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A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences and Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Young Adults with Mild to Moderate Disabilities

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the committee listed below,

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Abstract

A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences and Postsecondary Transition Outcomes

for Young Adults with Mild to Moderate Disabilities

By

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Claremont Graduate University: 2022

Research shows that students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (MMID) transition to post-secondary educational environments and the real-world experience more barriers than their typical peers (Banks, 2014). However, limited research includes the voices of students with MMID and their parents/guardians as they describe their transition from high school to post-secondary lives. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the postsecondary transition experiences from high school into post-secondary settings of students with MMID and parents/guardians who supported students with MMID in the transition process. This study also explored the role of the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) in secondary educational settings, support and resources, self-determination, student advocacy, and post-secondary experiences of students with MMIDs. Two frameworks served as the foundation for this study, exploring how students with MMID develop self-advocacy and self-determination: Kohler and Field's (2003) "Taxonomy for Transition Programing Framework" and Test et al. (2005) framework of "Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities."

Participants in this study included ten young adults with MMID and ten parents/guardians of young adults with MMID. Participants described their roles, supports, and self-advocacy through semi-structured interviews during the ITP process and the transition between high school, community college, trade school programs, and post-secondary life. Findings suggest

that the ITP process and support during high school could significantly impact the student success of young adults with mild to moderate disabilities in their post-secondary lives. In some cases, participants who participated in community-based instruction (CBI) programs were equipped with the necessary skills to survive at home and in the community. Many student and parent/guardian participants described the positive support they received from teachers during the high school transition process. However, not all participants felt they received support from key stakeholders or could express their voice and self-advocacy during the process. These findings point to implications for policy and practice for special education teachers, administrators, colleges, and universities around the ITP and post-secondary transition process for students with MMID. Further research is recommended to broaden the area and location of the study to have a more distinct view of the challenges posed to young adults with ID transitioning from colleges to universities.

Dedication

"With God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:23). I began this journey under an extreme amount of stress. I had become ill with severe bilateral inner and outer ear infections that caused damage to my central nervous system. Unable to coordinate my movements and perception effectively, I began the Ph.D. Program. I didn't think I would get through it, but God was with me every step of the way. Challenges didn't seem to stop coming. I stopped for two years when my daughter was diagnosed with a heart condition, had surgery, and recovered. I continue this journey to the end only because of my faith in God. I know God has a plan for my life through this work. My motto became "focused 2 PhinisheD" and "the race is not given to the swift nor the strong but to the one who endures to the end" Ecclesiastes 9:11. I dedicate this study to those who don't believe they can; with God, you can do all things because he is your strength. To my loving husband of 15 years, thank you for being there for me and encouraging me along the way. You made it easy for me to continue this journey. I thank my greatest cheerleader, my daughter Dakota. This work is for you; as a little black girl growing up in a world that doesn't always acknowledge your gifts, I want you to know that "you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you." I want to thank my mother, Mary, who has always encouraged education and, as a single mother, went back to school to get her degree so that she would be an example for her daughters. You always supported me in school and encouraged me along the way. Thank you to my sisters, Dana and LaRhonda. Thank you to my niece and nephew, Xandria and Xavier, who sometimes proofread my work and encouraged me along this journey. Thank you to my Girl Scout family: Sharis and Sunset, my sister Girl Scout and my Troop 5645 girls and parents, Marjar, Nakia, Karen, La Chanee, and all the parents. Finally, I want to thank my church family and friends.

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PROLOGUE

As an educator and administrator for the past 25 years in special education, I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand the inequities and lack of access students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) face. I spent 13 years teaching students with mild/moderate ID at a public middle school. I was amazed at their accomplishments and academic gains while in my program. Many of these students who were considered uneducable learned to read, write, multiply, divide, add money, and negotiate within the community. These were skills their age-level peers had mastered by fourth grade. My goal became independent living; therefore, I taught them life skills and essential and practical knowledge to support independence. Part of my instruction included self-advocacy and how to advocate for themselves.

The key is to learn about their disability and know which supports are needed to succeed. This may include assisting them in thinking about and making short- and long-term goals. One student expressed he would get a job at the car wash, get married, and live in an apartment. Another student said she wanted to be a chef. I always thought about my former students and their outcomes after high school. I asked myself: What are they doing? Did they get the job at the car wash or the restaurant? Are they working or going to school? Are they living on their own? However, when I encountered former students, I was saddened to know many had not accomplished the goals written in their Individual Transition Plans (ITPs). This is what drew me to this topic. This study is important to investigate, as many students get overlooked and fall between the cracks. My dissertation aims to give the student and guardian a voice, provide a blueprint to improve transition planning and seek best practices.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For many young people, high school is an exciting and critical time. Social events like football games, pep rallies, and proms have become traditional markers of the U.S. high school experience (Gil, 2007). In addition to participating in the social aspects of high school, many students are also actively exploring post-secondary options and trajectories, such as applying for college. For example, as students near senior year, they begin making critical choices about whether or not they will transition into the workforce or attend a post-secondary institution of learning. As a result, and due to the weight of these post-high school decision-making processes, students often seek out the support of family members, school agents, peers, and community resources to help guide individual choices.

Students with disabilities (SWD) in the United States experience high school differently. The path to adulthood is fraught with far more barriers for SWD than for their nondisabled peers (Lindstrom et al., 2007; Trainor, 2010). These students have significant disadvantages and difficulties, making smooth transitions after high school nearly impossible (Raghavan et al., 2013). After high school, SWD experience higher unemployment rates, under-education, incarceration, or poverty than their nondisabled peers (Gil, 2007).

Students with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (MMID) are an influential, but under-researched SWD group that has been marginalized and overlooked at school and in the community. Students with MMID make decisions about what they will do after high school but experience life drastically different than their peers (Gil, 2007; Grigal et al., 2012; Kohler and Field, 2003; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Raghavan et al., 2013; Trainor, 2010). In particular, students with MMID experience post-high school obstacles, particularly in employment, independent living, and community involvement (Kohler and Field, 2003; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Raghavan

et al., 2013; Trainor, 2010). Often, students with MMID are highly dependent on a caregiver, parent, or guardian to make key and daily decisions. The aim is for these students to make simple, healthy, and intelligent choices and think for themselves. In particular, independent living goals include making wise and healthy decisions, interviewing to obtain a job, and opening a basic bank account. They also entail having sustainable social relationships, knowing how to grocery shop, and being mindful of grooming and self-care habits. Therefore, it is important to know and understand how transition planning supports students with MMID in navigating from high school to post-secondary life.

Bridging the gap from high school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living are problems many students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) face (Webster, 2004). Without adequate support and preparation, the transition to postsecondary education can be filled with barriers (Gil, 2007). Additionally, transitioning from secondary school to postsecondary education systems for students with IEPs continues to be challenging (Bouck, 2014; Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Gil, 2007; Mozqueda, 2020). The Individual Transition Plan (ITP), a required component of the IEP, aims to support SWD planning and prepare for the post-secondary transition.

Background and Historical Context on Students with Mild-Moderate Disabilities

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), there are approximately 7 million students with disabilities (SWD), and 420,000 students are diagnosed with intellectual disabilities (Blokhuis et al., 2020). Approximately 414,000 SWD are ages 14-21 with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). There are over 800,000 SWD in California, and 45,000 are diagnosed with intellectual disabilities (ID) (California Department of Education, 2020). Federal laws, policies, and states enable legislation to regulate educational practices across all

educational settings. Some of these are Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; The

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Education for All Handicapped Children Act

[EAHCA], 1975); Individuals with Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act (Individuals with

Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act [IDEA], 1990, 1997, 2004); Americans with

Disabilities Act (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] , 1990), ADA Amendments of 2008,

2009 and 2012; and the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,

commonly known as No Child Left Behind (2001). These policies are in place to ensure access

and equity for all, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Specifically, in K-12 educational

settings, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), now entitled the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), establishes comprehensive Special

Education guidelines for identifying and providing services for SWD from the IEP. IDEA

mandates all students with an IEP develop Individual Transition Planning (ITP) beginning at the

age of fourteen.

 According to the U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Division, a significant

factor in a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education is accurate

knowledge about their civil rights while attending college. Educators must administer the

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process with answers to questions students with learning

disabilities may have as they get ready to move to the postsecondary education environment. A

resource guide was developed by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights

(OCR). Additionally, Gibb & Skiba (2008) indicate that "the Individuals with Disabilities Act

(IDEA) entitles all individuals with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education and

mandates nondiscriminatory assessment, identification, and placement of children with

disabilities" (p.1).

By extension, SWDs are also protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which assures them a right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). That said, receiving a FAPE under IDEA means SWD are afforded the right to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). One of the vital components of an IEP is a very detailed Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that outlines, by the time a student turns 16 years old through their high school completion, goals and objectives specific to a successful post-high school transition. IDEA also ensures these goals are reviewed and revised annually while mandating the drafting of the ITP, including the input, feedback, and involvement of the student, family, school, and relevant community members.

However, research posits that despite IDEA and the very clear laws it aims to protect and support this marginalized population, post-high school options for students with MMID are often non-inclusive of ongoing, active student participation (Scuccimarra & Speece, 2016). This lack of consistent and cohesive student involvement often results in students with MMID being subjected to post-high school options which are not designed to meet their needs or are misaligned with their college or career interests (Bhaumik et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2012; Small et al., 2013).

To mitigate this problem, research suggests providing a more comprehensive and collaborative approach earlier in students' schooling would better ensure successful post-secondary outcomes (Martinez et al., 2012). Additionally, while some research argues student advocacy is a critical component of the ITP, there is a dearth of research on student advocacy's impact on the transition outcomes specifically for students with MMD. Furthermore, there is an absence in the research that explains how the students themselves experience their post-high

school transition process (Williams-diehm and Lynch, 2007; Bhaumik et al., 2011, Winn and Hay, 2009)

The ITP provides students with a roadmap that ensures a successful transition to postsecondary settings. Specifically, it establishes adequate support needed to access independent living, careers, and post-secondary education. Secondly, it supports post-secondary educational institutions, specifically within the classroom and online. Thirdly, the ITP highlights the importance of student advocacy and self-determination as students have to self-identify as students who require disabled student services. In this study, I focused on the transition process and planning experiences of students with MMID in post-secondary settings and parents/guardians who supported students with MMID through the post-secondary transition process.

Statement of the Problem

All students are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Students with disabilities (SWD) are afforded an individualized education plan (IEP) that includes accommodations, modifications, and a viable transition plan. However, students with intellectual disabilities (ID) experience more barriers than their typical peers (Banks, 2014; Bouck, 2014; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010), exit the secondary setting with a certificate of completion, and often are not fully prepared to handle the real-world expectations of independent living as an adult despite having an individual transition plan (ITP) in high school.

Many researchers have explored transition planning for SWD. Much of this research focuses on students with specific learning disabilities, examining post-secondary support for college or employment (Showers and Kinsman, 2017; Weis et al., 2016; McCall, 2014; Connor, 2013; Repetto et al., 2011; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Gil, 2007; Rusch et al., 2009; Winn & Hay,

2009; Webster, 2004; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). The literature has revealed significant disparities between SWD and non-disabled peers; after high school, SWD experience higher unemployment rates, under-education, incarceration, or poverty than their non-disabled peers. The literature also identifies barriers affecting student progress and success that could be mitigated by providing appropriate interventions and preparations during the transition process at the high school level.

Furthermore, research has addressed aspects of ITPs such as the administrators, program support, parents, and teacher's perspective (Sankardas & Rajanahally, 2015; Pallisera et al., 2014; Banks, 2014; Raghavan, 2013). Research on post-secondary transition for SWD has focused on college attainment, inclusion, and parent involvement. The literature consistently indicates that better relationships between families and professionals need to be developed. Parental support and involvement are essential in the successful post-secondary transition process for SWD (Brinkerhoff, 1994; Connor, 2013; Gil, 2007). Research also suggests that student achievement increases when families are involved (Frances et al., 2016).

However, there are several limitations to the research base. Based on the review of the prior research, there is a population gap. While existing literature and research on transition planning focuses on students with specific learning disabilities, some sub-populations of SWD have been unexplored and under-researched (Foley et al., 2012; Bouck, 2014; Talapatra, 2019). In particular, there is limited research about students with MMID, their self-advocacy and student voice in the transition process, and whether and how the goals were met in the postsecondary plan. Furthermore, very little qualitative research has been conducted on students with MMID post-secondary transition experiences. Therefore, investigating this group is important because students with MMID often exit secondary settings unprepared or

underprepared for the real world. Some of these new aspects appear important and worthy of investigation in working with students with MMID and postsecondary planning. Additionally, investigating these issues is essential because it will provide educators with the knowledge and help them see the importance of incorporating self-advocacy training and skill-building early on in the educational journey for students with MMID. Equipped and retooled 21st-century educators can begin embedding practices in the educational program of students with MMID to practice independent skills early on, frequently, and over an extensive period of time (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Cimera et al., 2014; Gauthier-boudreault et al., 2017). This study aims to change educational practices on how transition planning is viewed, taught, and valued in secondary settings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the postsecondary transition experiences of students with MMID and their parents/guardians who supported students with MMID in the transition. Students with MMID transition to post-secondary educational environments and the real-world experience more barriers than their typical peers (Banks, 2014). This study explored the role of the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) in secondary educational settings, support and resources, self-determination, student advocacy, and post-secondary experiences of students with MMIDs.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: *What are the post-secondary experiences of students with Mild/Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (MMID)?*
To address the purposes of this study, the following research questions were explored:

RQ1: How do students with mild/moderate ID share their voice, self-determination, and practice self-advocacy during the transition process?

RQ2: What are the supports and resources offered to students with mild/moderate ID and parents or those with guardianship over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition process?

RQ3: What role, if any, do self-determination and self-advocacy play in the post-secondary experiences of students with mild/moderate ID?

(a) Did they get there?

(b) How did they get there?

(c) Who helped them get there?

(d) Did the transition plan help them meet their postsecondary goals?

Significance of Study

This research is significant for research, policy, and practice. First, this study adds to existing Special Education IEP and Transition Planning research. The body of research on ITPs and post-high school outcomes highlights the importance of student-centered planning. This study incorporated the student's voice with MMID and better understood their transition experiences from high school to post-secondary settings.

Second, according to the National Center for Special Education Statistics (2021), students with MMID are a marginalized population suffering significant disparities. Additionally, key findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) indicate that students with MMID are performing well below their non-disabled peers in the areas of (a) attending a post-secondary school; (b) having a paid job; (c) being engaged in the community; (d) living independently; and (e) owning a checking account.

The barriers and disparities students with MMID face outweigh the barriers and disparities of non-disabled peers. Even at the school level, they are considered an afterthought. Sometimes there is a disconnect between the guardians, parents, the schools, and the community. This study is written to elevate their voices and experiences prior to and after entering the postsecondary settings. It is important to understand how students with MMID progress when they leave the secure confines of the school setting, in which many stay until the age of 22 years old. It is at this point they go out into the real world. While there is a plan in place, sometimes they get lost in the transition.

This study identified specific supports that can assist students with MMID access to the same resources and post-high school opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, K-12 administrators, counselors, teachers and community, and advocacy groups like the Regional Center can benefit from the results of this study. This also informed decision-makers and policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels around the ITP and post-secondary transition processes for students with MMID.

Although there is a body of research about transition planning for SWD, there continue to be gaps in the literature that underrepresents students with MMID. Research documenting adequate support that aided students with a successful transition from high school is limited from the students' perspective. The process of providing student-centered transition services varies by state, disability, and by academic rigor. For example, evidence-based accountability systems to address effective transition practices continue to be missing. Additionally, Kohler and Field (2003) and Gil (2007) have provided several recommendations to address the lack of student-centered support in their transitions. Because of the limited research that includes students'

voices, this phenomenological study amplified the voices and first-hand experiences of students with MMID and parents who supported them.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter introduced the study, including the problem, purpose, and significance of this research on the postsecondary transition experiences of students with MMID and parents/guardians of students with MMID. Chapter two lays the groundwork for the study by reviewing the literature, including the history and overview of the Individual Transition Plan, a synthesis of research on SWD and their post-secondary outcomes, and an overview of the framework that guides this study. In chapter three, I introduce the design and methods of this qualitative phenomenological study, including a description of the context, participants, recruitment, data collection, interview protocols, and analysis techniques. Chapter four presents the study's findings, organized into three themes according to the research questions. Chapter five summarizes key findings, connected the findings to the previous research, and offered implications for research, policy, and practice. Finally, I conclude with an epilogue, highlighting the voices of participants in this journey.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms provided below offered clarity and was used throughout this study. The following terms are defined for the purposes of this study.

Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1964)- First known as Public Law (PL 192.) Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) federal law was established in 1964 and is part of The Civil Rights Act. It aims to provide mandates and protections for students K-12.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)- a document meant to serve the individual needs of SWD. IEPs provide a prescription of services, accommodations, and modifications that school staff, teachers, and paraprofessionals must adhere to by law.

Individual Transition Plan (ITP)- a document that outlines the stated goals and wrap-around services to help SWD transition to postsecondary or the workforce. The plan consists of transition supports such as college, vocational training, independent living, and real-world options to prepare students for postsecondary transition. This document is required for all SWD by the age of 16. The transition plan provides resources and guidance to assist SWD in transitioning into postsecondary adult life from the K-12 school system. The California Department of Education outlined five categories: employment, education and training, independent living, compliance, and guidelines for building a complete ITP (Kohler and Filed, 2003; Finn and Kohler, 2009; Kohler et al., 2016)

Intellectual Disabled- In 2007, The American Association on Mental Retardation restructured and renamed the organization The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The association began using people's first language and replaced the name retardation with intellectually disabled (ID) (Schalock et al., 2007).

Postsecondary Planning- the California Department of Education outlines postsecondary preparation into three categories: postsecondary education, postsecondary training, and certification opportunities. Postsecondary planning refers to "Career preparation and work-based learning that occurs in the community, or brings community partners into the classroom, to help youth prepare students for postsecondary education and training options that culminate in degrees, certificates, and lifelong learning skills."

Self-advocacy is a step toward self-determination; It's understanding and communicating one's individual needs and representing oneself or one's views or interests. (Brinckerhoff et al., 2001; Test et al., 2005; Martin et al., 1993; Petri et al., 2020)

Self-determination-it is associated with self-advocacy, the process by which a person controls their own life, defines their goals, and takes actions (Test et al., 2005; Martin et al., 1993; Palmer et al., 2012; McCall, 2015).

Student-centered Planning, students actively plan, communicate, and evaluate their progress toward meeting their post-secondary goals (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Morningstar et al., 1999).

Student-focused Planning- using assessment information, student self-determination, and student postsecondary goals to develop the individual education plan in partnership with the student and family (Kohler and Field, 2003; Kohler et al., 2016)

Students Voice-the unique perspectives, values, and opinions of individual students about learning, teaching, and school to shape and influence instructional practices and techniques based on student interests, choices, ambitions, and passions (Cook-Sather, 2006)

Summary of Performance (SOP)- Summary of Performance is part of the students' IEP. The SOP is required for all SWD who are completing high school. It is a separate document from the IEP that summarizes and organizes the critical information that should follow the student to post-school activities. (Woods et al., 2010)

Transition Planning- should begin by age 16; it is the process for students with disabilities and their parents or guardians to identify skills and interests to set goals for postsecondary life, determine related transition services, align annual IEP goals with postsecondary goals, and make

necessary agency connections to attain those goals. (Kohler and Field, 2003; Test et al., 2006;

Mazzotti et al., 2009).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has been extensive literature on the post-secondary transition process for students with disabilities (SWD) around student perspectives, advocacy, self-determination, high school to collect transition, employment outcomes, and parent and guardian perspectives. This literature review highlights critical themes across studies in these areas, highlighting what is known about the post-secondary transition process and identifying gaps in the literature.

In this chapter, prior to the literature review, I provide an overview of IDEA federal law which undergirded the basis for this study and established policy, procedures, and safeguards for SWD. From there, I synthesize research related to the post-secondary transition process for SWD. The literature review is followed by a description of the conceptual framework, which combines Kohler and Field's (2003) Taxonomy and Test et al.'s (2005) Conceptual Framework for Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities.

Overview of the Individualized Transition Plan

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 1990, provided students ages 16 through 22 years old with an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) and followed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, that enabled pre-employment transition services, job placement services, and supported employment services for students with disabilities. The ITP ensures adequate and successful transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, work, and independent living. There are five key components of the ITP to support this process (Kohler & Field, 2003). Successful transitions to postsecondary education settings were the ultimate goal. In 2004, IDEA was revised, requiring measurable postsecondary transition goals; Indicator 13 ensured public K-12 school systems provided age-appropriate assessments based on information to provide educational supports, goals, and objectives for students to transition into

postsecondary settings (Lindstom et al., 2007; Scuccimarra & Speece, 2016; Showers & Kinsman, 2017). The A team is developed to ensure each student's IEP is maintained and updated annually. When the school does not adhere to or comply with the IEP, it is at risk of legal consequences due to noncompliance. The success of a student's academic instruction is directly linked to the outcomes established in the IEP (Lindstrom et al., 2007).

