilities to successfully transition into employment.

Family participants in this study will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview that will occur face to face and one on one. After the interview is complete, participants may be asked to participate in a phone or email conversation to provide any clarification to the interview questions. A copy of the interview will be submitted to the participants so that they can check it for accuracy. Interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the participant and in a location selected by the participant as long as the location is free of distractions.

Teacher participants will be asked to complete a survey, will be emailed a copy of the survey and asked to complete their entries within a week. The survey is estimated to take about 20 minutes and consists of responses from teachers about their experiences and implementation of evidence-based practices for transition.

There are risks to this study that are described in this document. Risks may include feeling uncomfortable answering some of the questions during the interview as well as being open about their experiences in Fayette County Schools.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue to read below.

#### **Introduction and Background Information**

You are invited to take part in a research study because either as a family or a teacher you currently have a student with an intellectual disability that will exit high school in the next 12 months from one of the six high schools in Fayette County Public Schools. As a teacher, you are being asked to complete a survey about your experiences and implementation of evidence-based practices for transition with students with intellectual disabilities. The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. W. Kyle Ingle in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of parents and teachers in developing and implementing a transition process for students with intellectual disabilities. The study hopes to reveal the roles of families and teachers in transition along with their knowledge and ability to use the evidence-based predictors to support a successful transition for their child. This study also attempts to determine the capacity for staff to implement transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities in classrooms as well as in collaboration with families and community.

## **Procedures**

In this study, if you are a family of a student, you will be asked to schedule a time with the co-investigator to sit for a semi-structured interview that will last no longer than one hour. The interview site will be chosen by you but will take place in a quiet environment to limit distractions during the interview. The purpose of the interview questions will serve as the basis for information pertaining to your role, knowledge and experience of the transition process for your child in Fayette County Public schools. Interviews will be recorded with video equipment to ensure reliability and accurateness of the interview. Preexisting data related to your name, contact information and relationship to the individual with an intellectual disability will already be known per educational records. The overall study duration including consent forms, interviews, survey and follow up questions should last no longer, than one month but your time commitment to this study should be minimal. During the interview process, you may decline to answer any question that may make you uncomfortable.

You are invited to take part in a research study because either as a family or a teacher you currently have a student with an intellectual disability that will exit high school in the next 12 months from one of the six high schools in Fayette County Public Schools. Teacher participants will be asked to complete a survey through email sent from the co-investigator. The survey will consist of a set of questions designed to provide information about the teacher's knowledge and experience with implementation of transition practices for students with intellectual disabilities. The purpose of the survey questions will serve as the basis for information pertaining to your role, knowledge and experience of the transition process for your student in Fayette County Public schools.

Your data will be stored and shared for future research without additional informed consent if identifiable private information, such as your name are removed. If identifying information is removed from your data, the data may be used for future research studies or given to another investigator for future research studies without additional consent from you.

## **Potential Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions and the potential for identification by other teachers in Fayette County who may read this research study. There may also be unforeseen risks.

The possible benefits of this study include being able to share your experiences and/or professional involvement, or personal recommendations on how to improve the transition process for all parties involved.

The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others.

### **Alternatives**

Instead of taking part in this study, you could choose to not participate in this study.

### **Payment**

You will not be paid for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. We will protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. Once your information leaves our institution, we cannot promise that others will keep it private.

Your information may be shared with the following:

- Organizations that provide funding at any time for the conduct of the research.
- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Privacy Office, others involved in research administration and research and legal compliance at the University, and others contracted by the University for ensuring human participants safety or research and legal compliance
- The local research team
- People who are responsible for research, compliance and HIPAA/privacy oversight at the institutions where the research is conducted
- Applicable government agencies, such as:
  - Office for Human Research Protections

### **Security**

The data collected about you will be kept private and secure by password-protected computer and secured server with limited access.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide not to be in this study, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify. If you decide to be in this study, you may change your mind and stop taking part at any time. If you decide to stop taking part, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify. You will be told about any new information learned during the study that could affect your decision to continue in the study.