IDEA mandates that an ITP be developed when the student is 14 years old (Carter et al., 2012; Kohler & Field, 2003). The idea is to coordinate the student's interests, needs, and abilities in developing a plan to transition the student from school to postsecondary activities: education, vocational training, employment, independent living, and so forth. In addition to the ITP, the high school must provide each graduating student with a summary of performance (SOP). This formal technical document includes postsecondary employment, living, and education goals. However, student perspective and input are missing from this process. It should also have suggestions and recommendations on how students can attain their goals once they leave high school (Rusch et al., 2009). The development of the SOP should be done in collaboration with students. However, some researchers suggest that students do not play an active role in this process, impacting post-school outcomes (Gil, 2007; Rusch et al., 2009). Students' input is imperative for buy-in and creates a sense of ownership.

Policies and Funding that govern IEPs and ITP

Policies that govern students' IEP and ITP fall under IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act. Under IDEA, schools must provide free and appropriate public education (FAPE). As mentioned earlier, IDEA contains transition service requirements for students with disabilities that are essential to FAPE. FAPE includes the provision of transition services at no cost to parents in accordance with the IEP (VanBergeijk and Cavanagh, 2012; Kelepouris, 2017; deFur, 2003). In

2004, IDEA was revised, requiring measurable postsecondary transition goals, including

vocation, independent living, and encouraging postsecondary education. This revision included

Indicator 13, one of 17 indicators the federal government uses to monitor state performance

related to IDEA. Indicator 13 ensures that 16 years old and older students with IEPs have

postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate assessments and are updated annually (Erickson et

al., 2014; Finn and Kohler, 2009). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was amended in December

2015 to replace the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which stated:

> To extend and revise the authorization of grants to States for vocational rehabilitation
>
> services, with special emphasis on services to individuals with the most severe
>
> disabilities, to expand special Federal responsibilities and research and training programs
>
> with respect to individuals with disabilities, to create linkage between State vocational
>
> rehabilitation programs and workforce investment activities carried out under title I of the
>
> Workforce Investment Act of 1998, to establish special responsibilities for the Secretary
>
> of Education for coordination of all activities with respect to individuals with disabilities
>
> within and across programs administered by the Federal Government, and for other
>
> purposes. (Wikipedia, 2022)

Funding is a huge element connected to these policies. The Office of Special Education

Programs (OSEP) provides three formula grant programs to award states annual funding for

children ages 3 through 21 with disabilities. IDEA authorizes these formula grant programs,

which are:

        a) Reservation of Funds Requirement

b) A State must reserve at least 15% of its Vocational Rehabilitation state allotment for the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities (section 110(d)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act).

c) The funds reserved must be used solely for the provision of pre-employment transition services and pre-employment transition coordination activities described in section 113(b) through (d) of the Rehabilitation Act (§361.48(a)(2), (3), and (4)'

(U.S Department of Education, 2022).

Once students with disabilities leave secondary settings and enter postsecondary educational institutions, IDEA is no longer in place. Leaving Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act as the primary law protects students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings (Kelepouris, 2014; Osgood et al., 2010). While Assistance for the education of students with disabilities is available, funding is allotted by way of Local Education Agencies (LEA). These agencies then distribute funding for the education of students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 years. To receive funding, students must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), created by an IEP team, delineating the specific special education and related services (Dragoo, 2019). Unfortunately for these participants, eligibility for these funds is not feasible.

Synthesis of the Literature on SWD and the post-secondary transition process

Secondary transition services and planning are a large component of a student's IEP. School districts are required by federal law to ensure transition planning is integrated into the students' IEP. Although it is a requirement for secondary schools, it often becomes an afterthought (deFur, 2003), thus, leaving students with inadequate opportunities for transition

planning. Funding is provided to school districts through LEA to offer transition services for students with disabilities. Therefore, schools should provide quality transition programs and services for the student to access successful transition outcomes (deFur, 2003; Garrison-Wade,2012).

For students with disabilities, each stage in transition requires thoughtful planning to ensure that the students with disabilities can transition from one level to the next level smoothly. The ultimate goal for these students is to exit high school to achieve their desired post-secondary outcome (Manigault-McElveen, 2013). An important factor when analyzing transition planning is understanding the types of people who advocate for their learning. Students with disabilities must advocate for themselves as they transition to post-secondary life. The review of the literature that follows, outlines key themes across the research on student perspectives, the role of advocacy and self-determination, student-centered planning, parent/guardian perspectives and involvement, collaboration with community agencies, and post-secondary outcomes.

Student Perspectives

Several qualitative and quantitative studies have explored student perspectives in the transition process. For example, Repetto et al.'s (2011) quantitative study identified two trends of student outcomes once they completed high school. Exit surveys were given to examine the thoughts and perceptions of the high school graduates with and without disabilities about post-school preparation. Of the 1,250 students with disabilities (SWD), 8% were students with an Intellectual Disability (ID). Repetto et al. (2011) ascertained valuable information from students themselves. The findings suggest that SWD felt better prepared to achieve their goals than students without disabilities. SWDs felt better prepared, and students without disabilities had more social interactions and activities. Although this research contributes to the body of research

about SWD by including students' perspectives, students with ID were underrepresented in the participant selection.

In another study, Small et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study using an ecological approach to examine changes in the social networks of the young people with ID during their transition from school to college. With the use of Talking Mats, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and students were able to share their experiences and express their thoughts, wishes, and fears. Small et al.'s (2013) findings were similar to Repetto's about the limited nature of social interactions and their impact on SWD students. Small et al. (2013) asserts friends and fear of leaving school were a significant concern for students with ID. Leaving high school was most important, and it is impossible to gather valuable information about a student's feelings, concerns, fears, and thoughts without hearing from them.

Williams-diehm and Lynch's (2007) quantitative study used surveys to capture student perspectives and gathered knowledge and the opinions of SWD regarding the transition process. Students were asked ten questions to ascertain their ideas, knowledge, and understanding of the transition process. As a result of this study, the researcher determined that students desire to have more support and guidance from teachers to be better equipped for post-secondary life. Three findings emerged from this study, the need for teacher training on planning, a clear focus and plan of action for self-determination, and promotion and greater awareness of social agencies and services that offer support. It further indicated the necessity for teachers' training in transition planning. Similar to research conducted by Martin et al. (1993), Williams-diehm and Lynch (2007) concluded self-determination is viable for students to reach their transition goals. If self-determination is truly a goal, the researchers argue that students and their families need to be better educated on adult agencies and their services. Students in this high school were very

lacking in information regarding adult agencies in their community. However, the research focused on special education and transition planning to capture student knowledge and perception. SWD, including students with MMID, requires more guidance and transition training (Brinckerhoff et al., 2001; Finn & Kohler, 2009; Bhaumik et al., 2011; Banks, 2014; McCall, 2015).

These studies collectively indicate student accounts need additional teacher support, guidance, and assistance to support self-determination and self-advocacy for successful transitioning. However, students who lack necessary support probably would experience more significant barriers moving on to post-secondary life. My study builds on Williams-diehm and Lynch's (2007) idea of self-determination and self-perspective by using an inclusion criterion inviting young adults ages 18-30 to participate in the study and share their experiences during the transition process.

<div align="center">**Advocacy and Self-Determination**</div>

An important factor when analyzing transition planning is understanding the types of people who advocate for their learning. The following articles, policies, frameworks, and empirical studies below demonstrate the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination. For example, Martin et al. (1993) article argued the importance of incorporating self-advocacy and self-determination as part of the transition process in IEPs. These are essential transition skills to provide SWD as they complete the transition process to be successful in post-school settings. Self-determination, self-advocacy, and student-directed transition planning lay the foundation for my research study. Test et al.'s (2005) "Conceptual Framework for Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities" denotes advocacy as a skill that can be taught and learned. This level of self-seeking behavior provides individuals the ability to communicate their needs and wants.

When analyzing this, the first point that needs to be discussed is generally the best

management of learning disabilities. Students who regularly attended their IEP meetings while in

the primary grades are in the best position to advocate for themselves. They have first-hand

knowledge of their individual needs, wants, and desires (Test et al., 2005, Griffin et al., 2010;

Palmer et al., 2012; Rehm et al., 2013; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Wehmeyer and Lawrence, 1995;

and Martin et al., 1993). This is partly due because of total integration in the decision-making

process. Additionally, during the meeting, students should be asked about their interests. For

example, some students can speak up while others cannot because they cannot express their

thoughts and ideas. It is as if they have been silently excluded and not given chances to advocate

or make choices. Advocacy and self-determination are needed to empower students to take

ownership. Educators, parents, and students consistently recommend self-determination

instruction begin early, well before high school (Cinema et al., 2014; Hartman-Hall & Haaga,

2002). Natural opportunities for making choices occur throughout life, and increased

opportunities to express preferences and options, beginning in early childhood, can heighten an

individual's sense of self-esteem and self-direction (Brinckerhoff, 1994; Martin et al., 1993;

Caton & Kagan, 2006; Cimera et al., 2014; Tuckwiller & Dardick, 2015).

Researchers suggest that for students to become successful in postsecondary educational

settings, they must develop advocacy and self-determination skills. Student advocacy skills are

critical to successful outcomes in college (Brinkerhoff, 1994; McCall, 2015; Gil, 2007).

Brinkerhoff (1994) explained self-advocacy for SWD in college settings like the ability to

understand and recognize one's needs without compromising one's dignity. Self-determination

and assertiveness are the most significant factors contributing to the success or failure of SWD in

colleges and postsecondary settings (Harris & Robertson, 2001; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; McCall, 2015; McCall, 2015).

For example, McCall's (2015) qualitative study discovered students' successes and failures in negotiating and communicating with professors attributed to their opportunities to participate in the transition planning and have a voice in high school. Using a phenomenological approach, four college students with disabilities participated in three in-depth interviews to determine the relationship between high school preparation and levels of self-determination. Findings from this study claim the skills of self-determination and assertiveness should begin as soon as possible for students with ID at the primary age to advocate and articulate their needs. Students who cannot advocate for themselves experience more difficulties transitioning into college systems requiring a voice. (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Brinkerhoff, 1994; Connor, 2013; Banks, 2014).

Research postulates that self-determination and self-advocacy are necessary skills SWD needs for successful post-secondary living. It also claims that integrating these skills into the curriculum supports teachers in providing support for transitioning students. Additionally, SWD participation in the transition process and IEP meetings creates opportunities to practice using their voice to articulate their ideas, desires, needs, and wants, making a positive outlook for post-secondary living.

Student-Centered Planning

The ITP is essential in successful transitions to postsecondary settings; it is important to note that student-centered planning is the most valuable element of the ITP. The process should be done in collaboration with students. Developing the ITP with consideration of the student's interests, needs, and abilities is key. Additionally, promoting self-determination and self-

advocacy are fundamental in increasing independence after high school (Foley et al., 2012; Test et al., 2005).

When students are involved in their ITPs, they are more likely to be empowered and develop a greater sense of self-determination (Gil, 2007). When students do not play an active role in the ITP process, their post-school outcomes are adversely impacted. For example, they may experience higher unemployment rates, under-education, and sometimes incarceration.

Student-centered planning is a positive approach that considers students' individual needs and outcomes. It broadly encompasses methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. Students are partners in the process of teaching and learning. According to Test et al. (2005), "A more student-centered approach prepares students for the many challenges of adulthood. Students understand their learning style and get more control over how they spend their time. These are all skills they'll need in adulthood when no one is looking over their shoulder, forcing them to learn" (projectpals.org, 2019, p.3).

It is highly encouraged that students actively participate in the IEP process; it is a part of adulting and adulthood. Students need to develop their goals and understand what supports and services effectively support their academic progress (Brinkerhoff, 1994; Gil, 2007; Harris & Robertson, 2001; Webster, 2004). Once in college, parents and special educators are no longer the primary advocates and decision-makers. The issue becomes passing the baton of responsibility, but the students aren't always completely prepared (Lindsay et al., 2011). K-12 school systems provide students a false sense of dependency, primarily because teachers and parents have been the primary decision-makers for instructional and academic programming. The K-12 system is authoritative, didactic, and teacher-centered (Winn & Hay, 2009; Foley et al., 2012). Thus, it is missing the voice and input of the learner/the student. Student participation has

been limited in making academic and instructional decisions. Any recommendations or inputs are minimally considered if the student participates in their IEP meetings. (Martinez et al. 2012; Scuccimarra & Speece, 2016; Gauthier-Boudreault et al. 2017).

Once students enter a higher education system, they must take ownership and responsibility for obtaining support to ensure their academic success (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002). Winn and Hay (2009) argue the barriers that impede a successful transition from high school to college are threefold: (1) the lack of connection between colleges and service agencies, (2) the need for a comprehensive transition plan in high school, and (3) prejudice toward people with disabilities. The management of supports significantly changes. Under the ADA, colleges and universities are required to provide support for SWD. However, IDEA does not regulate the student's academic support and success. Although some services and support are available to students, the shift of responsibility lies solely on the student (Brinkerhoff, 1994; Orlando et al., 2016). Before the student leaves high school, self-management and executive functioning tools should be taught and practiced (Repetto et al., 2011).

As previously stated, student involvement in transition planning meetings helps them become knowledgeable about their postsecondary goals and the steps to achieve them. This involvement helps develop self-determination skills (McCall, 2015). Ultimately, promoting self-advocacy and participation in transition planning ensures SWD better opportunities to experience positive outcomes in post-secondary settings. At the same time, the research on student-centered planning is broad. The focus includes all students with various disabilities, primarily students with learning disabilities. I focus specifically on students with MMID to understand how they have participated in the transition process during their high school experience.

Parent/Guardian Perspectives and Involvement

Transition planning has found that when effective transition practices inclusive of students and parents, students experience greater success after high school, positively affecting their adult lives. Unfortunately, parents' view of the transition process is not always positive, and parents and guardians are not always satisfied with interagency supports and services. Many are unaware that there's a transition plan for their child or how to access the information in the transition plan (Bhaumik et al., 2011).

The research indicated the importance of early transition training and discussion for students with ID during the K-12 school experience. The school should provide more opportunities for vocational, social skills, and self-advocacy training (Cimera et al., 2014). Additionally, the research indicates the value of parental involvement and student involvement to promote successful and meaningful outcomes.

Parents and guardians have their perspectives, goals, and outcomes they want and think are best for the student. Their involvement is critical and necessary. The lack of their participation is noticeable, slows down the process, and can hinder the progress of student support and services. When parents and guardians are non-responsive, the student is impacted, services are delayed, and resources go untapped and unused.

Bhaumik et al.'s (2011) mixed-methods study of teenagers with ID focused on the ideas and perspectives of the guardians regarding the transition process and interagency services. The participants discussed their understanding of post-school transitions and how academic and nonacademic needs were met. The results indicated a quarter of the guardians were satisfied with interagency supports and services. Only one-third of the participants were aware that their

teenager had a transition plan and did not have access to or a copy of it. Unfortunately, the transition process is not always viewed positively.

Research by Raghavan et al. (2013), Martinez et al. (2012), and Bhaumik et al. (2011) revealed the following about parents: (a) they viewed the transition process as unclear, (b) they were offered little to no options, and (c) they were unclear of the future outcomes for their youth transitioning from school to postsecondary life (Bhaumik et al., 2011). In other cases, the information received by parents was incorrect (Martinez et al., 2012). Martinez et al. (2012) further reported, "Parents felt pushed away or were not included in making decisions" (p. 6). The responsibility for establishing strong and relevant communication rests with the school and the educators (Mounts et al., 2006). Frances et al. (2016) suggested educators must reach out to families with a clear message encouraging participation, which is essential to the education process. Additionally, research suggests schools and teachers create social structures that include students, parents, and communities (Gil, 2007; Webster, 2004). This type of partnership maximizes the benefits of campus environments for students as they transition into college settings (Gil, 2007). Gillan and Coughlan's (2010) qualitative study explored the aspect of the transition from a parent/guardians perspective. Knowledge of parents' experiences of their child's transitions from special education to postsecondary settings ascertained and identified themes: meaning of the transition process, the psychological impact of the transition, and barriers and facilitative factors of the transition process. The results indicated better relationships between families and professionals need to be developed.

Martinez et al. (2012) also conducted a mixed-methods study. This study examined how post-school options are affected when parents of students with ID are involved in the transition process; while parents may have goals of college and other post-school opportunities for their

children, the reality of those successes lessens as their child with ID becomes older and begins secondary school. Inclusion was a factor used to determine and distinguish the level of parental involvement. Martinez et al. (2012) explained that students in general education typically experience higher parent participation rates, especially in the lower grades. This is important because SWD and more severe disabilities have lower rates of parent engagement. This study is relevant to my proposed study because of the related identified factors to transition participation of parents with students with ID. Additionally, Martinez et al. (2012) provide essential information to my study because they revealed the importance of parent involvement in the transition process for students with ID.

Frances et al. (2016) concluded in their expository article on the importance of understanding parental involvement. They argue that parent involvement is essential in the decision-making process for students with IEPs, and it is a legal mandate to include parents as a member of the IEP team. Furthermore, Frances et al. (2016) pointed out the review of literature synthesized studies on parent involvement in SWD. They concluded including parent partnerships in post-secondary education to be better equipped to support their children. While minimal literature on parent partnerships in post-secondary education was prevalent, the researcher suggested conducting more research to evaluate partnership methods and determine the effectiveness and generalizability of partnership methods to develop evidence-based models.

Research indicates parental involvement is necessary to stem the tide of ineffective transitioning services; it is essential for the success of SWD who are transitioning into postsecondary educational settings (Brinkerhoff, 1994; Connor, 2013; Gil, 2007). Additionally, parent input and ideas are essential in the decision-making process (Bhaumik et al., 2011; Frances et al., 2016; Hirano and Rowe, 2016). When the families are involved in the transition

process, achievement increases (Frances et al. 2016). However, students with MMID have lower rates of parent involvement than students in general education (Hirano and Rowe, 2016; Martinez et al., 2012).

Inarguably, parents want the best outcomes for their children. They have dreams and expectations for their young adult children; some include independence, vocational employment, and college (Martinez et al., 2012). Parents need to participate in the transition planning process to make these dreams come true. However, parents' dreams and expectations for postsecondary educational outcomes are sometimes unrealistic (Martinez et al., 2012). Additionally, Harris and Robertson (2001) asserted that SWD has unrealistic college expectations. Still, parents are also unaware of the college support systems and expect the same support during their child's K-12 experience. Harris and Robertson (2001) further recommended parents be provided with information and training about Post-secondary education transitions into college settings.

While parents may have goals of college and other post-school options for their children, the reality of those successes lessens as their child with ID becomes older and begins secondary school (Bouck, 2014). Inclusion was a factor used to determine and distinguish the level of parental involvement. Students in general education typically experience higher parent participation rates, especially in the lower grades (Martinez et al., 2012). Moreover, SWD and students with more severe disabilities have lower rates of parent engagement.

Overall, identified factors related to transition planning include parental participation and perspectives that lead to successful outcomes for students with disabilities. It is important to involve parents in all parts of the transitioning process. Ultimately, creating social structures that include the voices of students, parents, and the communities is the responsibility of schools and

teachers (Gil, 2007; Webster, 2004). More research, including improving parental engagement and involvement in the transition process, is recommended across the literature.

In addition to parent involvement, transition planning should be inclusive and collaborative with higher education institutions, community agencies, parents, and student interests (Bhaumik et al., 2011; Gil, 2007; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Martinez et al., 2012; Trainor, 2010; Winn & Hay, 2009). The focus should be student-centered and encourage student participation (Bhaumik et al., 2011).

Collaboration with Community Agencies

To improve the ITP process, ongoing collaboration with agencies is essential in providing sustainability and promoting successful outcomes in post-school employment and community living (Grigal et al., 2012). In this process, it is crucial to facilitate the involvement of community organizations, agencies, and local colleges. College and school partnerships are beneficial when school district administrators and colleges collaborate, and this partnership helps develop communication, mutual goals, and support systems (Dyson, 1999). When these moving pieces work together, they foster collaboration and develop programs and curricula accessible for students entering their community (Gil, 2007; Kohler & Field, 2003; Trainor, 2010).

SWD is provided with a significant amount of support and resources during high school, almost to enable them. The K-12 system of special education supports was established to create goals, monitor progress, track support, and provide assessments and reports every year. This network system of support is managed by school administrators and implemented by the case manager, generally the special education teacher. It is usually established by excluding students' input. (Lindstrom et al., 2007; Bhaumik et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2010; Grigal,2012). This is an adult-driven system provided to implement the outcomes generated by the IEP team with the

ultimate goal of successful progress and outcomes. Students have very little to manage their academic experience other than being present and completing coursework (Trainor, 2010; Winn & Hay, 2009).

Community support and resources are essential to successful transitioning (Hall, 2017). Coordinating services between agencies, families, and school personnel is important in the transition process (Lindstrom et al., 2007; Certo et al., 2008; Winn & Hay, 2009; Hall, 2017). Palliser et al.'s (2014) qualitative study examined the services and supports of transition partners of young adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) as they transition to adulthood. Their study revealed a lack of continuity between schools and post-school services and fragmented support. Lack of resources and government funding and support was also reported. This study is important because it provided knowledge and recommendations to support changes in instruction and added to best practices for educators.

Post-Secondary Outcomes

Students with disabilities continue to face challenges in post-secondary life, daunting to high school (Garrison-Wade, 2012). During the high school transition process, goals are established to provide direction for the student to attain once they transition into post-secondary life. These goals are centered on independent living, gainful employment, and college attainment.

Employment Outcomes

Gainful employment is a desire all adults have to be independent and care for daily living needs, wants, and desires. However, for students with MMID finding gainful employment is often a barrier and more complex (Carter et al., 2012; Kaehne & Beyer, 2014; Raghavan et al., 2013; Sankardas & Rajanahally, 2015). The chances of obtaining employment are often impossible, slim,

and are an overall challenge. The following qualitative and quantitative studies reveal employment outcomes and trends for students with MMID.

Using in-depth interviews, Lindsay et al.'s (2011) qualitative study sought to understand the dynamics of challenges young adults face in employment training programs. Discrepancies between adults with and without a disability indicate that those with a disability are three times less likely to find full-time employment. Adding to Lindsay et al.'s (2011), Bouck's (2014) quantitative study included over 68,000 students with mild intellectual disabilities (MID), analyzing post-school outcomes, including employment data. Bouck (2014) revealed that students with MID had difficulty and struggled with postsecondary employment. She indicated that those with an intellectual disability are significantly less likely than their non-disabled peers to have gainful employment.

Additionally, Carter et al.'s (2012) quantitative study examined the predictors of post-secondary outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. Only 26% of young adults with severe disabilities worked up to two years after exiting high school. Scuccimarra & Speece (2016) mixed-methods study had similar findings; adults with more severe handicaps were employed significantly lower than those with mild learning disabilities.

Contributing factors to these deficits could be linked to insufficient (a) training that promotes individuals' capacity to progress on the job; (b) self-determination skills; and (c) work skills, social, adaptive, and behavior training (Reio & Ghosh, 2009). Additionally, Martorell et al. (2008) also reported that low expectations are also a contributor. This long-standing problem has continued throughout the years. People with intellectual disabilities have been associated with having more behavior problems than people without disabilities (Martorell et al., 2008; Bouck, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2011). Bouck (2014) recommended that educators provide relevant

in-school opportunities to promote independence, acquire life skills, and practice social skills to ensure greater post-secondary outcomes. Social integration and parental involvement are necessary factors to improve these outcomes (Scuccimarra and Spreece, 2016; Winn & Hay, 2009; Foley et al., 2012; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Young et al., 2016).

These studies revealed SWD experiences challenges with finding and securing gainful employment. Career training and preparation can facilitate easier transitions from school to work by helping young adults with intellectual disabilities gain appropriate and adequate employment (Sankardas and Rajanahally, 2015). Additionally, adults with intellectual disabilities reported significantly less.

Post-Secondary Educational Outcomes and College Collaboration

Students with MMID struggle with adaptability, attainment, and access in post-secondary educational environments. They generally attend community colleges and universities at a significantly lower rate than students with specific learning disabilities (Gil, 2007, Winn and Hay, 2009, Griffin et al., 2010, & Foley et al., 2012). Many leave secondary settings without the self-advocacy skills needed to survive in college (Eckes & Ochoa, 2003).

Webster (2004) argued that although colleges have made progress in providing access and opportunities for SWD, considerable gaps still exist. Students continue to experience difficulties with adjusting to college environments. Transitioning from high school to higher education is difficult for students with disabilities. Schools must do a better job facilitating effective transition practices for students to have the ultimate opportunity for academic success. Understanding legal mandates and the importance of the transition process is critical for students and parents. The education systems are different in K-12 schooling than in postsecondary

educational settings. Similarly, legislation governing the K-12 school system is significantly different from the legislation governing community colleges and universities for SWD.

Young et al.'s (2016) qualitative study indicated that going to college increases self-efficacy and independence for students with MMID. In their study, students indicated they didn't feel prepared and worried about having friends and getting to college without the school bus. Once students enter the higher education system, they must take ownership and responsibility for obtaining support to ensure their academic success (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002). They also suggest that a vast number of students with disabilities, in general, are not identified in higher educational institutions. The number of students with disabilities is grossly underrepresented (Weis et al., 2016). This is mainly because the student must self-identify their disability and provide the appropriate documentation. After all, many students do not disclose their learning disability; some research determined that some students would conceal their disability for fear of being stereotyped as "academically incompetent" (Banks, 2013). To mediate this dilemma, students need to understand their disability and articulate what supports are required to ensure equitable access to the curriculum and instruction (Gil, 2007).

College students should be able to articulate their disabilities, and they should describe their unique learning style and the area(s) of deficit that impact their ability to process information. By knowing and understanding the deficit area, the college student can advocate for support and accommodations that are specific and unique to their need (Vogel & Adelman, 1992; Webster, 2004). For example, recording lectures to slow down the information, therefore chucking the information into smaller pieces. Processing written language is generally a strength for a student with an auditory processing disorder. Thus, providing the student with transmitted copies of lectures would support and accommodate this area of need (Brinckerhoff et al., 2001).

Although colleges and universities provide support centers for students with disabilities, support is not always individualized to accommodate the student's specific academic needs. Colleges are not legally required to conduct student assessments to determine individualized accommodations for students. Nor are they required to monitor the progress or participation of the students who access the supports and services (Banks, 2014; Brinckerhoff, 1994; Brinckerhoff et al., 2001; & Gil, 2007). College support centers are available on campus to aid students in accessing support, resources, and accommodations. Gil (2007) recommended that K-12 educators and colleges work together to address transition issues students with disabilities might encounter upon entering college. She further asserted parent involvement is a critical factor in the collaboration process. Similarly, Mozqueda (2020) suggested that college and university faculty and staff should offer services for students with disabilities to successfully complete their academic endeavors. Creating these partnerships will ensure smoother transitions in accessing the college environment (McCall, 2015).

McCall (2015) highlighted the transition process from high school to adulthood of four successful young adults by examining the transitional experiences. The study examined the range of transition supports in self-advocacy, family support, and inclusive high school programming. As a result, McCall (2015) examined the resources from pre-college life and how they have navigated their college environment. Successful transition was connected to family involvement and opportunities for self-determination and self-advocacy, and family expectations and support factors (Martin et al., 1993; Bhaumik et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2012; and Frances et al., 2016).

Overall, research indicates that student-centered transition planning inclusive of collaboration between agencies, schools, family, family involvement, and program development

supports the successful transition and post-school outcomes and develops self-advocacy and self-determination. However, research on the coordination of these practices is unclear and often missing from school-based environments and programs. Further research is needed to understand the transition to post-secondary life from the perspective of students with MMID. This study addressed the challenges students face with MMID transitioning from high school to post-secondary life.

Based on the above literature and empirical studies on transition planning for SWD, I merged two complementary models to use as an overlay and a new lens to view students with MMID transition planning processes. This is a positive and unique approach as it views students with disabilities using people's first language, ethics of care, and consideration and not from a deficit lens.

Conceptual Framework: Operational Definition of Student-Centered Planning

This study draws on Kohler and Field's Taxonomy for Transition Programming Framework (2003) and Test et al.'s Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities (2005) to create an adapted conceptual framework to guide my research. The organization of this section is as follows; first, I will describe Taxonomy for Transition Programming and its components. It is important to note that a documented transition plan is required for all students with disabilities (SWD). Therefore, this research study is essential for the Transition Programming framework components' Taxonomy for Transition Programming framework. Then, I will define Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities. In doing so, I argue that elements of these frameworks help understand the phenomenon of transition planning for young adults with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities entering post-secondary settings and

how student-centered planning encourages self-advocacy skills to give a voice to students transitioning from high school.

As a result of the 1990 and 1997 amendments of IDEA, all SWD must have transition plans that focus on post-school outcomes (Kohler & Field, 2003; Test et al., 2005). Taxonomy for transition planning provides structure and accountability that educators can follow to develop a complete and comprehensive transition plan. The taxonomy for transition planning entails the following that details five key components of transition planning: (a) Family Involvement, (b) Program Structure, (c) Interagency Collaboration, (d) Student Development, and (e) Student-Focused Planning (Kohler & Field, 2003). The advantages of using this framework are its ease of use and adaptability, and it provides a clear structure that aligns with IDEA. For this research study, I focused on student development and student-focused planning components.

Self-determination and student-advocacy are the factors called out in the research as critical in the transition planning process for SWD but are also highly underexplored. Therefore, I drew upon Test et al.'s (2005) Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for SWD to highlight the nuances of self-advocacy.

The premise of Test's Framework offers a practical application of studies from the field and perspectives from educators to determine the best practices to incorporate student voice when designing the ITP. This framework is an instructional guide for students with disabilities used by educators, and the instructional plan helps students with disabilities advocate for themselves. Additionally, self-determination and student advocacy were two of the main themes that emerged from the research. Test's model sought to help students speak up for themselves, think for themselves, and make good decisions based on their desires. This framework is important to my study. It highlights the importance of students with disabilities knowing

themselves, knowing their rights, and effectively communicating and negotiating their needs and wants.

Therefore, I created and adapted a conceptual model using the aforementioned frameworks titled the ITP for Students with Mild/Moderate Disabilities: Kohler and Field's (2003) Effective Transition Practices Framework and Test's et al. (2005) Conceptual Framework of Self-advocacy for SWD. As displayed in Figure 1, this adapted model acknowledges Kohler and Field's (2003) elements of (a) Program Structure, (b) Interagency Collaboration, and (c) Family Involvement but combines the elements of Student Development and Student-Focused Planning into a sole category called Student-Centered Planning.

This adapted conceptual model also underscores student-centered planning as the pathway students with MMID transition into post-secondary living. Student-centered planning is the foundation for increasing self-determination and developing self-advocacy for students with MMID. This framework suggests students with MMID successful transition planning centered on the student promoting self-determination and empowerment. Additionally, the research questions in this study focus on student-centered planning and the various concepts of transition planning (family involvement, agency involvement, student development, and program structure) that foster self-advocacy and self-determination for students with MMID. Figure 1 below is a visual representation of the adapted framework, which illustrates the pathway for students with MMID. It explained the possible path students could follow as they transition into post-secondary life.

Figure 1

Adapted Conceptual Framework: Operational Definition of Student-Centered Planning
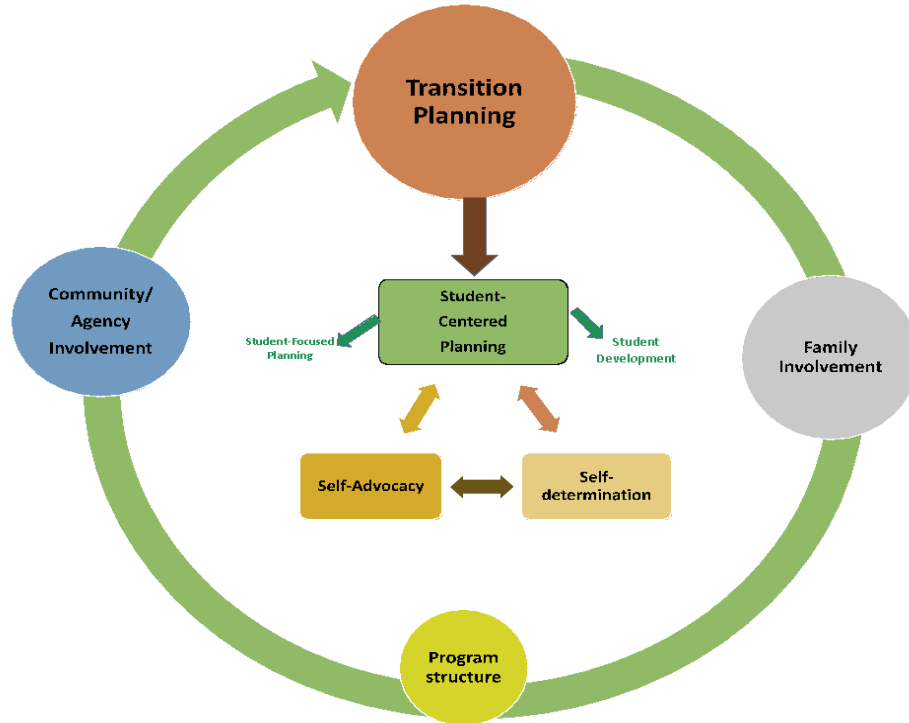
Summary

The literature review revealed several salient points regarding successful post-secondary school transition outcomes for adults with SLD. Transition planning and preparation is a significant elements of discussion across the literature. Transition planning should be inclusive and collaborative with colleges, agencies, parents, and student interests (Gil, 2007; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Winn & Hay, 2009; Trainor, 2010; Bhaumik et al., 2011; Martinez, 2012). The focus should be student-centered and encourage student participation (Bhaumik et al., 2011). To improve the ITP process, ongoing collaboration with agencies is essential in providing sustainability and promoting successful outcomes in post-school employment and community living (Grigal, 2012).

Students with MMID are tasked with the responsibilities of transitioning to post-secondary life. They must advocate for themselves and develop self-determination throughout this process. These skills are an important factor when analyzing the transition and planning procedures. Students with MMID struggle with adaptability, attainment, and access in post-secondary educational environments. Researchers found that when effective transition practices are collaborative and inclusive of students and parents, students experience tremendous success in college, positively affecting their adult life. The literature indicated the importance of early transition training and discussion. The school should provide more vocational, social skills, and self-advocacy training opportunities. Additionally, the research the value of parental involvement and student involvement to promote successful and meaningful outcomes.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 1990, provides students ages 16 through 22 years old with an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The Rehabilitation act of 1973 enables pre-employment transition services, job placement services, and supported employment services for students with disabilities. Equally, the ITP is essential in successful transitions to postsecondary settings; it is important to note that student-centered planning is the most valuable element of the ITP. To improve the ITP process, ongoing collaboration with agencies is essential in providing sustainability and promoting successful post-school employment and community outcomes. Research showed that students are not adequately prepared to fully make the transition from high school to post-secondary life without the support of outside agencies to provide guidance.

This study draws on Kohler and Field's Taxonomy for Transition Programming Framework (2003) and Test et al.'s Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities (2005) to create an adapted conceptual framework to guide this research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore students' postsecondary experiences with Mild/Moderate ID. Students with mild/moderate ID transition to postsecondary educational environments and the natural world face more barriers than their typical peers (Banks, 2014). This study examined the role of the ITP in secondary educational settings, along with student advocacy, resources, and support, which contributed to the post-high school transition for students with Mild/Moderate ID.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: *What are students' postsecondary experiences with Mild/Moderate ID?* The following questions were explored:

RQ 1: How do students with mild/moderate ID share their voice, self-determination, and practice self-advocacy during the transition process?

RQ 2: What are the supports and resources offered to students with mild/moderate ID and parents or those with guardianship over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition process?

RQ 3: What role, if any, do self-determination and self-advocacy play in the post-secondary experiences of students with mild/moderate ID?

(a) Did they get there?

(b) How did they get there?

(c) Who helped them get there?

(d) Did the transition plan help them meet their postsecondary goals?

Research Design

The participants in this study are a marginalized population. Ethics becomes a factor when considering qualitative research design: participants, data collection, and data analysis

(Creswell, 2016). Therefore, I considered all procedures and analyses that involved the participants in maintaining the integrity of the research and allowing the participant's voices to be heard (Corby et al., 2015).

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological hermeneutical research approach. According to Kumar (2018), a qualitative dissertation seeks to study values, beliefs, understanding, perceptions, and meanings. This study aimed to explore the phenomena of transition planning for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in post-secondary life through open-ended semi-structured questions using the interview protocol.

In this study, I drew on major assumptions that underlie the phenomenological research approach: the lived world or lived experience is critical when engaging in phenomenological research. The human experience is meaningful and of interest. These assumptions acknowledge that people are in their worlds and only understandable in their context. As a researcher, my assumptions and worldviews aligned with this approach. I believe the lived experiences of young adults with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities are of interest and worthy of being researched. Their lives are meaningful in that they experience different barriers and challenges that may or may not be their perception.

Phenomenological research aimed to capture expressive information not conveyed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations underlying behaviors. My goal was to make meaning, establish patterns, identify themes, and include the participants' voices. Furthermore, the study sought to understand the personal transition process of individuals with MMID and parents or caregivers of students with MMID. Phenomenological approaches aim to elicit individuals' meaning of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.

Phenomenologists focused on describing what participants have in common. I sought to understand the nature of transitional planning for students with MMID.

Setting/Context

People with Intellectual disabilities make up 5% of the population. Approximately seven million people in the U.S. are diagnosed with MMID, and approximately 800,000 have MMID in the Los Angeles County area. (KidsData.org, 2019). This study took place in the Los Angeles County area.

Student participants and students of parent/guardian participants attended post-secondary school in one of three school districts: Demasca USD, Galilee USD, and Judea USD[1] in the Los Angeles County. Each district is a large district and serves as an individual Local Education Area (LEA).

Special education programs are state and federally funded through the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). A plan is developed to outline how the allotment of federal funding will be distributed to their special education programs. Additionally, policies that regulate the ITP are embedded in IDEA. However, to ensure student information is available for post-secondary entities, high school procedures include providing graduating students with a summary of performance (SOP) are implemented before a student leaves high school. This formal technical document includes postsecondary employment, living, and education goals, and it also includes suggestions and recommendations on how students can attain the goals once they leave high school (Rusch et al., 2009).

Demasca USD has over 600,000 students. The fiscal budget for the SELPA is around $1.5 billion. Transition services are managed and monitored by the transition department within

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[1] Pseudonyms were used to hide the identity of the districts.

the district. The district allots federal funding for transition training centers for students 18 years and older who completed high school with a certificate of completion. These centers are separate campuses within the district. The transition training centers provide community-based instruction (CBI), vocational training, and academic curriculum for students in real-life applications (Demasca Unified School District, 2022).

Galilee USD has over 80,000 students and encompasses several surrounding cities. Special education transition training is provided at the local high schools within the district. Special education programs. The SELPA fiscal budget is $60,500,000. The LEA Plan revealed that 1.3% of the total special education funds are used for transition planning (Galilee Unified School District, 2022).

Judea USD has over 20,000 students. Judea USD SELPA fiscal budget is around $16,700,000 but does not explicitly identify the allotment of funds for transition services or programs. The district provides transition and vocational training at the local high school CBI programs until a student reaches age 22 (Judea Unified School District, 2022).

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

According to Moustakas (1994), five to 20 participants is the minimum to conduct a quality phenomenological study. A small sample size is ideal for using interviews to collect data (Isaac & Michael, 1995; Patton, 2002). I used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 20 study participants for this study. My sample included ten individuals who have identified as having an MMID between the ages of 21 to 30 and 10 parents or caregivers of individuals with MMID. Initially, participants were purposively selected in the Los Angeles County area, have a mild to moderate intellectual disability, and are a parent or caregivers of a student with a mild to moderate intellectual disability.

The study participants were not required to be paired from the same household or family, and this increased chances of getting more available and willing participants. I aimed to recruit participants with various post-secondary experiences, including college, vocational training, work, and living with or without parents or caregivers. Additional participants were selected based on snowball sampling until 20 participants were identified.

The goal was to find participants that could produce rich and deep levels of understanding. Creswell (2007) suggested that the research study has a phenomenological study between three and 10 participants. According to Thompson (1999; as cited in Jenkins, 2017), qualitative research aims to choose respondents who are likely to produce rich and deep levels of understanding. For this study, potential participants were identified as students with MMID, ages 21 to 30, and parents/guardians of a student identified with MMID. Students who recently completed high school with an ITP within the past eight years from an accredited private, public, or charter school in the Los Angeles County area participated in the study.

Criteria for Inclusion

The standards for inclusion for student participants in this study were:

- Be a student ages 21 to 30 and identified as MMID.

- Had recently completed high school with an ITP within the past eight years. Range of graduation dates 2013-present.

- Be a graduate of an accredited California private, public, or charter school.

- Potential participants may participate in this study if they have a secondary disability.

- If referrals are received who meet the criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study.

The standards for inclusion for parent/guardian participants in this study were:

- Be a parent/guardian of a student identified with a MMID.