### **Research Participant's Rights**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also call this number if you have other

questions about the research, and you cannot reach the study doctor, or want to talk to someone else. The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has approved the participation of human participants in this research study.

### **Questions, Concerns and Complaints**

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact co-investigator Rachel Baker at 859.339.8048.

Primary Investigator: W. Kyle Ingle, Ph. D., Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development, Porter Building, Room 333 (502) 852-6097.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call the toll free number 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

### **Acknowledgment and Signatures**

This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature and date indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document though you are providing your authorization as outlined in this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

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Participant Name (Please Print)

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Signature of Participant

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Date Signed

\*Authority to act on behalf of another includes, but is not limited to parent, guardian, or durable power of attorney for health care.

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Printed Name of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)

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Signature of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)

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Date Signed

Phone number for participants to call for questions: (859) 339-8048 and (502) 852-6097

Co-Investigator(s) Rachel Baker, Doctor of Education, (859) 339-8048, University of Louisville College of Education and Human Development, 112 Jones Court Nicholasville, Ky. 40356.

Primary Investigator: W. Kyle Ingle, Ph. D., Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development, Porter Building, Room 333 (502) 852-6097.

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Fayette County, Kentucky

## APPENDIX D: STRUCTURED ETHICAL REFLECTION

<b>Integrity</b>	Does my research intend to focus on what I have described?	Are my questions related to positive change/purpose driven by my career projects?	Can I let my research challenge current work even if it challenges the status quo?	Encouraging participants to take on new roles	Finding the right time and space to collect data and allowing for participant input	Being open to new information found in my research	Provide differing opportunities to gain the knowledge from each role within the family structure	Following through with intention and using research for future programming
<b>Conscientious</b>	Am I careful to let my research speak to the social justices surrounding disabilities?	Have I read enough to have an informed perspective on employers, disabilities and family structures?	Can I involve and represent all family structures and their struggles in my research?	Finding the participants who don't normally have an opportunity to share	Finding new ways to collect data	Valuing the process of analyzing data even when it's difficult	Giving opportunities foe members to reflect on their statements	Being sure to take in the impact of the research to be added value on the world of disabilities
<b>Open-mindedness</b>	Does my research allow my current training and bias to be open to my findings?	Have I taken into account different research perspectives on transition?	Can I accept the results even if they are not congruent with my current assumptions?	Looking for ways for students to participate along with family support perspectives	Going beyond data and looking at family structures impact on student outcomes	Being open to families lack of interest of employment or outcomes outside of the home	Open to the societal interpretations of meaningful employment/supports for students with disabilities	Being cognizant of the impact of my research outcomes on future schools and family planning
<b>Social Responsibility</b>	Does my research look to make positive change for the social issues surrounding disabilities?	Will my research provide improvement or restrain disability groups more?	Will my research support and improve conditions for my partners?	Making sure all level of family structures are available and represented	Open to data that exists that misrepresents disabilities and employment	Carefully considering how people say or represent their disability	Checking often with the participants to promote input.	Internalizing my social and moral obligation to present my findings.

<b>Values</b>	<b>Developing Partnerships</b>	<b>Constructing Research Question</b>	<b>Planning Project/Action</b>	<b>Recruiting Participants</b>	<b>Collecting Data/ Taking Action</b>	<b>Analyzing Data/ Evaluating Action</b>	<b>Member Checking</b>	<b>Going Public (Presentation &amp; Publication)</b>
<b>Authenticity</b>	Have I presented myself in a genuine way in congruence with my research intentions	Does my research truly focus on the individuals I want to empower?	Is my project truly focused on making positive change for my intended audience?	Will my current role affect my literature I choose to include?	Being reflective with the data and allowing different lenses as I review the data	Valuing the process of analyzing data even when it's difficult	Checking the interpretation of the research with participants	Being aware that my outcomes represent the families heart of their desires for their kids
<b>Flexibility</b>	Is my flexible thinking open to all perspectives?	Are my research questions flexible enough to represent the data processes?	Will I be open to perspectives on my research that I have not anticipated?	Will I be able to represent different perspectives in current research?	Can I set aside my anticipated outcome data having looked at data for years	Welcoming feedback and help from leaders in the industry	Being flexible when working with families on their knowledge and perspective	Alternative ways to represent the data to different types of communities
<b>Honesty</b>	Have I built relationships with partners through honesty of my research topic?	Do my questions reflect my true intentions of improving the quality of life of my subjects?	Can I truly represent the information in my research with empathy and true understanding of people with disabilities?	Can I use the documents identified to represent teachers or do I need interviews to capture genuine skills of teacher?	Is the data from a variety of family perspectives with limited bias on how supportive the family may be	Accepting that the data may not align with my beliefs or thoughts	Giving opportunities foe members to reflect on their statements	Implementing the structures in school programming around the future outcome research