- No minimum education level is needed for parents/guardians to participate in this study

In this study, I used several recruitment strategies. First, as an administrator in the second-largest school district in the country, I have access to and maintained connections with former students and parents throughout my 25-year tenure. I reached out to current and former students and parents or caregivers and personally invited them to participate in the study. These are students whom I have previously taught in middle school. Additionally, I used social media outlets LinkedIn and Facebook to post the recruitment flyer. There was an overwhelming response on Facebook. The post was shared over fifteen times. This allowed me to recruit 5 of the 20 study participants. As I describe below, I completed ten parent interviews and eight student interviews within two weeks. Finding the additional two student participants who met the criteria wasn't easy. Therefore, the final two participants were obtained in this study using snowball sampling.

Student Demographics

A total of 20 participants were included in this study. There were ten student participants in this study: seven males and three females. Of the student participants, two completed high school with a diploma and eight with a certificate of completion. Five of the ten participants have a secondary disability other than ID. After high school, three of the participants went to community college or trade school. Currently, four students are employed. The average age of the student participants is 26 years old. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the student participants.

Table 1

Student Participant Background Information

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	District (pseudonym)	Diploma/ Certificate of Completion	Secondary Disability	College/Voc. College after HS	Employed Y/N
Noah	26	Male	Hispanic	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Trade School	Yes
Jacob	30	Male	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Community College	Yes
David	23	Male	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	No College	Yes
Mary	21	Female	Black	Galilee USD	Diploma	DHH	Community College	No
Paul	30	Male	Black	Judea USD	Diploma	Cerebral Palsy	No College	No
Martha	29	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	No College	No
Joshua	30	Male	Black	Judea USD	Certificate	DHH	Community College	No
Christian	24	Male	Black	Judea USD	Certificate	Autism	No College	No
Abel	21	Male	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	No College	No
Ruth	26	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	Down Syndrome	No College	Yes

Parent/Guardian Demographics

There were ten parent/guardian participants in this study. Nine participants were females, and one was male. Eight parent/guardian participants identified as African American, one was White, and one identified as Hispanic. Nine parent/guardian participants completed some college, and two earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The average age of the parent/guardian participant is 58 years old. Table two below depicts the parents' background who were a part of this study. This table displays the diverse background experiences of parent/guardian participants for this study.

Table 2

Parent/Guardian Participant Background Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	District (pseudonym)	Diploma/Certificate of Completion	Secondary Disability	Education Level
Ms. Matthews	46	Female	Black	Judea USD	Certificate	Autism	Some College
Ms. Mark	72	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Some College
Mr. Luke	56	Male	White	Demasca USD	Certificate	Autism	Masters
Ms. John	64	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	Down Syndrome	Some College
Ms. Simon	53	Female	Black	Galilee USD	Diploma	DHH	AA Degree
Ms. Peter	47	Female	Hispanic	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Some College
Ms. Joseph	58	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Some College
Ms. Adam	45	Female	Black	Judea USD	Certificate	Autism	High School
Ms. Timothy	52	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	None	Bachelors
Ms. Thomas	85	Female	Black	Demasca USD	Certificate	Rubenstein-Tabi syndrome	Some College

The participants in the study included former students from public schools and parents/guardians who met the inclusion criteria to participate in this study. The diverse ethnic background of the participants identified as Black, Hispanic and White. The student participants' ethnic background was nine Black and one Hispanic. Participants from all ethnic backgrounds were invited to participate in this research study. However, Black and Hispanic participants responded and committed, thus demographically creating disproportionality of race/ethnicity. The ethnic background of the parents/guardians participants were eight Black, one Hispanic, and one White. Figure two below represents the diverse ethnic background of the participant in this study.

Figure 2

Participant's Ethnicity
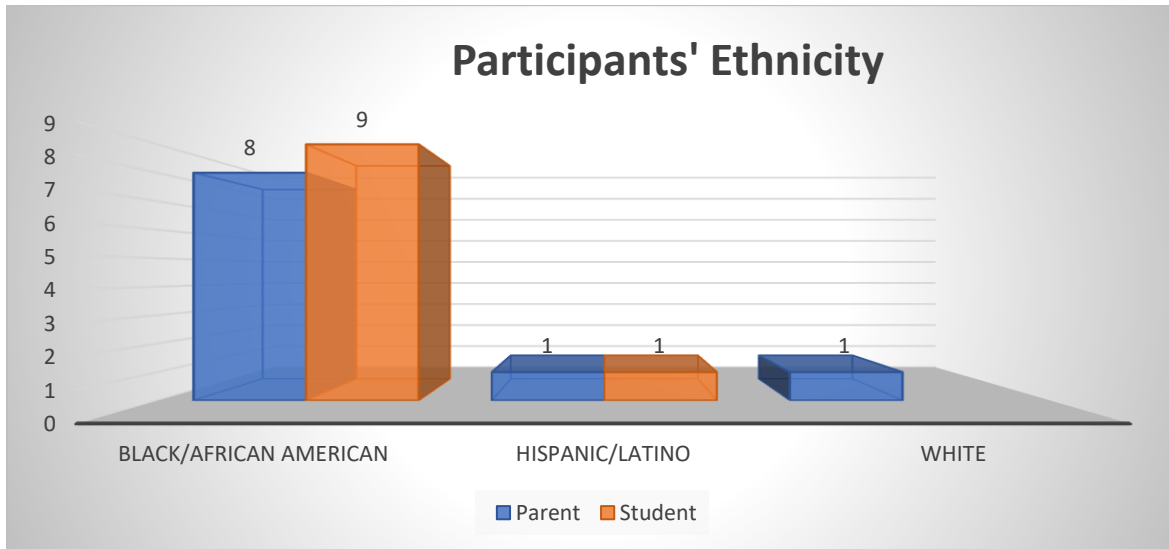
The participants in the study included men and women that had various levels of education, as seen in Figure Three below. The story of education for the parents/guardians' participants included no college, some college, AA degree, Bachelor's degree, and Master's degree. One parent, Ms. Adams, completed high school. Six parents finished some college, Ms. Mathews. Ms. Mark, Ms. Peter, Ms. Joseph, Ms. John, and Ms. Thomas. One parent, Ms. Simon, completed an AA Degree. One parent, Ms. Timothy, completed a Bachelor's degree. One parent, Mr. Luke, completed a Master's degree.

The level of education for student participants included high school, trade school, and community college. Eight student participants completed high school with a Certificate of Completion, Noah, Jacob, David, Martha, Joshua, Christian, Abel, and Ruth. Two student participants completed high school with a diploma, Mary and Paul. Six student participants did not attend college postsecondary, David, Paul, Martha, Christian, Abel, and Ruth. Thirty percent attended community college, Jacob, Mary, and Joshua. One student participant, Noah, attended trade school.

Figure 3

Participant Education Level
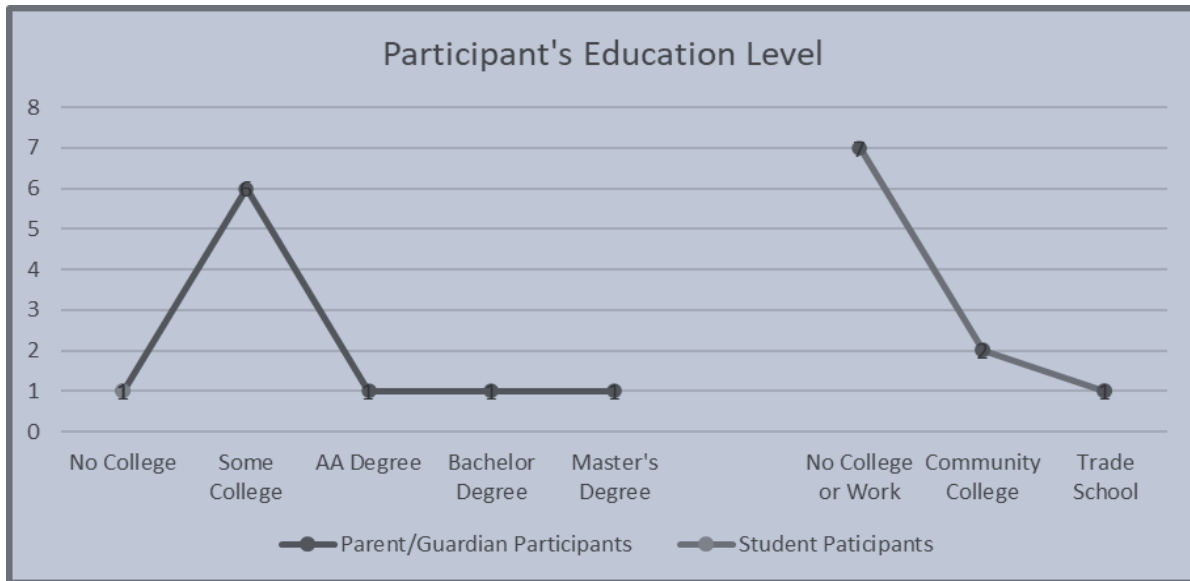
Protection of Human Subjects

To protect the human rights of all participants, an application for the research study was submitted and approved by Claremont Graduate University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in September 2020. Each participant was asked to sign a consent/assent form (Appendix I) according to the standard established by the IRB. The consent/assent form specifically stated that the participants were not required to answer every question and could leave the research project. The confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the study. A pseudonym was given to identify information was given to each participant. The dissertation and any other reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, will remain private. Personal information for any purpose outside of this research project was not shared. Although interviews were recorded, coded, and transcribed, the recordings were destroyed upon completion of the study, eliminating the possibility of the participants' connection to the study being discovered.

Pseudonyms

Lupenga's (2006) article, "Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture," calls attention to the importance of the naming process. Lupenga begins the article with: "What is in a name? Among many African cultures, a name tells a lot about the individual it signifies, the language it is drawn, and the society that ascribes it. Through re-naming…African Americans have continued the process of redefining themselves and dismantling the paradigm that kept them mentally chained for centuries" (p. 1).

I chose to use biblical names from the Old and New Testament for all participants and place the names in order according to the books in the bible as a systematic way to organize the interviews. It was easy to remember and connect to the participants. As stated in the positionality statement, it took faith to complete the doctoral journey; therefore, such pseudonyms are suitable.

Instrumentation

I created an interview protocol (see Appendix D) and a list of open-ended questions to ask students and parents/guardians of those with MMID to talk directly with them and add their voices to the study (see Appendix D for Student Interview Questions). I created a separate list of questions for Parents and Guardians (see Appendix E) to gain insights. As part of the interview, for the purpose of recollection only, I asked the participant to bring the final copy of the IEP or SOP. It was not required but used as a tool for the participant to refer to during the interview.

Matrix of Research Questions

The matrix of the research question table below (see Table 3) contains the research questions paired with interview questions. The purpose of Table 3 below is to outline which

questions were asked during the interview to collect the appropriate responses that answered the

guiding research questions driving this study.

Table 3

Matrix of Research Questions

Research Questions	Student Interview Questions	Parent/Guardian Interview Questions
RQ1: How do students with mild/moderate ID share their voice, self-determination, and practice self-advocacy during the transition process?	SQ2: When you were in high school, you had an IEP. What do you remember about the IEP process? Did you attend your IEP? SQ6: How was the Transition plan explained to you? Probe: did anyone explain the transition plan to you? What did they say? SQ8: How and in what ways were you included in creating your transition goals? SQ14: What are you doing to be independent or maintain independence? SQ16: What motivates you to continue doing what you do? Probe: What encourages or makes you happy about what you do? SQ17: Remember we talked about self-advocacy. As an adult, how are you advocating for yourself? Probe: Can you share an experience you had where you practiced self-advocacy. SQ18: Is there something different you want to do, or are you where you want to be? SQ19: What plans or goals do you have for your future? How are you going to achieve it? Probe: what will you do to make sure you reach your goal? SQ20: Is there anything else you want to share with me?	PQ3: How and in what ways was your child included in the ITP planning of goals and objectives PQ6: Thinking back, was there any training offered to help you establish ITP goals for your child? PQ10: At what stage of transition was your child given an opportunity to express their needs and wants and have a voice in the transition process? (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school, etc. PQ11: In thinking about independent living goals or stages of adulting, describe how they access their goals and objectives outlined in the ITP. Did they get a driver's license? Are they driving? Are they living independently in an apartment or shared living home? Do they have employment? Do they have a bank account? Etc… PQ12: How was your child encouraged to advocate for themselves during high school? PQ15: When thinking of self-advocacy, how is your child practicing self-determination? Probe: How are they motivated

RQ2: What are the supports and resources offered to students with mild/moderate ID and parents or those with guardianship over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition process?

SQ1: Think about your high school experience, which helped you during that time.

SQ4: Who was present at your last IEP meeting?

SQ5: Thinking about transition planning during high school, who helped you in the transition process? Probe: was it the transition teacher? Was it your classroom teacher or assistant? Classroom teacher or assistant?

SQ7: What were your goals (your plans after high school?) What did you want to do?

SQ12: Who is a part of your support system now?

SQ14: What are you doing to be independent or maintain independence?

SQ15: You said that you are (whatever they stated). Can you explain how you get there? SQ19: What plans or goals do you have for your future? How are you going to achieve it? Probe: what will you do to make sure you reach your goal?

PQ1: When thinking of transition planning, who helped you navigate the process when creating the ITP for your child or student in care? How was the Transition plan explained to you?

PQ2: Looking back, were you able to attend your child's final ITP? Who else was present at the final ITP?

PQ4; Since high school completion, how have you helped facilitate the goals established in the final ITP?

PQ5: What outside agencies were involved in the final IEP meeting?

PQ7: How did the school or district share agency options with you or provide information to help you with the process of aligning the agency with your child's ITP?

PQ8: is there anything different you would expect from the transition process? Is there anything you would have done differently in the schools' facilitation of the ITP during the high school years?

PQ9: If any, describe what you want to achieve for your child's future?

PQ11: In thinking about independent living goals or stages of adulting, describe how they access their goals and objectives outlined in the ITP?

PQ16: Who is a part of your child's support system?

PQ17: Is there something different you would like them to be doing, or are they where you expected them to be?

PQ18: What plans or goals would you like your child to have for your future?

PQ19: What recommendations would you give to other parents/guardians or students knowing what you know now about transition planning?

PQ20: Is there anything else you want to share with me?

| RQ3: What role, if any, do self-determination and self-advocacy play in the post-secondary experiences of students with mild/moderate ID? | SQ3: How did you participate in your IEP?

SQ6: How was the Transition plan explained to you?

SQ8: How and in what ways were you included in creating your transition goals?

SQ9: Think about self-advocacy (speaking up for what you want): Can you share an experience where you practiced self-advocacy? Or wanted to practice advocating for yourself or speaking up for yourself.

SQ10: What trainings did you participate in to help you meet your transition goals?

SQ11: You shared skills that you learned (name them). Now that you are an adult, how are you using those skills?

SQ13: Think about independence. What does that mean to you? Probe: does it mean living alone or with a roommate, going on dates, paying bills, and not asking permission to leave the house?

SQ17: Remember we talked about self-advocacy. As an adult, how are you advocating for yourself? | PQ3: How and in what ways was your child included in the ITP planning of goals and objectives?

PQ13: In your opinion, what is the most valuable transition lesson your child experienced to help them reach their transition goals?

PQ14: Now that your child is an adult, how are they using the skills from high school to help them advocate for themselves? |

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants. I recruited ten individuals with mild to moderate intellectual disability who have completed the K-12 school system with an Individual Transition Plan. Ten parents/guardians of an individual with a mild to moderate intellectual disability yielded illuminating results. Parent interviews began on September 6, 2021, and concluded on September 27, 2021. Student interviews started on September 12, 2021, and ended on December 21, 2021.

Data was collected virtually using Zoom video conferencing. This platform allowed for Voice of Internet Protocol and seeing, hearing, and recording of the participant. I scheduled 30- to 60-minute semi-structured, one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions. The average interview was 27:00 minutes.

The interview protocol was employed. There were 19 student questions and 18 parent/guardian questions. Interviews were recorded to capture the most accurate data. I emailed the interview protocol to participants 24 hours prior to the scheduled interview. I took copious notes and recorded the interviews. All field notes and researcher notes were transcribed. Recordings were listened to multiple times to hear nuances and check for clarity and accuracy. Last, the interviews were transcribed into a completed written transcription using Temi, a transcription subscription. The table below describes the data collection timeframe of each participant.

Table 4

Interview Schedule

Pseudonym	Date of interview	Length of interview
Ms. Matthews	September 25, 2021	20:13
Ms. Mark	September 8, 2021	52:00
Mr. Luke	September 11, 2021	43:49
Ms. John	September 16, 2021	35:18
Ms. Simon	September 26, 2021	40:21
Ms. Peter	September 27, 2021	20:29
Ms. Joseph	September 15, 2021	16:10
Ms. Adam	September 12, 2021	37:36
Ms. Timothy	September 6, 2021	36:09

Ms. Thomas	September 6, 2021	26:40
Noah	September 20. 2021	16:27
Jacob	September 7, 2021	15:50
David	September 16, 2021	17:41
Mary	September 16, 2021	14:33
Paul	December 20, 2021	22:54
Martha	September 7, 2021	18:15
Joshua	September 12, 2021	17:15
Christian	September 12, 2021	17:59
Abel	September 16, 2021	17:48
Ruth	December 21, 2021	16:22

Data Analysis

A combination of detailed data analysis techniques was used during the coding and analysis process. Temi software is a transcription software package that transcribes speech to text. I uned Temi to transcribe all interviews. Following transcription, I hand-coded using Excel to organize and make sense of the data and find trends across participants.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), a coding process is a systematic approach to deducing, managing, and reducing large amounts of qualitative data. Detailed analysis of the data was included in the coding process. The process began by reading all transcriptions multiple times. Additional notes were taken during the reading and rereading. The data was organized, categorized, and sorted into codes taken verbatim from the interview recordings and field notes (Saldana, 2012). From those categories, the data was coded further into sub-categories to arrive at emerging themes and concepts, specifically feelings, ideas, perspectives, and lived experiences of the transition process. At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed that

member checking would be used to verify researcher data with participant responses. A follow-up interview with Ms. Timothy was conducted a few days after the initial interview. This interview was done via phone to clarify her responses that were not clear in the transcription. This allowed me to clarify her response and will enable her to elaborate on specific responses and verify the accuracy of obtained information (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Once the coding process was complete, I sent a draft of a transcribed interview to all participants for member checking and triangulation (see Appendix G Transcript Verification).

In this dissertation, pseudonyms assigned to each participant were used for both student and parent/guardian to protect all participants' identities. Additionally, my goal was to hear the voice and words of students with MMID. The only way to get there was to use direct quotes from them because transition planning for students with MMID is a single phenomenon that has been under-researched; using phenomenology allowed me to collect data from the individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell, 2016).

Coding

Coding is a process whereby the researcher reduces large sums of data and organizes it in such a way to reduce, deduct, and simplify qualitative responses. I used manual coding in Excel for this study. Coding allows the researcher to segment rich textual data by categorizing, counting frequency, grouping, identifying common words and phrases, and reducing and sorting information to allow common themes to emerge.

Stemler (2001) discusses two data-coding approaches: emergent coding, where codes are drawn from the text, and a priori coding, where codes are created beforehand and applied to the text. I used open coding first. A set of a priori codes were used. A priori codes are codes that are developed before examining the current data. The following is a list of pre-set a priori codes that

I had established: (1) Community support, (2) Parental Support, (3) Agency Support, (4) Program structure such as training, and (5) Student Development.

Emergent coding is codes used to categorize data that emerge from the data. This process is used when the question is broad and exploratory. I developed other codes as she coded the data. These codes are called inductive codes. Inductive codes are codes that I developed by directly examining the data. I placed all interview questions in an excel file and recorded the responses in categories. Next, I took the responses and uploaded them into excel, which allowed me to hand code, color code, label the data sets, count frequencies, highlight significant quotes, create a word cloud, and reduce the textual data.

After analyzing the parent interviews and responses, 31 codes were established, which were then clustered, grouped, and reduced into 21 codes and then further grouped and clustered into eight codes. D. Thomas (2003) outlined a five-step plan and procedures needed for inductive analysis:

1. Organizing data files

2. Determining categories and themes

3. Overlapping uncoded and coded text

4. Closing reading text

5. Refining and revising categories and themes

From the inductive analysis, eight themes emerged from the interviewees' responses: (1) Family and friend support, (2) agency support, (3) school support, (4) life skills training/ preparedness, (5) independence, (6) guidance (7) vocation, and (8) autonomous/decision-making skills.

After analyzing the student interviews, 26 codes were established, which were then clustered, grouped, and reduced into nine codes (1) Family and friend support, (2) school support, (3) agency support, (4) training and preparation (5) vocation, (6) independence, (7) autonomy/decision-making skills (8) inclusion (9) advocate. Some of the categories between the parent and student interview overlapped. I followed the exact inductive analysis procedure outlined above used for the parent interviews to reduce and determine the emerging themes for the student interviews.   The emergent themes are (1) Support Systems, (2) Training and preparation, and (3) Self-determination.

The initial nine categories that emerged after multiple readings of the transcriptions were categorized, grouped, and coded below: (1) Family and friend support, (2) school support, (3) agency support, (4) training and preparation, (5) vocation, (6) independence, (7) autonomy/decision-making skills (8) participation (9) advocacy. Emerging themes began to develop. During the coding process, the process of reduction took place. The final three themes and four sub-themes are below:

1. Participation and Support systems

    a) Advocacy Opportunities

    b) School Support

    c) Family/friends Support

    d) Agency Support

2. Training and preparation

    a) Life Skills Training

    b) Vocational Training

    c) Parent Training

3. Self-determination

    a) Self-Advocacy

    b) Independence

    c) Autonomy

Researcher's Positionality

This study is particularly important to me for several reasons. I have had first-hand experience with students with MMID as a practitioner and an administrator. I witnessed the frustration and uncertainty of parents and guardians during the transition phases leaving the protection and comfort of high school. Therefore, I must acknowledge my own biases toward students with MMID. During this study, I interviewed a few former students and former parents. This established relationship allowed them to share more ways than others if they didn't have me as their former teacher. So, I had to triangulate data across participants and data sources and acknowledge my potential bias around my relationship with the students and parents.

As a middle school teacher, I focused on incorporating independence and transition skills training and practice in my classroom lessons and routines. This included teaching the students about their disability, IEP goals, and accomplishment. They learned how to advocate for themselves. My expectation for each student was to reach their maximum potential and more. My class motto was, "let's celebrate the small accomplishments and then push to the next level." While I realized the importance of early transition for students with MMID, parents would tell me that they were not receiving the same encouragement, rigor, expectations, and support. This left me wondering what happened during the high school transition and how are the students progressing independently.

Summary

This chapter began with a restatement of the research questions and the statement of purpose and described the nature of the study. The chapter continued with assumptions about the qualitative study. Chapter 3 described the study's methodology, the nature of the phenomenological approach, and the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness of the approach. The chapter continued with population, purposive sampling, sample size, and inclusion and exclusion criteria. In addition, the chapter described the protection of human subjects and the Claremont Graduate University's IRB approval process. Next, I described the data collection process use of the interview protocol and wrote a statement of personal bias, also known as bracketing or epoch. The chapter concluded with the data analysis plan, an overview of the coding and analysis process, and a chapter summary.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings related to the three research questions, which center on the role of self-advocacy and self-determination in the transition process from high school to post-secondary, and how guardians monitor the post-secondary transition progress to ensure successful growth and goal attainment as it relates to the individualized transition plan (ITP). Employing a phenomenological approach, the main focus of this chapter is on the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they made from the phenomena of their experiences in the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) process. While describing these experiences, the words of the participants were used as much as possible. The chapter is organized with regard to each research question and the frequency of themes and sub-themes, along with direct quotes and rich textual data, charts, graphs, tables, word clouds, and descriptive statistics.

Across interviews, participants provided detailed examples of their lived experiences during high school. They were provided transition support and services, post-secondary backgrounds once they completed high school, and current experiences related to their transition goals and expectations. Three themes emerged from the findings. They were participation and support system, training and preparation, and self-determination. Together results suggest that the ITP process and support during high school could significantly impact the student success of young adults with mild to moderate disabilities in their post-secondary lives.

In some cases, participants who participated in community-based instruction (CBI) programs were equipped with the necessary skills to survive at home and in the community. Many student and parent participants described the positive support they received from teachers during the high school transition process. However, not all participants felt they received support from key stakeholders or could express their voice and self-advocacy during the progress.

The results are grouped under themes and sub-themes, as seen below in Figure four. The major themes are (1) participation and support systems, (2) training and preparation (3) self-determination. As was presented earlier, twenty participants, including ten students and ten parents/guardians, were interviewed using semi-structured open-ended questions in virtual interviews, which lasted approximately 30-minutes each.

Figure 4

Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Participation and Support Systems	• Advocacy opportunities • School Support • Family/Friends Support • Agency Support
Theme 2: Training and Preparation	• Life Skills Training • Vocational Training • Parent Training
Theme 3: Self - Determination	• Self-Advocacy • Independence • Autonomy
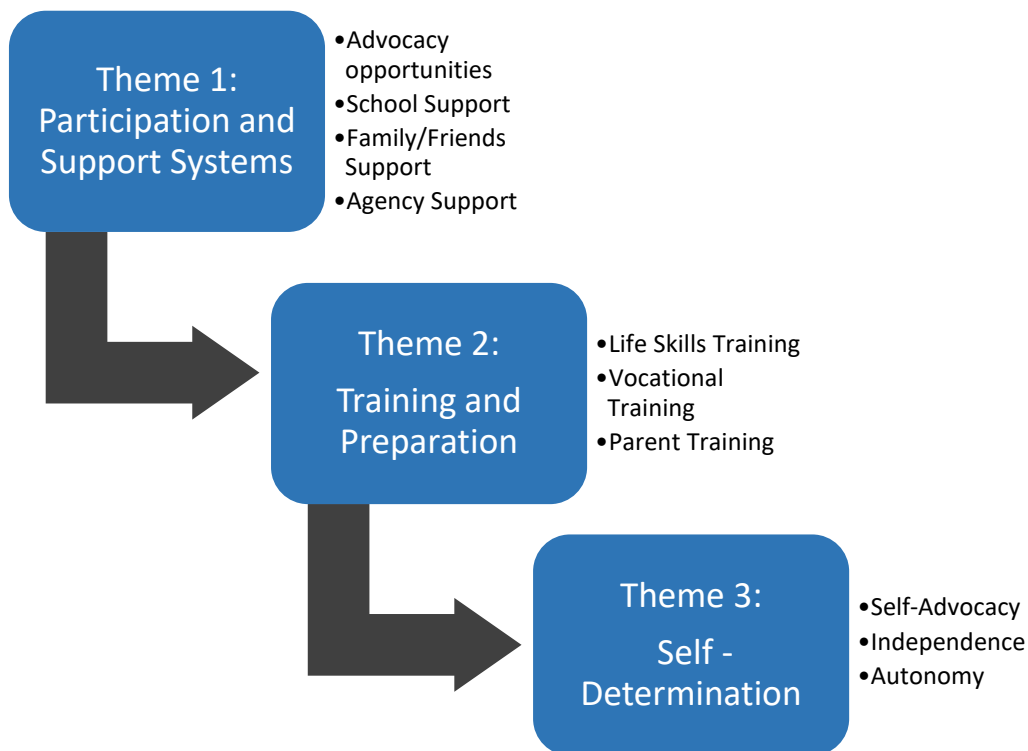
Theme 1: ITP Participation and Support Systems

The first theme, ITP participation and support systems, begin to address the first research question, "How do students with mild/moderate ID share their voice, self-determination, and practice self-advocacy during the transition process?" and the second research question, "What supports and resources are offered to students with mild/moderate ID and guardians or

guardianship over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition process?" This theme expands on how participants described their self-advocacy and their support systems during high school, the ITP process, and post-secondary life.

Connor (2013) stresses the importance of discussing plans for the level of support, outcomes, and success of students with MMID post-secondary transition into adult life during high school Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Transition Plan (ITP) meetings. Based on the participants' responses in this study, three different support systems surfaced as subthemes: school support, family and friend support, and agency support. Both student and parent/guardian participants provided detailed accounts of how these support systems played a vital role during the ITP process and helped develop self-advocacy skills. Figure five below depicts the levels of support participants embraced.

Figure 5

Participants Support Systems
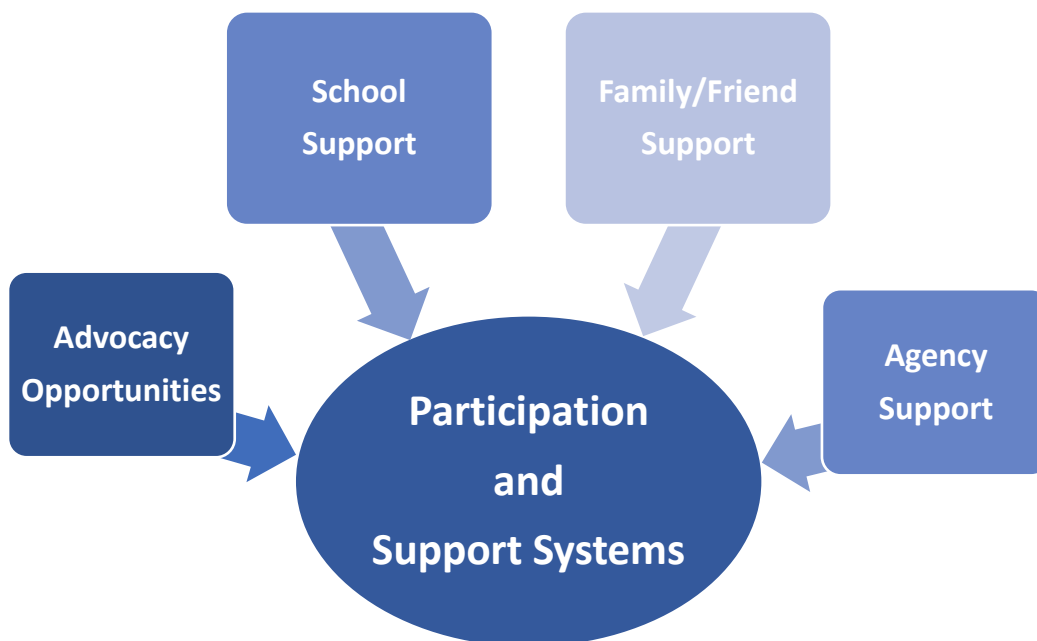
The final ITP meeting is crucial in establishing a roadmap of transitions into post-secondary settings. This is when the IEP team, including parents/guardians and students, finalizes the set goals outlined in the ITP plan from the past four years and recommends resources and the support needed to transition into post-secondary settings. The required members of the IEP team should be present at all meetings as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Participants were asked how students self-advocated during their K-12 educational experiences during the interviews. They were also asked how they participated in the IEP and ITP process. Student and parent/guardian participants shared experiences of self-advocacy and participation.

Advocacy Opportunities

The analysis of data for advocacy opportunities was captured in two areas (1) none and (2) during K-12 school. Some responses indicated 'No Opportunity to Self-Advocate or not encouraged to advocate for themselves. The results demonstrate that six student participants never advocated or spoke up for themselves. Four student participants said, "No," they could not share an experience when they spoke up for themselves or were encouraged to advocate for themselves. For example, Noah shared that he could not advocate for himself during school. He had difficulty asking questions or speaking up for himself, and he relied on his mother to speak for him. When asked to share a time during school when he had to advocate for himself, he could think of a time. He indicated that his mother took care of everything.

Parent/guardian participants were asked, "During high school, how was your child encouraged to advocate for him/herself?" Six parent participants indicated, "Not during school." Ms. Matthews explicitly said, "Students aren't allowed to sit in the IEP; he never sat in the IEP." Ms. Peter added, "I don't think he had any encouragement to speak up or share his thoughts."

Many parent/guardian participants believed that their children couldn't participate in the conversation during the IEP/ITP meetings. The parent/guardian participants felt that they were not personally equipped or knowledgeable of the process, and teachers were in control and knew what was best for their children. Teachers' knowledge and professional expertise are highly valued amongst parents/guardians, so much so that parents willingly surrender their power to advocate for their children and their children's futures.

During K-12

Two student participants and four parent/guardian participants shared that advocacy opportunities were experienced while enrolled in K-12 schools. Student participants explained how they had to advocate for themselves during middle and high school. Mary shared a time during high school when she spoke up for herself to a teacher. She knew her rights as a student and informed the teacher of her IEP accommodations. She vividly recalled, "I had to tell the P.E. I need to sit close because of my hearing, and I need a sign language interpreter."

Abel shared a similar experience. He provided an explicit explanation of how he employs self-advocacy. He stated, "I use self-advocacy when the teachers are not communicating. I have to say, okay, why are we not communicating? Let's set up a meeting to communicate. So, you can let people know what will happen in my next phase of life." Abel felt that keeping the lines of communication open during the ITP process would help ensure fidelity during the ITP process. This way, he would be aware and informed. With confidence, these student participants shared how they used their voice to resolve an issue so that their needs and wants could be met.

Parent/guardian participants also provided detailed accounts of their experiences. Ms. Simon, Mary's mother, explained when Mary was in middle school, a teacher encouraged her to advocate for herself. She shared, "When she was in middle school, the person over the IEP, she

was deaf and hard of hearing. She was an advocate for her. She was the one who made it clear that my daughter needs to be able to advocate for herself and not just me tell people what she needs from them, but she needs to speak up for herself and let her needs be known." Like Ms. Simon, Ms. Joseph remembered the middle school teacher being the person who encouraged advocacy for the student, "I want to say, it started in middle school. Of course, it was middle school. He had the best teachers ever. He's still using his advocacy skills today…It was definitely middle school." Ms. Thomas said, "At the high school, they would encourage her to speak up for *herself."* In these cases, the teacher promoted self-advocacy and encouraged students to use their voices.

School Supports

The participants in this study were asked which team members were present at the final IEP/ITP meeting. Ten student participants indicated that their parent(s)/guardian(s) were present, their teachers were present, and they individually at their final IEP/ITP meetings. Interestingly, all ten student participants indicated that neither a school administrator nor a Regional Center representative was present at the last IEP/ITP meetings. Given that all of the student participants are clients of the Regional Center, Regional Center representatives at the final IEP/ITP meetings could have helped provide insight into the following steps as the student participants transitioned from high school to post-secondary life. Parent/guardian participants reported the following persons present at their children's final IEP/ITP meetings: parent(s)/guardian(s), teacher, administrator, Regional Center representative, and the student. Specifically, nine parents/guardians indicated that they were present at the final meeting. Nine participants indicated that the teacher was present. Five parents/guardians indicated that an administrator was present. Only one parent/guardian indicated that a Regional Center representative was present,

and eight parents/guardians indicated that the students were present for their individual IEP/ITP meetings. Figure six below illustrates the representation of participants and school personnel at the final IEP/ITP meetings.

Figure 6

Participants IEP/ITP Participation
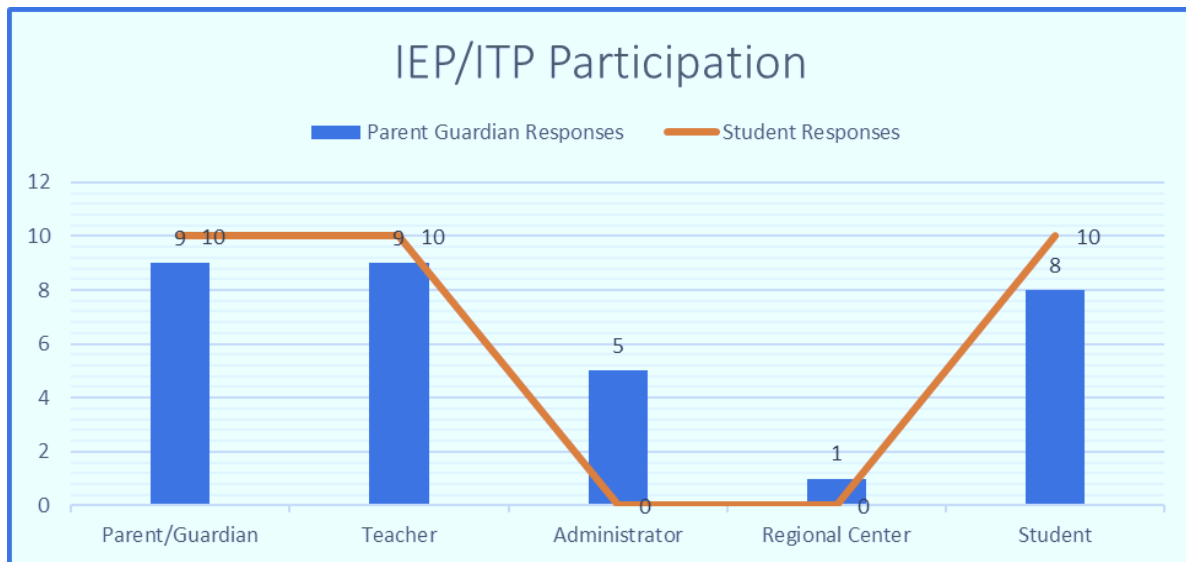
School-Based Support

For this study, school-based support systems are defined as the staff and personnel at the high school site. To analyze and interpret the information in this study, I organized school-based support into two areas, teacher support and administrator support. Teacher support includes classroom teacher and teacher assistant or paraprofessional, and administrator support provides school administrators with the principal, assistant principal, and counselor.

To further disaggregate school-based support, the terms supported, and unsupported are used to explain student participants' and parent/guardian participants' expressions of how and in what ways students were included or provided support during the ITP process. Both student participants and parent/guardian participants expressed circumstances when they felt supported

by the school and other times when they thought they were unsupported during the ITP process. Expressions of being supported were mentioned eleven times by nine students and thirteen times by eight parent/guardian participants. Ninety percent of student participants expressed positive experiences of having support during the ITP process while in high school.

Teacher Support

The teacher's role in the ITP process is valuable because they provide helpful information to prepare and guide students to achieve the goals outlined in their ITPs. There was an overwhelming acknowledgment of positive teacher support from student participants and parent/guardian participants. Figure seven below depicts the overwhelming support given by teachers to participants during their ITP. Nine student participants mentioned teacher support 28 times by nine student participants and sixteen times by all parent/guardian participants. According to student participants, the school team shared post-secondary options to either go to a work program or community college during the transition process.

Joshua is a thirty-year-old student who graduated from high school with a certificate of completion. He described how his teacher used assessment data to determine his need and aligned supports that were best suited for him, "She explained my options and assessed me on the things I need to work on and what the best program for me. So, I wouldn't waste my time". Joshua's description of the support from the teacher included a much-needed resource assessment. Assessment tools provided the teacher data to measure the students' abilities. This helped with the necessary information to monitor a student's progress and establish meaningful goals. Abel is twenty-one years old and graduated from high school with a certificate of completion. He expressed how helpful his teacher was during his transition meeting. He said, "They were trying to get me prepared to go where I was going and get me needed services."

Figure 7

Teacher Support

Who helped you with the ITP process?

	Teacher	Administrator	Regional Center
Parent	10	1	3
Student	9	0	1
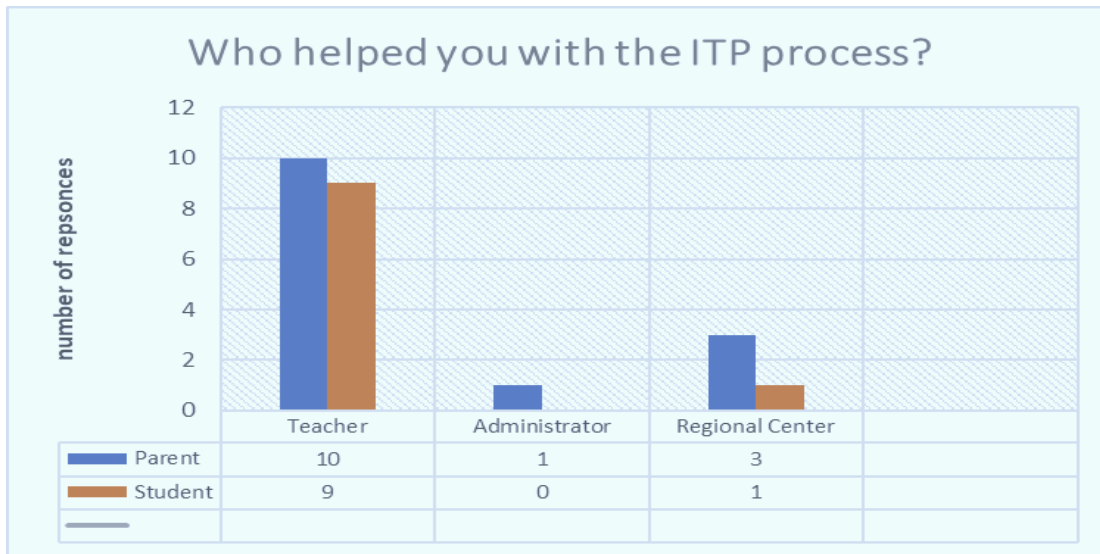
Additionally, parents shared their ideas and experiences of the school's support during the transition process. Ms. Peter is the parent of Noah. She explained that she was not fully aware of the options available to her son once he completed high school. She recalled a side conversation with the teacher where they discussed transition options that were available but not offered;

> Basically, they did tell me that he could stay in high school until the age of twenty-two. But I had previously spoken with the teacher, and she whispered to me that there is a program out there, but they only take kids when they're, I, I want to say the age of twenty, which he was two years younger than what they were accepting. But she said if you fight and it's just that you didn't hear it from me, you might be able to get in the program. You didn't hear it from me. So when I went into the meeting, I said, well, I'm aware about this program, that Noah Can go into a trade college in the same classes that high school does. I don't want my son to be here until the age of twenty-two and then not know what he can do after. (Ms. Peter)

Teachers are representatives of the school and district they work for. During IEP meetings, teachers speak on behalf of the school and district they work for, which holds them accountable for their resources. Therefore, teachers may not always feel comfortable sharing resources outside the student's program. Given school funding structures and policies, the teacher took a professional risk of sharing information that could have caused discord with other members of the ITP team to make sure Ms. Peter was well informed of potential options for Noah that are separate from what the school provides. Ms. Peter realized the teacher was limited in publicly providing resources at the meeting. Ms. Peter used the information she received from the teacher at the IEP meeting to request a program that would benefit Noah as he transitioned from high school to post-secondary settings.