## APPENDIX E: EXPLORATION OF RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY USING MILNER'S (2007) FRAMEWORK

Reflexivity is understanding how processes of doing research shape the outcomes reflecting upon the ways in which we carry out our empirical research projects, and explaining to an audience how we move through research manufacturing processes to certain conclusions. Positionality refers to the stance or the positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study- the community, the organization or the participant group. Positionality reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study. It influences both how research is conducted, its outcomes, and results. Milner's methodological framework provided guidance throughout my process. The four components from this framework include researching self, researching the self in relation to others, engaging in reflection, and shifting from self to system research.

Self-awareness played an important role from beginning to end through my research process. In the beginning, I used the structured ethical reflection for structure to explore my research and personal goals during my research. My process included understanding my own advantages and disadvantages in society growing up in a small town with limited opportunities. As a new researcher, the exploration of my own perceptions, experiences and expectations of myself throughout my childhood shaped my life choices as well as the decisions. As a female growing up in poverty, the expectations of strong work ethic and educational achievement was expected but also tempered with understanding the limitations and barriers that would be present. Academics and social engagement came with limited struggles. My education focused on behaving, making



good grades, going to college and working. As a female, I certainly encountered limitations which included guidance on certain types of careers, expectations of having a family, and quietly accepting the role of peacemaker. The peacemaker expectation was difficult for me as a young person. These limitations about next steps for my career or family were frustrating to me because I was goal oriented and had higher aspirations for my future. My involvement in challenging coursework, volunteerism and social engagements created a belief in continued education and a strong desire to work hard and help others achieve.

My experiences in education were primarily positive with teachers pushing me and having high expectations. These experience in my own education translated into a belief that all kids can achieve given the right tools and opportunities. That belief directed me into becoming an educator but my desire to help others and take on challenges placed me in the role of special education. As my work with children with disabilities emerged this belief in “all kids can achieve” shifted.

As with age and increased experiences as an educator in the disability community, my social identity would shift from the personal experiences with being a student to being an educator. Moving ahead to my role as an educator, I reflected often on my belief system about achievement. My work with disabilities was challenging as I observed the skills and difficulties of my students. My lack of struggles in academics placed me at a disadvantage in attempting to understand and problem solve situations for students, families, teachers and administrators. Often, I would be questioned about my work to improve skills for “those” kids. I encountered families that I perceived had decided their child didn’t need to work or believed their child not capable of much in life.

Throughout my career, I struggle with this concept of achievement for all. My personal struggles with high expectations and experience with limitations provide a balance to my work. My work with children with disabilities keeps me focused that limitations are cultural, rooted in societies perception of people with disabilities and can be self-imposed through others expectations. I relate my early experiences with others limiting my achievements because of my gender or background with the limits we place on those with disabilities. These personal and professional experiences began my journey into learning and relating to those with disabilities.

Disability research is personal for my participants and the participants in my study are part of a certain social structure shaped by issues of discrimination and marginalization in the work place. In employment the disability landscape is limiting for many participants and their families. Employment is multi-layered with academic expectations, social expectations and subtle nuances of transitions. For those with intellectual disabilities, employment is a complex experience to navigate. The experience of my participants was intimidating to me as I began my interviews. I struggled with self-reflection about my ability to listen and give meaning to the experiences shared with me and being genuine and asking participants to expose some personal beliefs about their goals for their child. My participants most likely experienced judgement from others at multiple levels throughout school and society. I approached each interview being aware of my personal beliefs and convictions about employment realizing my participants may not share the same level of conviction concerning employment.