Student participants also shared experiences of feeling unsupported during the ITP process. Student participants were asked, "How was transition explained?" All students said the teacher explained it to them, and students viewed the teacher as the primary source of information. Student participants were also asked how they were included in creating their transition goals. Seven student participants indicated, *"Not at all."* Ironically, when asked how the transition was explained to you, all ten student participants indicated *"the teacher"* explained the transition process. While students were given options, they didn't fully comprehend the process; therefore, they felt that they were not engaged in the process and had a choice in deciding on their goals.

There is an apparent disconnect between explaining the ITP to the students versus having the students actively involved in the ITP process where they can make meaning and have a clear understanding of the purpose of the ITP. Joshua responded, "Nobody explained it to me." Abel explained, "I wasn't included at all." They were not allowed to create their own goals and

establish a transition plan aligned with their personal needs and interests. Jacob is 30 years old

and a former student, and he is currently employed and working multiple jobs. When asked,

"What do you remember about the ITP process?" His response was, "Um, I remembered that Mr.

S. was just talking, and I don't know what we were talking about, but I know we were just

talking." He was further asked if he could share his ideas with the team, and he said, "No, not

really."

Figure 8

Student participant participation in the ITP Process
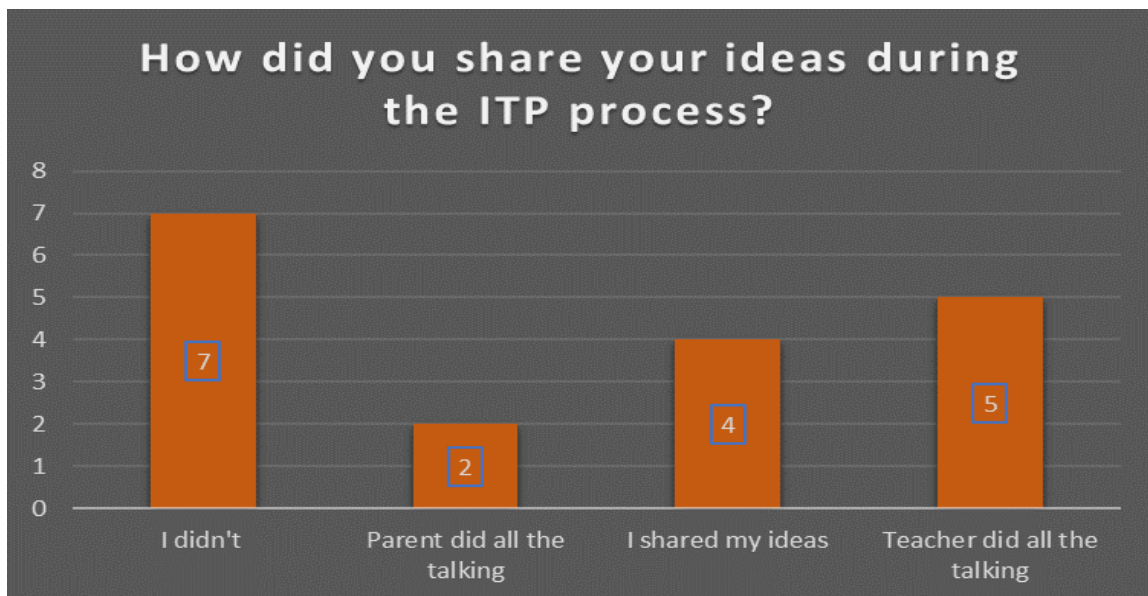
Figure 8 above portrays how students were able to share ideas during the ITP process.

Seven expressed sentiments of not being able to share their ideas during ITP process; there were

two students indicated the parents did all the talking. Five student participants explained that

their teacher talked and they listened.

Parents/guardians were asked how their children were included in creating goals. Nine

participants indicated their children were not involved in creating their ITP goals. Their

responses suggested that it was already done before the meeting, the teacher had it all written out, or suggestions were offered, but parent input wasn't welcomed. It was also explained how they were involved, but there was no indication of the student being part of the ITP planning or discussion.

Additionally, parents/guardians were asked if their children were included in the ITP meeting. All said, "No." Since students play an important role in the transition process, they felt that their students were not involved in the transition process. Additionally, because of the responses, parents are not aware of the value of student involvement in the process. Furthermore, parents/guardians were asked how the school facilitated support by aligning agency options or supports. Forty percent of the parents indicated that they received no help or very little help. Mr. Luke is the only male parent who participated in the study. He has a son with multiple disabilities, including MMID. He stated that he had done his research. Mr. Luke described his son as he lamented his dissatisfaction with the entire ITP process. "It's kind of a sore spot with me…For me, I really don't focus so much on the goals. I'll be quite frank with you. I read these goals. This plan's boilerplate for about eighty-five percent of it. I think it's something that is somewhat jaded. I can see the bureaucracy of it all." Mr. Luke viewed the ITP process as meaningless. The ITP didn't provide realistic or attainable goals to meet his son's individual needs. The following statements from other parent/guardian participants express how they may not have been fully included in the ITP process.

Ms. Mathews works for the school district where her child attends. She responded, "The teacher wrote the goals. And once he read them to me, I, I agree." Ms. Mathews continues to compliment the teacher on making the transition process easy for her; "It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I thought of him being diagnosed and being a single parent. I thought it

would be harder, but the support that I had from the teachers made it a lot easier." Ms. Thomas offered, "They gave me suggestions," Ms. Thomas is the grandmother of student who has MMID and Rubenstein-Tabi syndrome.

On the other hand, Ms. Mark and Ms. Peter were more vigilant regarding ITP processes. Ms. Mark shared how she was persistent during the ITP process. She stated, "They would not have me involved, but I was very persistent." Similarly, Ms. Peter explained how she inserted herself into the ITP process, "I had it. Everything is written down what I wanted for him."

Overall, student and parent/guardian participants identified the teacher as the primary source of school-based support. Teachers provided students and parents with the necessary resources, training, support, and guidance to help facilitate them through the transition process. Based on participant responses, teachers were viewed as knowledgeable and trustworthy. Administrators and counselors were rarely mentioned when the participants described school-based support.

Figure nine shows the percentage of parents who expressed the school provided some or limited support with agency options for post-secondary support. This is an excellent example of how the school shares resources or agency options during the ITP process.

Figure 9

How Resources Are Shared
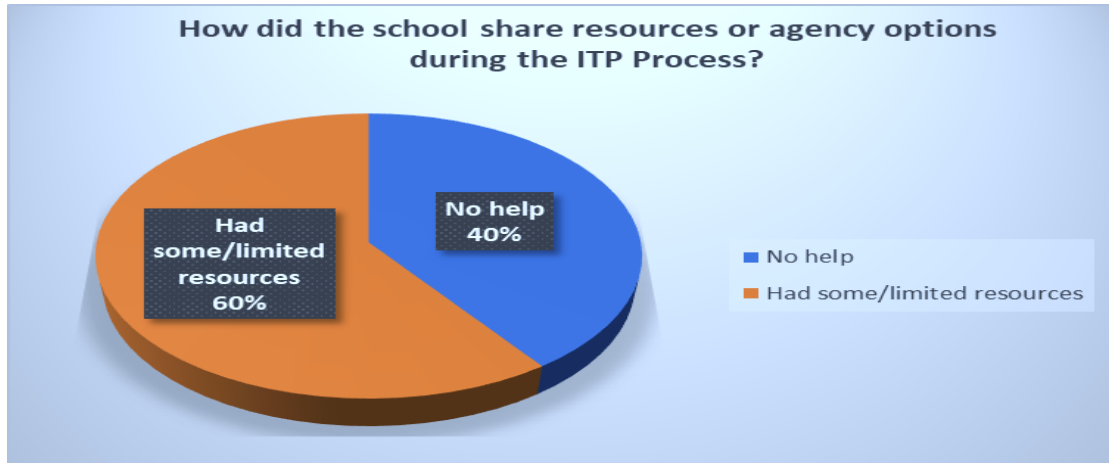
Agency Support

One major entity was prevalent support for student participants and parent/guardian participants, the Regional Center. The Regional Center is the largest and most critical organization in providing services and support to individuals (minors and adults) with MMID and their families. Once a child has aged out (at twenty-two years of age) of the K-12 school system, the Regional Center generally becomes responsible for ensuring services and support align with the goals outlined in the students' ITP. Seven student participants mentioned Regional Center support sixteen times and thirty-six times by eight parent/guardian participants.

An extension of the Regional Center is various programs available to clients (student participants). For example, three student participants described how the Regional Center connected them with a plan to align the individual supports they need. Jacob explained how he could get a job; "I'm in this program that my mom put me in. I'm in there. They helped me get this next job and a job at the stadium." As a result of being involved in this program, Jacob was able to get two additional jobs. He continued to proclaim, "I have three jobs, I'm balling'; I'm at

a higher status now." Mary is 21 years old and graduated with a high school diploma. Both Jacob and Mary participated in a program through the Regional Center to help her find an apartment. She explained, "Through the Regional Center, they would help me live on my own. It was through a program. But it didn't happen because of COVID. So, I haven't completed that process yet." Martha discussed how she is in a program through the Regional Center, helping her get a job. She added, "I was in a program, they [the Regional Center] helped me find a program for me to go through, but right now, it's difficult with this Corona." The collaboration of services between schools and the Regional Center has been beneficial for the student participants.

Parent/guardian participants described their experiences with the Regional Center and the Regional Center's impact on their children's transition from high school to adult life. Most of the parents shared positive experiences with Regional Center support. Ms. Matthews proudly shared, "one of the five top regional psychologists is setting up a self-help group that she wants her son to be involved in."

Ms. John described the process of her son transitioning from high school support to Regional Center support; "the Regional Center supposedly had picked up the ball after my son transitioned out of high school; they informed me of all the programs and, you know, services that were available for him to move into an adult program." She continued to explain the supports "regional social worker at the time, after that transition, helped so much. They give me tools, contacts, for programs or facilities."

When asked how the school facilitated agency options and supports, Ms. Timothy, Jacob's mother, lamented, "Not necessarily the school," She continued to elaborate on how the Regional Center provided support and a presence during the ITP process. She said:

The Regional Center was at every IEP. They were at the yearly meeting and then at the three-year meeting. So now, every year when the [Regional Center] counselor would ask him [Jacob], 'what are your goals then?', 'What do you want to be?'. 'What do you want to do then?', 'Where do you see yourself?', 'What do you know?', 'What's your past doing?'' Let's get it. They were very vigilant. (Ms. Timothy)

Ms. Timothy continued to describe the types of support the Regional Center has been providing since he transitioned from high school; she said:

Because of the Regional Center's support since transitioning from high school, he's in different life skills programs that helped with his basic functioning. Some of them have been helping him to read, helping to count money. The one that he's in now, they actually go out and do life skill things like going to the DMV, going to the bank, you know, he's going to get their ID. (Ms. Timothy)

She applauded the Regional Center for the support he was receiving. She stated, "the supports he's getting from the Regional Center are 'Amazing'...They are very helpful with Jacob's daily life skills, and they have open communication with both of us."

Mr. Luke continued by providing accolades about the Regional Center's support. He added, "the most integral part of the process was with the regional Center…They were involved in the funding and coordinating the funding through the state for XYZ Program. I believe they were also instrumental in assisting us in getting him enrolled there." Ms. Simon further contributes to success with the Regional Center. She states, "she [Mary] is working with someone from the Regional Center to get a job. They worked on her resume, and they are currently looking for her a job."

Like Ms. Timothy, Ms. Adam, the parent of a student with MMID and autism, wasn't completely satisfied with the high school's support when her child transitioned to postsecondary life. She pointed out how students with MMID are not provided equitable support and services compared to those with milder disabilities. She explained, "Um, and so those students [MMID] were being left behind, um, [Judea USD] didn't provide, and neither did [Demasca USD]. That was another reason why I pulled him. They didn't provide job coaches. I didn't find out that [Judea USD] didn't have job coaches until we were digging deep into finding out why are ID mild to moderate students are not receiving the same work experience that the regular special ed students or RSP students were receiving." She explained how the school referred her to the Regional Center for additional support, and now he's receiving support and services; *"talk to your regional center case manager….He was with the regional center, and they helped me… now he has a new caseworker, and I'm very grateful for them."*

Other parents expressed paradoxical Regional Center support. Ms. Mark stated, "Like even with the regional center, they really don't help the kids or do whatever… They said, well, just stay on your counselor at a regional center to help. So basically, they don't do anything. It doesn't work for me." Ms. Peter pointed out that the Regional Center was not involved in Noah's ITP process until his 18th birthday. She wasn't aware that the [Regional Center] existed until Noah was ready to graduate from high school. In her response to how the school provided agency options, she replied,

> None. Noah didn't get to the Regional Center until his 18th birthday, right on his birth date. The only reason that I didn't even know that he had that he needed a regional center until the teacher Ms. C was the one that sent me the link with all the information, and I reached out to them. They came out and basically, uh, two months before his graduation.

When he turned 18, I got an appointment with the regional center on his actual birth date.

So I've been doing this by myself.

Since connecting with the Regional Center, she has had very little support, and there has been a lack of consistency with caseworkers. She continued to share and said:

Within the past two years, I want to say we've been through three different, um, uh, workers, and there was a really good one, but she left cause she, you know, got promoted. So, we haven't really gotten anyone yet. We just got a letter this year that I'm his new worker, but it hasn't been consistent.

There were mixed sentiments about agency support. Some participants viewed the Regional Center as supportive and helpful. They shared positive experiences with the Regional Center. Participants shared how the Regional Center participated in IEP meetings, helped find employment, and facilitated resources for independence. On the other hand, parent participants perceived the Regional Center as unsupportive and unavailable. These parents/guardians strongly expressed their discontent with the Regional Center.

Family and Friend Support

Student participants were asked, "Who is a part of your support system?" All student participants stated their parents (mom or dad) were a part of their support systems. Parent/guardian participants were also asked, "Who is a part of your child's support system?" All ten parent/guardian participants indicated themself, and eight said, other family members. Three participants told friends or church members. This support comes in the form of assisting with mentoring, attending meetings, and providing financial and social-emotional support.

Theme one looked at the Individual Transition Program Participation and Support Systems. It highlighted the importance of school, family, friends, and agency support. Both

student and parent/guardian participants provided detailed accounts of how this support

positively and negatively affected their transition to post-secondary life. Some students felt they

were sometimes given to advocate for themselves, while others said they could not self-advocate

or develop their self-advocacy skills. While a representative of the Regional Center may not have

been present during the ITP meetings, participants all agreed that the Regional Center is helpful

as it becomes the location responsible for ensuring services and support and assisting with the

transition.

Theme 2: Training and Preparation

The second theme, training, and preparing delve deeper to address the second research

question, "What supports and resources are offered to students with mild/moderate ID and

guardians over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition

process?" Specifically, participants described how training and preparation were necessary for

student participants to develop self-determination. Support systems are critical during this

process to help guide the development of self-determination. Thus, this theme of training and

preparation is the bridge that connects the other two themes of self-determination and support

systems and participation. Figure 10 below shows the three subthemes that emerged from the

analysis of the participant responses (1) life skills training, (2) vocational training, and (3)

parent/guardian training. In response to the second research question, participants described the

training and preparation in post-secondary life. The second research question states: What

supports and resources are offered to students with mild/moderate ID and guardians or

guardianship over students with mild/moderate ID during the ITP and post-secondary transition.

Figure 10

Training and Participation Subthemes

Life Skills Training

  Student participants were asked, "What training did you participate in to help you meet your transition goals? Fifty percent of student participants said Community Base Instruction life skills training, thirty percent said "vocational training," and twenty percent said "none." The eight students who participated in the Community Base Instruction (CBI) training program viewed it as an extension of high school. Many of the classes took place on the high school campus where they attended. A few of the students' school districts had separate campuses. These students participated in the CBI program at a different school location set up only for students in that specific program. The participants shared the different skills they learned and how they're using them in their adult lives. The CBI program allowed student participants to learn and practice skills in real-life settings and have exposure to their community. For example, Joshua learned cooking skills and took field trips to learn about his class skills. Joshua expounds on his experience, "We did a lot of things. I had a cooking class, and we went on a field trip. We

went to a warehouse to show how to do it. And we were working with the workers, and we had fun with it. It was good."

Jacob shares his experience while participating in the CBI program. He explained how he applied the skills he learned in class to his everyday life as an adult. Joshua said, "In high school, I took a cooking class, and I was very good. I'm putting them to good use. I'm cooking for my mother." Joshua's mother, Ms. Timothy, adds to his experiences by pointing out that life skill programs also build academic skills like reading and math. She adds, "life skill programs have been helping him to read, count money. They actually go out and do life skill things like going to the DMV and the bank."

Another parent/guardian participant, like Ms. Timothy, illustrated the positive effects of the CBI program on their children. Ms. Matthew explained how her son participated in the CBI program from age 18 to 22. She described the benefits of the program. "Being out in the community was the biggest thing. They had to make grocery store lists. He learned how to use bus tokens and get on a bus to the grocery store and purchase items."

Ms. Thomas described during high school, her granddaughter transitioned to the CBI program and learned household skills that she continues to use as an adult. Ms. Thomas stated, "She's been making her bed, doing chores around the house, and keeping her schedule and calendar."

In addition to the life skills training that high schools provided, student participants explained the vocational training as part of the ITP process. Noah explained that he transitioned to Trade School after high school and learned vocational skills, and he practiced the skills he learned at actual companies. Noah explained, "In the XYZ program at the trade school. I used to volunteer at Walgreens and the 99, and now I have a part-time job."

The CBI program at the high school teaches life skills lessons to help students with daily living skills, but vocational training is also part of the program. Vocational skills training provided students with hands-on work training with actual companies. Martha recalls her experience in the CBI program, where she learned how to detail cars and received income while learning. Martha explains, "CBI training was fine. I do different things. I washed cars and went to this bus yard that paid me. Yes. I did well, washing the vehicles."

The training student participants took during their ITP process gave them transferable skills to use and apply to their everyday adult lives. Mary said, "Now that I'm an adult, I recently learned, like, learned zooms through high school. I got better at it, cuz I am doing my Harvard original and my, I can, we have me through zoom and getting better with, you know, understanding how to use it."

Vocational Skill Training

Four student participants identified vocational training programs as part of the transition process during high school. Noah described the vocational training he received from the work-based program while transitioning from high school to trade college. This program was in partnership with the school district and provided him the opportunity to learn vocational skills, receive college classes and gain work experience. This training was beneficial for Noah, and he could use the skills attained in the program and is now gainfully employed.

Like Noah, Jacob received vocational skills training in a school-based program that provided community-based instruction (CBI) training. The CBI program is an extension of high school. Once Jacob completed 12th grade at the local high school, he transitioned to the CBI center that was a part of the local school district. The CBI program provided interview training skills practiced, job skills, and learned daily living activities like cooking, shopping, money

management, and navigating the community safely. As a result, Jacob works full-time and gets around the community independently.

Abel and Martha also received vocational skills training while participating in the CBI program during the high school transition process. They both shared how they learned vocational skills and job skills. Both participants participated in work-based training and worked at a community store during the school day as part of their work experience training. During this time, they learned customer service skills, how to follow work instructions, and how to maintain a job. They explained that this training was valuable, and they are both looking for a job.

Vocational training programs provided student participants with practical applications of real-life and hands-on work experiences. The local school districts and the local trade college made these programs available. Students were able to gain transferrable skills and apply them to their individual lives. In some cases, the students used the skills learned to achieve and maintain employment.

Parent Training

Parent/guardian participants were asked, "Were there any training offered to help you establish ITP goals for your child?" Five parent/guardian participants said that they didn't receive any training. Two indicated the school passed out a few pamphlets, and three indicated that options were shared or the school gave them a list of agencies. Some schools actively shared information and prepared parents for postsecondary expectations for their children. Ms. Mark explained how the school was proactive and planned regular parent meetings.

> "We always had meetings, and monthly meetings with the regional center or the rehab
>
> department would come and share information at the school. And, um, the Regional

Center always gives classes throughout the year on what to expect when your kid leaves

high school or whatever."

Ms. Joseph also shared that the school provided training for the parents; "They had a workshop

for parents to come in and talk to different agencies. Ms. Mathews has a very different

experience. In lieu of having workshops and training, the school simply handed the information

to the parents with the expectation of them following up. Sadly, she stated, "They gave me the

information for the department of rehab, but I can never reach anybody. Nothing ever got done.

They were not helpful to me at all." Ms. Thomas found the school unhelpful in guiding

postschool support and services. She said, "They just gave me a list of agencies and told me, you

know, to select one from the list and just to visit them before I decided."

Theme two highlighted the importance of training and preparation, which is essential for

transition. Eight participants were able to refer to the Community Base Instruction (CBI), where

they learned life skills necessary to develop self-determination. Parents must be involved in the

transition process, and the parent also shared their experience in the support given. A few were

not given any training, while others retrieved information from pamphlets.

Theme 3: Self-Determination

To address the third research question, "What role, if any, do self-determination and self-

advocacy play in the post-secondary experiences of students with mild/moderate ID?" the theme

of self-determination illustrates how participants work toward and demonstrate self-advocacy,

autonomy, and independence. Figure eleven below presents a visual that reflects the relationship

among the sub-themes in this theme. Participants described the opportunities to make choices in

transition to their post-secondary lives.

Figure 11

Self Determination
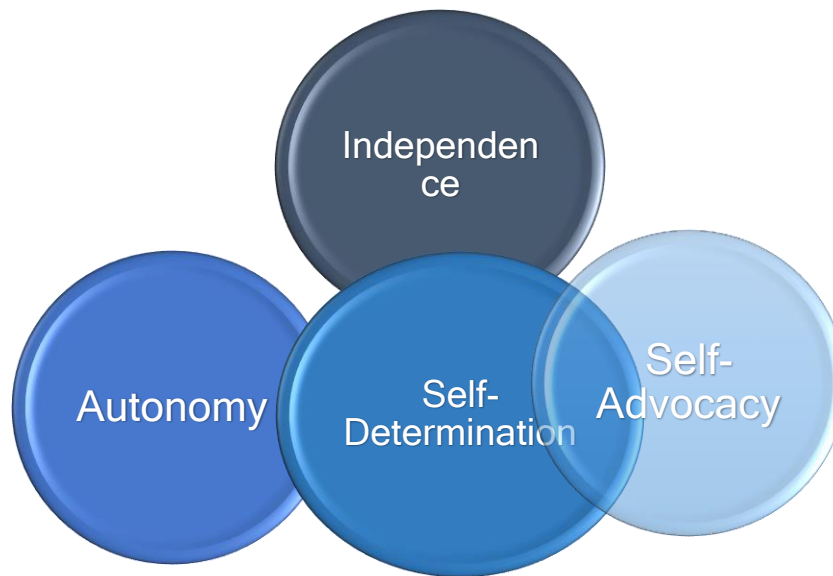
Self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. Scholars suggest that self-determination is the strong desire to believe in oneself, set and accomplish a goal, and have the keen ability to make confident choices and think independently (Chirkov et al., 2003; Nieniec and Ryan, 2009; Malian and Nevin, 2002; Cherry, 2021). Although independence and autonomy may appear synonymous, there is a clear distinction between the two. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), independence is the art or state of not depending on others. At the same time, autonomy is a strongly held inclination to take a particular course of action without permission.

The analysis of the interview data suggest many individuals, despite having a mild/moderate intellectual disability, have a strong desire to be independent, be autonomous, and advocate for themselves are working toward that goal.

Independence

     Being independent and having independence as an adult was common for all student and parent/guardian interview participants. Both students and parents/guardians identified independence as having vocational skills, life skills, and attending college as important aspects of independence. When parent/guardian participants were asked, "What goals did you want for your child?", ten participants responded "independence." The analysis of data for the subtheme independence was captured in three areas (1) vocation, (2) life skills, and (3) attending college. One main significant factor revealed from the responses was that high school transition programs played an integral role in developing skills to acquire independence.

Vocation

     The importance of vocation was mentioned thirty-seven times by nine students and eight times by seven parents. Vocation is the ability to have a job or a career. Results revealed participants showed self-determination by speaking about economic goals such as obtaining a job and paying bills. Student participants were asked about their ITP goals and plans after high school. Nine participants indicated getting a job. During the interviews, three students expressed the desire and importance of working. These students shared their transition experiences from high school and how it relates to their lives as adults working or aspiring to get a job.

     For example, Mary is twenty-one years old and completed high school with a diploma. One of her transition goals was to get a job. Mary shared that working motivates her and would give her more independence. She explained, "I'm independent when paying my bills, and I have a job." She further stated, "What motivates me is, um, um, learning experience. I want to be working. I want to be in the working force. I want to be motivated to have a job and know what I'm doing to have something to do instead of being inside the house all day."

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Noah is twenty-six years old and completed high school with a certificate of completion. One of Noah's transition goals was to have a job after completing high school. Noah participated in a transition program that partners community colleges with school districts as part of his transition plan. Students who participate in this program must leave the secondary setting after completing the 12th grade and enroll in trade school or the community college. This program helps students with MMID learn and develop skills to provide work, employment, and independent living skills. Noah attended trade college and learned several vocational skills. While enrolled at the trade school, Noah participated in the work program that allowed him to receive work-based instruction and career development, gain work experience, and make money. Noah explained that the transition program helped him get the skills he needed to understand working and following work rules and regulations. As a result of his experiences, he has been working part-time as a cafeteria worker at one of the largest healthcare hospitals in the nation for several years. Proudly, Noah shared that he likes working and enjoys his job, understands the importance of working and making money to provide for his needs, and wants independence. Currently, he is living with his mom. However, he has the desire to live independently. In fact, he stated, "I want a full-time job and save my money to get an apartment."

Like Noah, one of Jacob's transition goals was to have a job after high school. Jacob is very confident and ambitious. He is thirty years old and completed high school with a certificate of completion. Jacob participated in the community-based instruction (CBI) program during high school. CBI is a school-based, hands-on instructional program that promotes the teaching and use of functional and academic skills students with MMID will use as adults at home and in their community. These students remain at their high school or a high school within their district until age 22. The CBI program allowed Jacob the opportunity to learn and practice vocational skills.

He had many responsibilities and was given leadership roles during high school. Jacob had paid off-campus jobs at the local hardware store and retail shops as part of the CBI program. He had CBI instruction in the mornings and went to work in the afternoon. For Jacob, his teachers in the CBI program helped him learn work skills. He described his experiences: "People liked me, the teachers and administrators like me, and they let me work." Additionally, he explained that these skills helped him transition into gainful employment upon completing the CBI program. After high school, he had many jobs, and now he is working for a major delivery company.

Similar to Jacob, Abel participated in the CBI program during high school. Abel is a twenty-one-year-old, very expressive, and outgoing young man who recently completed high school with a certificate of completion. He provided details of his CBI training and explained how he enjoyed the program because he could leave campus and work at different places. He worked at a childcare center, a retail store, and a hardware store. Unfortunately, he could not continue the program because of the pandemic, "Everything had to stop." Although he could not complete the CBI program, Abel was optimistic about finding a job.

Martha is twenty-nine years old and completed high school with a certificate of completion. Another student participant utilized her CBI program skills and gained employment after high school. Her ITP goal was to have a job immediately after high school. When asked how you are using your skills from the CBI program as an adult. Martha proudly replied, "I was working at XYZ grocery store. uh, doing different stuff like stocking, getting, carts and bagging, and sweeping the mats." She added that she had to stop working once the pandemic happened, and she's looking for a job now. Working allows these students to earn their own money, create a sense of pride, make decisions and choices, manage a budget, and have access to make purchases and acquire things. The high school transition programs helped them develop

vocational skills, self-management, the skill set, and confidence to interview, acquire, and maintain employment, all of which are necessities of adulthood and independence.

In addition to student participants, seven parent/guardian participants indicated the importance of their adult children working and earning their own money to live on their own and be more independent. Two parent participants directly connected vocation to their children's independence. Ms. Peter is a forty-seven-year-old single mother of student participant Noah. She wanted to ensure Noah had all the skills necessary to avail him of post-high school success; therefore, she was very active during Noah's transition from high school to post-high school settings. When Noah entered 12th grade, Ms. Peter was highly passionate about the success of his future and researched potential options for him. During the ITP process for Noah, Ms. Peter expressed to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team that she wanted his plan to have the best transition skills to ensure his independence as he entered adult life. The IEP team decided for Noah to complete high school with a certificate of completion and transition to the trade school that partners with the high school. For Ms. Peter, this option would further develop the skills Noah needed to attain employment. When Ms. Peter was asked how Noah practiced self-determination, she associated self-determination with maintaining employment, "He is determined. He has a job, and he knows that he can go to amusement parks if he works hard and saves some money." This transition experience illustrates how a strong relationship between high school and community college or trade school programs can impact student success during the transition process.

Similarly, Ms. Timothy was an active parent during her son's high school transition process. She is the fifty-three-year-old single mother of student participant Jacob. While her son was in high school, she initially wanted him to go to college like his cousins, family friends, and

peers; however, she realized that he needed additional support to access college independently. Jacob participated in the CBI program and gained work experience. When he completed the CBI program, he went to community college and worked for the local park. While Jacob was in college, Ms. Timothy's goal shifted from receiving a college degree to gaining the adequate skills necessary to maintain independence during his adult life. She shared how important it was for Jacob to acquire those skills needed to manage his life independently, without the need for her to always navigate for him.

She wanted him to get a job, make his own money, and live on his own one day. She talked about how she works with him on his functional skills to manage day-to-day living skills of time management which enable him to function at a job. Additionally, she connected with the Regional Center. The regional center provided MMID adults with instructional opportunities to further develop vocational and functioning skills. Ms. Timothy wanted Jacob to further develop vocational and functional skills to gain and maintain employment and live independently. In Ms. Timothy's response to the interview question, "How is your child practicing self-determination?" She stated, "He's able to go to work on his own without any help, and he wakes himself up and keeps his work schedule." Ms. Timothy's statement reveals a connection between Jacob's independence in acquiring vocational skills and managing his life correlated to self-determination independently.

Life Skills

The word 'life skills' was mentioned twenty-three times by four students and twenty times by parent participants. Life skills are necessary or desirable for full participation in everyday life. Life skills are the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. Results revealed that student

participants desire to live independently, access public transportation, obtain a driver's license, and improve reading skills. As a result of interview questions about goals in the ITP, current goals now, and practicing self-determination, parent participants also indicated their desire for their adult children to live on their own and obtain a driver's license or ability to use public transportation. Parents/guardians additionally expressed their desires for their adult children to complete daily living skills such as cooking, doing laundry, and making their beds.

Living on their own

Ten student participants expressed the desire to live independently, away from their parents/guardians, and in their apartments. This level of independence provides self-sufficiency and autonomy for accessing adult life. Mary is twenty-one years old and graduated with a high school diploma, and her transition process was different from students who received a certificate of completion. Her classes focused on core academics only (English, Maths, Science, and History). She didn't participate in life skills or vocational courses during high school. She explained how her teachers and counselors guided her to take classes that would help her transition to community college; however, the support of the regional center was instrumental in helping her develop strategies to gain independence.

During the interview, Mary talked about being independent and living independently. She was very detailed in responding to the interview questions. She explained that she didn't receive much support during her high school experience and ITP process. She remembered that one of her ITP goals was to live independently. Correspondingly, in her response to the interview question, "What does independence mean to you?" Mary provided a detailed explanation of the meaning, "If I was living on my own, I'm independent because I'm paying my bills. I have a job, and I could be living in a house on my own." She still lives at home with her mother but shared

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that the Regional Center had a program to help her get an apartment, "...but it didn't happen because of COVID. So, I haven't completed that process yet."

Like Mary, one of Jacob's ITP goals was to live independently. As previously mentioned, the CBI program in high school helped him develop life skills that he currently uses to access independence. He shared that his ITP goal was to live on his own. "I want to live by myself, but my main goal was to improve my reading." He explained his meaning of being independent, "Being dependent on me, like living on my own, doing stuff for myself and doing anything that I can do for myself." Jacob has been living with his mother, and now that he is working, he is saving his money to get an apartment. Both Jacob and Mary continued to work towards the ITP goal of living independently that was established during high school.

Joshua is thirty years old and graduated from high school with a certificate of completion. Joshua confidently provided detailed information in response to questions about his secondary and post-secondary experiences. Joshua attended a non-public school for students who cannot function on a general education campus. Life skills training, which included daily living skills like making the bed, doing the laundry, folding the clothes, budgeting, and managing money, was part of the school's transition process. While living at home with his mother, Joshua practices the life skills he learned during high school, which are necessary to maintain a home. Joshua also shared that he would like to move from his mother's house and have his place. In response to the interview question, Joshua explained what he wants differently in his life and his plans of "making it happen" in his words. "Now that I'm thirty, I need to buckle down and get my place. My plan is still to get an apartment. I've been applying, and I'm waiting. That's my plan." The Regional Center is helping him apply for apartments. While Joshua didn't explicitly

state that living on his own was an ITP goal, he displays determination by concluding that living independently would allow him the independence needed to be an adult.

Four parent/guardian participants also indicated that having an apartment and their adult children living on their own was vital to their children's independence. Ms. Mark is the adoptive mother of two student participants, Abel and Joshua. She is very knowledgeable and provided a wealth of information regarding her experiences with the ITP process. Ms. Mark conveyed that both her sons were provided transition preparation geared to equip them for post-school life during high school. She expressed that her goal was to live independently; however, her sons still live at home. She was especially eager for Joshua, who is thirty years old, to move and get an apartment. "I want him to move on and get an apartment with a roommate and live independently." Ms. Mark sought support from the Regional Center to help Joshua get an apartment. Still, her experience became frustrating, "Joshua had applied for different apartments and roommates and different things to be funded by the Regional Center. It was fine with the counselor and the housing group. And we did interviews and everything. Then, suddenly, the president of the Regional Center took his paperwork and said he didn't qualify. So, why didn't he qualify? He's your client?" Despite her efforts to accomplish having her son live independently, Ms. Mark has been left without continuing to find resources to support this endeavor of independence.

Similarly, both Ms. Timothy and Ms. Peter shared the sentiment and goal of independent living for their children. Ms. Timothy connects independence with sustainability, and Jacob can live independently. She states, "I would like him to move out and have his place, his apartment and just sustain himself." Likewise, Ms. Peter relates independence to Noah having his

apartment but adds his learning to cook as a skill needed to accomplish this goal. She said, "He just wants to have an apartment, but he wants to learn how to cook and be independent."

Additionally, Ms. Simon's goal is similar to the other parents/guardians, " I would like to see her living alone, or maybe we can live nearby or close together." Ms. Simon is the mother of student participant Mary. Ms. Simon advocated for Mary to get a high school diploma despite her disability of MMID. Mary was on the diploma track, which did not include life skills or vocational training. During high school, Mary didn't participate in transition training. Ms. Simon provided those independent living skills for her daughter, "During high school and now, I show her how to do certain things….she helps around the house and has chores and responsibilities." Realizing that she needed more support to help her daughter, Ms. Simon was determined to ensure Mary had the skills necessary to live independently and provided her with experiences to develop her independence. Ms. Simon connected with the Regional Center during Mary's 12th-grade year, "With the help of the Regional Center and me, she'll be able to reach her transition goals."

Transportation/Driver's License

Acquiring a driver's license requires an understanding of how to operate a vehicle, being responsible and attentive, understanding the laws of the road, and being able to navigate the surrounding areas. Having transportation and a driver's license was viewed as having the freedom and autonomy of having immediate access to come and go and complete daily living desires, managing life, and having a sense of independence. Three of the ten student participants wanted better access to transportation or got a driver's license. Only one student participant wanted to get a driver's license. Abel was the only student that expressed the desire to learn how to drive and get a car. He adamantly said that one of his transition goals was to "Get a license to

drive where I need to go." When asked, "How are you going to accomplish this goal?" Abel said, "Right now, I'm working on it and practicing."

The other two students were satisfied with knowing how to use public transportation, ride their bikes, or use rideshare. Noah explained that he either walks or uses public transportation. He said, "I know how to take the buses to get to work." Jacob explained that independence meant riding his bike everywhere he wanted to go. He rides his bike to work, the beach, meets up with friends or explores the city. Jacob said he might get a driver's license one day, but he's fine on his bike. He stated, "I mostly ride my bike to work, go to the beach, mingle with people, and have fun." When asked, "How did you learn to get around?" Both participants explained that it was a part of their training in high school. These transition experiences helped them transfer learned skills and apply them to their adult lives.

Two parent/guardian participants stated having a driver's license is a huge part of their children's independence. Ms. Simon provided detailed examples of how she helped her daughter access independence by using public transportation to navigate the community to get to school daily. She explained, "During her senior year, she wanted some kind of normalcy, so she would cancel the school bus, walk to the bus stop and ride the city bus to school." She added that Mary is accessing her ITP goals; "She is competent. She is interested in learning and driving, and she wants a driver's license….I want her to learn how to drive and get a license…her brother wants to take her and start practicing driving." On the contrary, Mary didn't express the desire to get a driver's license as one of her ITP goals or currently as an adult. Although Mary made transitional progress relative to accessing transportation, her ITP goal for independence was quite different from her mother's goals.

Ms. Joseph shared that she wants her son to drive himself places. Ms. Joseph is the mother of student participant David. Currently, she's driving David everywhere. In fact, during the interview, she stated that she needed to pause to go and pick him up. She explained how it's time-consuming to go back and forth. She further explained that she would like him to be more independent and learn how to drive, get a license, and transport. Like Ms. Simon, Ms. Joseph had the desire and goal of her son getting a driver's license, but that was not his ITP goal. He is okay with using rideshare or having his mother drive him. In these two cases, both parent/guardian participants had their ideas and goals for independence related to driving; however, it was quite different from their children.

Cooking

Two students mentioned cooking as a skill needed to live independently and be independent. Jacob shared how he learned to cook while in the CBI program during high school. "In high school, I did take a cooking class, I had a nice cooking teacher too, and I was very good too." He was asked, "How are you using your high-school transitional skills?" He further explained, "I'm putting them to good use. I'm cooking for my mother. Yeah. And I'm cooking for myself." As a result, Jacob has transferred the skills learned from the CBI program in high school to his everyday adult life.

David also shared his experiences with cooking. He took a cooking class as part of his high school vocational program, and he learned to make grocery lists, shop at the store, and cook simple meals. As an adult, he, too, could use the skills from his class. He excitedly said, "Oh, yeah, I cook when I get a chance because I like to cook, I like to cook for my best friend." For these participants, the vocational cooking classes were instrumental in helping them read recipes, create grocery lists, grocery shop, use money and get change, measure items, prepare meals, and

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use the stove, all of which are fundamental skills required for making simple meals and being independent.

Four parent/guardian participants identified cooking as a life skill that indicates independence. They conveyed that they would like their children to be able to cook full meals or use a microwave so that they would be able to be more independent at home. They also indicated that this level of independence provides self-sufficiency and autonomy for accessing adult life; cooking for oneself is vital to being self-sufficient.

The parent/guardian participants spoke about how the CBI program was instrumental in preparing their children with important skills that they are using today as an adult. Ms. Adams, the mother of Christian, expounded on her son's high school transition experiences, "Being out in the community was the biggest thing Christian could do. They made grocery lists, did grocery store runs, found the items, and purchased them. He got on the bus and went to the store. This is valuable because he uses the things he got in the CBI program, and this is bond because he is still doing them to this day."

Correspondingly, Ms. Mark's experiences were similar. She shared, "As guardians or parents or foster parents or whatever, we got to do more teaching with our kids and not depend on the school to do everything. I let them cook in the kitchen, make their lunches, and go shopping. I let them practice the skills they learned at school." For Ms. Mark, she views herself as an extension of the school to reinforce her skills, and she encourages all her children to practice independence. Ms. Timothy passionately explained how Jacob uses the skills he learned during high school to help him reach his ITP goal of independent living. She stated,

He had a desire to potentially cook. He cooks very well, and he cooks meals thoroughly.

Three prep, you know, with meat, veggies, and starch. I had to eat them, but we got to the point where I enjoyed coming home and having a home-cooked meal. You know, turkey and chicken and everything, grilled or baked potato, baked ham with veggies. I like his food, and I'm like, where's my meal?... Those are some of the things that he has been working on that he's been able to obtain.

Although Mary's vocational instructional experience occurred after high school after receiving services from the Regional Center, Ms. Simon explained how she would prepare and teach Mary how to do basic things. Still, as previously stated, Ms. Simon realized that Mary required more intense services and support to help her accomplish independent living goals. She said, "Before the pandemic, she [Mary] was enrolled in a socialization class that helped her with life skills like cooking, cleaning, and household things. Now she's helping around the kitchen and cooking and stuff because she can, she can make certain things, but a lot of it is a microwave and toaster oven, um, not stovetop stuff."

College

College was mentioned twelve times by seven students and three parents/guardians eight times. Seven of the student participants acknowledged the goal of going to college after high school. They indicated that college access was important, or it was, in fact, a goal, during the transition process. Analysis of the interview data revealed that only four of these participants attended community college or trade school after high school. The one student who participated in trade school learned several trades and considered his experience successful; however, the three participants that attended community college didn't finish and eventually dropped out.