As I mentioned early on, I did not relate to the world through a disability lens but through an advocacy lens for those with disabilities. My advocacy was my choice as an

educator. My participants had lived life forced to advocate for their child through the lens of a parent which is a different level of commitment. Employment for adults with disabilities was the next step for my advocacy but perhaps more of the next battle for a parent that had struggled with advocating for their child in all aspects of life. My perspective on employment outcomes was not the same as a family struggling with social security benefits, a lack of care providers, medical disability and everyday care for their child.

Throughout my study, I was careful to reflect on my interpretation of my participants responses in relation to their life experiences. Their shared experience throughout my interviews were impacted and shaped by their interactions in the community. Interactions that were mostly engaged through sympathy or lowered expectations for a child that may not fit the societal typicality of employees. The complexities of disabilities in school offer an insight to the later experiences as children transition into adulthood. Schools are influenced by laws that set learning expectations for children with disabilities while employment is governed more by access in the workplace not supports for learning the process. My reflection often rekindled that feeling in me about achievement and was I expecting too much of families to believe work was the natural next step. Statements from parents challenged my belief system again as they shared the experiences. I wondered if I was developing an understanding for the positive and nuances of a system that expected employment outcomes from families that had different expectations such as continued medical care, respite opportunities and social engagements for their child.

The final component in Milner's framework is the shifting from self to system. Being part of the system challenged my abilities to be open to the weaknesses and strengths of the system. The current system is rooted in a belief that employment is the outcome for all students with disabilities. The perspective relative to educators is that people with disabilities do not have a defect but can function effectively provided they are given the necessary tools, alternative techniques, modern training and positive societal attitudes. The expectations set forth in this system has not always been the experience of families within the school system which then challenges the outcomes of this system.

Throughout the educational experience our system may look at disability through a lens of unable to do, ineffective techniques, lack of training and negative attitudes about outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. Being part of the system, I had to accept that some shared experiences of families encompassed the barriers such as lack of teacher training, ineffective techniques and negative attitudes about outcomes. Although the system was meant to be supportive there could be parts that were counterproductive to the desired outcomes.

In being the associate director of special education and supervising the system for transition programming, I understand and am aware of my passion about employment and advocacy for students with intellectual disabilities. My goal was to identify areas for improvement for families but recognizing that I lack the understanding of living with a disability and experiencing life differently. The continuous reflection from being a young female with no identified disability and having the ability to take advantage of

opportunities throughout my life, was important for my reflection about my role in the system.

## CURRICULUM VITA

Rachel I. Baker

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**Leadership Purpose** To engage, empower and support other leaders to continue to improve the educational experiences of students, families and educators as they pursue equity and excellence in all educational opportunities.

### **Professional Experience**

**Fayette County Public School** / Associate Director of Special Education and Director (Principal) of The Stables

August 2006- Present

**Fayette County Public Schools/** Special Education Facilitator

August 2005- May 2006

**Jessamine County Schools/** Guidance Counselor

August 2000- May 2005

**Jessamine County Schools /** Special Education Teacher

August 1996- May 2000

In summary, my experience has followed a leadership path that has supported skill development, leadership opportunities and professional growth.

### **Educational Endeavors**

**University of Louisville/** Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership and Organizational Management (Superintendent Program)

January 2018- December 2021

**University of Kentucky /DOSE** certificate Level 1

August 2007 - December 2008

**University of Kentucky/** Educational Leadership (Rank I)

August 2002 - May 2004

**Eastern Kentucky University/** M.A. in Counseling

August 1998 - May 2000

**Eastern Kentucky University/** English and Communications (5-12) and Special Education: Learning and Behavior Disorders (K-12)

August 1991- May 1996

### **Professional Leadership Trainings**

National Institute for School Leadership

Continuous Classroom Improvement Trainer

Google Certification for Instructional Collaboration

Assessment Coordinator

District Lead for Co-Teaching Initiative

School Based Decision Making

Trainer for Working with Kids in Poverty (Payne and Erickson)

Marzano District Trainer

Instructional Coaching

Summit Learning Administrator