Jacob explained to the transition teacher that college was one of his goals after completing high school. He stated, "I told him I would go to college and make something

myself. Then I went to Community College. I went there, but I didn't finish." Like Jacob, Mary also set a goal for college. When asked, "What was your transition goal after high school?" Mary responded, "College," "My goals after high school were going to college and trying it out, but it got hard, and I didn't have help."

Joshua shared his experience with his IEP team about transitioning from high school. He explained, "They asked me if I want to go to college first, and I say, yeah, college. That's the first thing I did once I graduated from high school and went straight to college as boom stayed there. And I messed up in college, and I only got one year left. So, I'm going to finish that." Joshua was unbothered because he had spent ten years at the community college without completing a degree or a certificate. Instead, he continued to desire to finish the goal he set for himself in high school.

Three parents/guardians also expressed how attending college or trade school contributed to their child's independence. Ms. Peter had a very positive experience and explained how trade school was instrumental in her son learning vocational skills that helped him attain a sustainable job. She shared her ideas about college, "The goal to get him [Noah] out of high school with his class and for him to go to a trade college right after high school; She continued to express her sentiments of joy, "I proudly say he has got a job and is doing trade work. He went to a trade college and learned three different trades. And he was happy with that. He would tell me what he would do, and he liked that."

On the other hand, Ms. Mark and Ms. Simon had opposite experiences with community college. Ms. Mark emphatically expressed, "He [David] went to community college for ten years and still didn't accomplish a degree or anything. It was a waste of time." Ms. Simon shared a similar experience. She explained:

She [Mary] said she wanted to be a veterinarian, so they put her in Biology classes;

"her major was biology. She had the most challenging classes, and she was not given

help, guidance, or instruction…. She was not doing well. And we had to fix that. And

when I talked to one of the counselors there, that's when they told me that it was about

funding, and they don't hold hands, and the students have to do stuff for themselves.

Student participants were given the option to attend college during the ITP process.

Although attending college and attaining a degree was a desired ITP goal, none of the

student participants have accomplished that goal. The coordination of support during the ITP

process was the missing link for these student participants. Additionally, once these students

were enrolled, even though they knew there was a support center on campus, it was still difficult

for them to access support, and there were no effective plans put in place for them to complete

their programs. There was a lack of follow-up; thus, many students attended for several years

without the support to help them realistically navigate their matriculation. Figure twelve below

represents the participants' ITP process and their current work status.

Figure 12

Participants Work Status
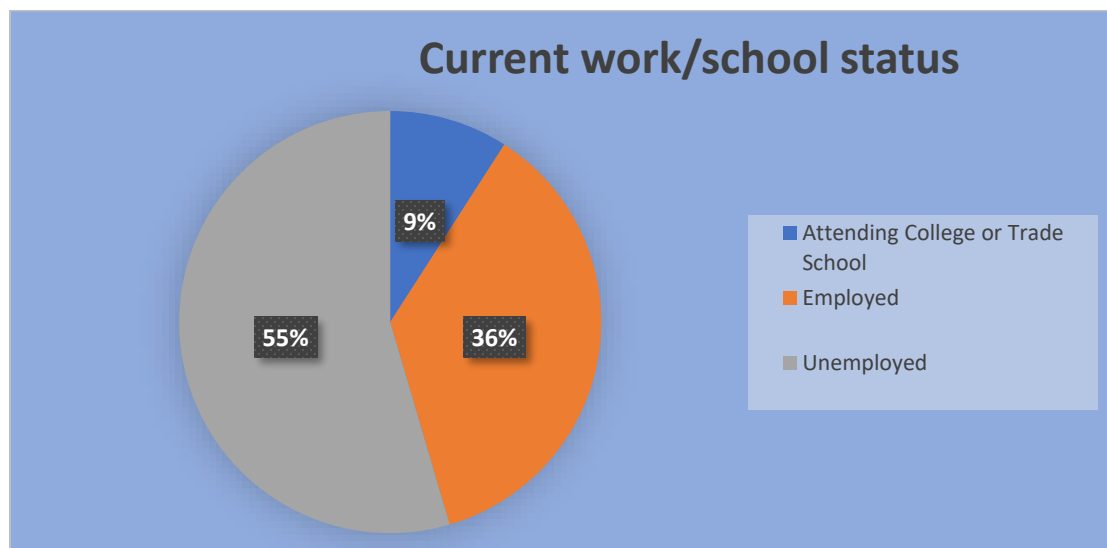
Autonomy

Autonomy is the state of self-determination and independence that the participants in this study identified as being able to govern their lives by making decisions on their own and generating income (Cherry, 2021). Making decisions and money was identified as an indication of autonomy based on student participants' and parent/guardian participants' responses. Even though five of the participants were unemployed, the talk of having access to money was prevalent. Participants do realize the autonomy money can bring them

Making Decisions

Decision-making is a process that requires multiple levels of thinking and the ability to gather information and evaluate the complexity of circumstances. When asked, "What does independence mean to you?' "Making my own decisions" was the common response for all ten student participants. For these students, making their own decisions is related to adult life and independence. They need to make choices about their jobs, school, health and wellness, and relationships. When Jacob describes his idea of having autonomy, he emphatically says, "Being my own man and not depending on anybody," "I do what I want to do." Jacob continued to explain how he has his job and makes his own money. Like Jacob, Joshua was also very confident when sharing his ideas about the meaning of independence. He stated, "I make decisions on my own. If I'm going to make a decision, I just do it. If I just don't make a decision, I'll just leave it alone."

Seven parent/guardian participants equated independence to making decisions. For these parents/guardians, the ability of their adult children to make their own decisions was the pathway to being independent. When asked, "How are they using their transition skills from high school?" Ms. Simon provided an example of Mary's ability to make decisions independently. She said,

"She sets her schedule and makes her appointments, and she communicates with the Regional Center on her own. She's very determined to make her own decisions."

On the other hand, Ms. Timothy wants Jacob to develop more decision-making skills. She expressed concerns about Jacob not making effective decisions or decisions that could be harmful. She shared an experience when Jacob was taken advantage of because he didn't make a calculated decision. Specifically, he had his money taken from him by a woman who claimed to be his friend. When Ms. Timothy inquired why he gave his money to the woman, Jacob replied, "Mom, she's my friend. I was trying to help her." Ms. Timothy felt Jacob had good intentions but felt he had been used or taken advantage of because the woman he met on social media convinced him to drain his bank account of $2,000 and never pay the money back.

Money

Money was mentioned eleven times by four of the student participants. They equated having money, saving money, or making money with accessing independence now and in the future. Having their own money is vital to their independence. Jacob stated, "I like getting paid and buying things, eating at the restaurant with my friends. I treat myself then go get some nice things for my mom." He continued to share his ideas for the future, "What I'm doing right now, I'm saving up a lot of money for, uh, my future. I'm saving up some money, and I want to own my game truck and business. So that's why I'm saving that for." Joshua stated, "I work, and I'm saving my money to get my apartment… work and save my money. So that's what I've been doing now." Making money gave these participants access to acquire goods, dine out, socialize, and treat others. This idea of autonomy made them feel in control of their own lives.

Self-Advocacy

Prior evidence in the literature suggests self-advocacy is the step towards self-determination, and it is the ability to advocate for oneself and understand and communicate one's individual needs (Paradiz, 2018). The participants in this study view self-advocacy as an important skill to understand and express their individual needs.

Noah is competent and can navigate his life as an adult. However, he didn't see himself speaking up and expressing his desires. Martha, 29 years old and timid, responded, "I'm not very good at speaking up for myself," " I'm still working on that." Ten percent said they sometimes speak up. David rated his ability to advocate. He asserted, "Sometimes. From 1 to 10. Uh, I give myself a seven." Three participants stated that they speak up.

Mary continued to elaborate about the doctor's office situation when she felt another nurse could help her better. Mary vividly recalled, "I remember going to the doctor, and I had to get a shot, and I told them that I need a new person, like someone who is trained, not training to do this. I need somebody who knows what they are doing because I'm a hard poker."

Parent/guardian participants especially perceived self-advocacy as a confidence booster that provides a skill set for their children to express themselves, their views, or interests. Advocating for oneself is an important skill that is generally acquired and developed throughout life. The evidence of the results of this study is presented in the following two charts below. Figure thirteen proposed participants' self-advocacy as an adult, and figure fourteen presented participants' self-advocacy during the middle, high, and post-secondary levels. It could be concluded from both figures that participants don't always take the opportunity to speak up for themselves.

Figure 13

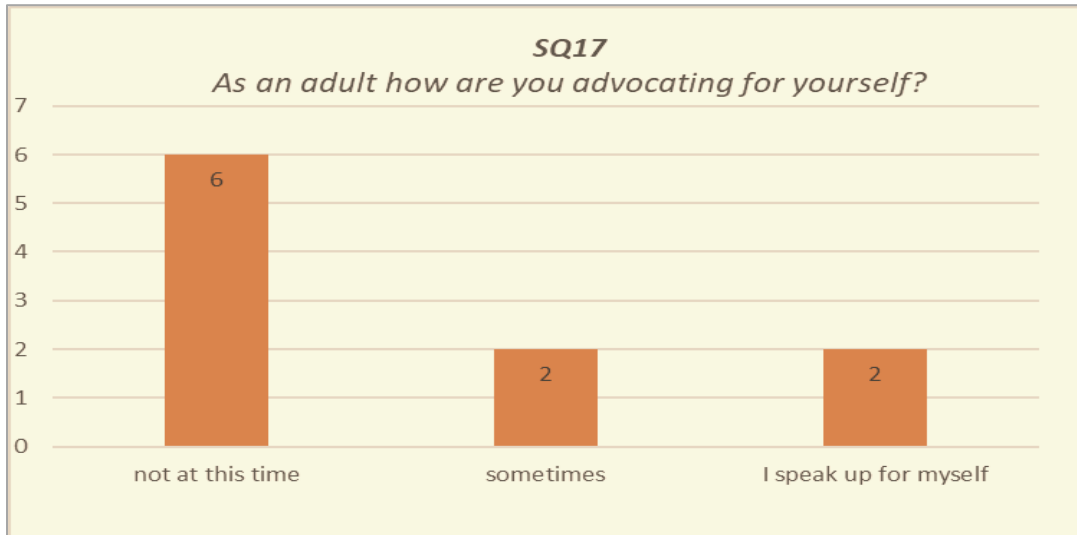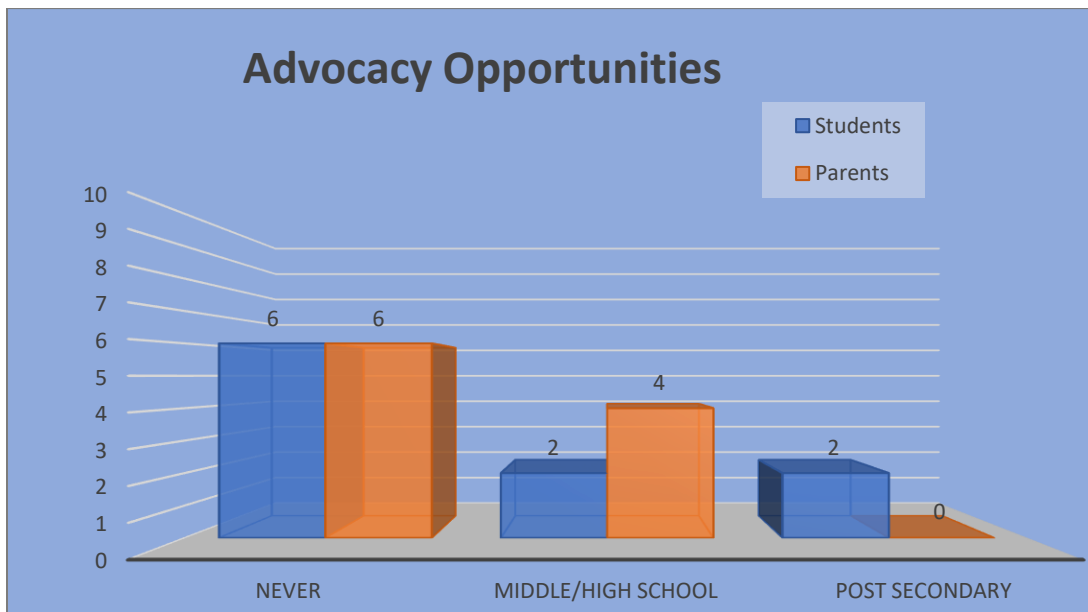*Student Participants' Self-Advocacy as an Adult*

Figure 14

Participants' Self-Advocacy During Middle, High, and Post-Secondary Levels

Self-determination, autonomy, and self-advocacy are important concepts when managing

one's life. Participants described their determination to develop the skills needed to live

independently through interviews. Student participants look to family for support while simultaneously seeking independence. Participants recognized that having vocational skills, life skills, and attending college are important aspects of independence. Participants showed self-determination by speaking to economic goals such as obtaining a job and paying bills. They want to get a job, make money, and live independently one day. While some participants can find jobs, they still live at home with their parents. Parent/guardian participants also indicated that having an apartment and their adult children living on their own was vital to their children's independence. However, students still need the support of their families. Participants believed that having a job, transportation, and a driver's license gives them freedom and autonomy to have a complete life. Participants desire to make choices about their jobs, school, health and wellness, and relationships.

Summary of Findings

Data were collected by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten students with MMID and ten parents/guardians of students with MMID who completed the ITP process during high school. Each participant was asked 20 interview questions. This approach enabled me to gather in-depth information on how students with MMID practice self-determination and self- during the ITP process. The findings were outlined within the three themes aligned with the three research questions. The results captured the transition experiences of students and parents/guardians, the role of self-advocacy and self-determination in the transition process from high school to post-secondary life, and how guardians monitor the post-secondary transition progress to ensure successful growth and goal attainment as it relates to the ITP.

The results of theme one outlined ITP participation and support systems that influenced positive outcomes for students with MMID. Most students did not participate in their final ITP or

demonstrate self-advocacy during high school, and ITP planning was conducted either without their input or understanding of the process. The teachers' role in the ITP process was identified as the only school-based support by all participants. The teacher influenced advocacy opportunities, ensured transition skills, or provided all the transition information during middle and high school. The teachers provided students and parents with the necessary resources, training, support, and guidance for the transition process. Family and friends were identified as parents, church members, or themselves as a supporter. The Regional Center also played an important role in the ITP process.

Theme two results indicated the importance of training and preparations for successful transitioning into post-secondary living. Student participants identified two areas of training vocational skills training and life skills training. The results showed that students who participated in either training program could apply the skills to their individual lives. In some cases, the student used the skills learned to gain and maintain employment. Parent training regarding the ITP process was not a priority for many secondary settings, and only three parents stated the school provided them with formal training about the ITP process.

The final theme of self-determination was demonstrated when student participants discussed the economic goals of getting a job and paying bills. Student participants stated that having vocational skills, life skills, and attending college are essential aspects of independence. Participants also indicated that having a job, transportation, and a driver's license gives them freedom and autonomy to have a complete life. They desired to make choices about their jobs, school, health and wellness, and relationships.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Qualitative research on students with MMID is sparse, and student perspectives and voices are largely missing. Students with MMID transition to post-secondary educational environments and the real-world experience more barriers than their typical peers (Banks, 2014). Some of these barriers include a lack of self-advocacy. Students who are not given opportunities to advocate for themselves experience more significant difficulties transitioning into postsecondary settings requiring a voice. (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Brinkerhoff, C. 1994; Connor, 2013; Banks, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the postsecondary transition experiences of students with MMID and their parents/guardians. Findings suggested that students had various opportunities and a range of support systems struck during the ITP process. Students and parents were trained and prepared through programming, support structures, and post-secondary life. Some students were employed and lived at home, but all had independent lives.

Summary of Findings

Participation and Support Systems

Knowing legal mandates and the importance of the transition process is critical for students and parents. Findings suggest an overwhelming acknowledgment of positive teacher support from student and parent/guardian participants. According to student participants, the school team shared post-secondary options to either go to a work program or community college during the transition process. However, students did not feel a part of the decision-making process as they were not involved, nor did they think they could express their opinions regarding their transition goals. This supported the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

1986, which provides students ages 14 through 22 years old with an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The ITP ensures adequate and successful transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, work, and independent living. Having a great support system in life is crucial as it can help to alleviate the pressure when dealing with difficult situations. All participants indicated their parent(s)/guardian(s) were present, their teachers were present, and they individually were present at their final IEP/ITP meetings. However, student participants indicated that neither a school administrator nor a Regional Center representative was present at the last IEP/ITP meetings. This contrasts with parents participants who indicated that parent(s)/guardian(s), teacher, administrator, Regional Center representative, and the student, were present at their final meeting.

Both student participants and parent/guardian participants expressed circumstances when they felt supported by the school and other times when they thought they were unsupported during the ITP process. This supports Bhaumik et al. (2011), who suggested that parents and guardians are not always satisfied with interagency supports and services. Many are unaware that there's a transition plan for their child or how to access the information in the transition plan. Results revealed that one parent could discretely access information from a teacher concerning the next steps for her child. Ninety percent of student participants expressed positive experiences of having support during the ITP process while in high school. Student participants also shared experiences of feeling unsupported during the ITP process.

While all parents/guardians expressed sentiments of being unsupported during the ITP process, ninety percent indicated their children did not create their ITP goals. Their responses suggested that it was already done before the meeting, the teacher had it all written out, or suggestions were offered, but parent input wasn't welcomed. It was also explained how they

were involved, but there was no indication of the student being part of the ITP planning or discussion. Trainor (2010), Winn, and Hay (2009) backed the concern of the parents by reiterating that this is an adult-driven system provided to implement the outcomes generated by the IEP team with the ultimate goal of successful progress and outcomes. Students have very little to manage their academic experience other than being present and completing coursework.

Preparation and Training

Vocation is the ability to have a job or a career. Results revealed participants showed self-determination by speaking about economic goals such as obtaining a job and paying bills. These vocational skills were developed during CBI training programs that student participants were involved in, and participants were able to develop skills they presently utilize in their post-secondary life. This corroborated Cimera et al. (2014), who suggested that schools provide more vocational, social skills, and self-advocacy training opportunities. Life skills are necessary or desirable for full participation in everyday life.

Participants were ecstatic to share their life skills learned in the CBI program. Two participants related their experience in cooking class. Other participants can do home chores, go to the store and help their parents around the house. Parent participants are also grateful for the CBI program because it allows students to learn and practice skills in real-life settings and exposed to their community. Rodrigañez (2020) reiterated this by suggesting that life skills provide the adaptive and positive behavior abilities that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life.

The responsibility for establishing relevant and robust communication rests with the school and the educators (Mounts et al., 2006). Parents were asked what training they participated in to help meet their transition goals. Some parent participants revealed that the

school does not always reach out to them to communicate relevant information. Five parent/guardian participants said they didn't receive any information about the transition. Two indicated the school passed out a few pamphlets. Three participants indicated that options were shared, or the school gave them a list of agencies and one. This validated Frances et al. (2016), who suggested educators must reach out to families with a clear message encouraging participation. Harris and Robertson (2001) further recommended parents be provided with information and training about Post-secondary education transitions into college settings.

Self-Determination

The transition between high school and community college or trade school programs can significantly impact the student success of young adults with mild to moderate disabilities. This transition often requires adapting to a less structured environment. Mitchell et al. (2018) suggested that this change in environment is likely to be more pronounced for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Considering the significant disabilities of people with MMID, it is possible to imagine that their transition experience will be even more complicated and present specific needs (Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2017). Findings from this study revealed that some participants experienced difficulties transitioning as they depended on family members to function in society, while others were more independent.

Self-determination is the heart of the transition process. Students need to know and understand their role in the ITP process to attain more successful outcomes (Wehmeyer, 2002). This is a skill that is developed over time. This study's findings revealed student participants who shared advocacy experiences as an adult demonstrated those skills during middle and high school. As indicated in chapter two, self-determination skills should begin as soon as possible for students with ID to advocate and articulate their needs. Students who cannot advocate for

themselves experience more difficulties transitioning into post-secondary independent life (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Brinkerhoff, 1994; Connor, 2013; Banks, 2014).

A significant finding from this study was how high school transition programs played a role in developing skills to acquire independence. For some participants, the high school transition programs helped them develop vocational skills, self-management, the skill set, and confidence to interview, acquire, and maintain employment, all of which are necessities of adulthood and independence. These skills were developed through the CBI program, which extends the high school years. Findings also suggest that eight participants participated in a community-based instruction (CBI) program, which equipped them with the necessary skills to survive at home and in the community. Researchers suggested that for students to become successful in postsecondary educational settings, they must develop advocacy and self-determination skills (Brinkerhoff, 1994; McCall, 2015; Gil, 2007). Self-determination is important for all people, including students with disabilities. The skills leading to enhanced self-determination, like goal-setting, problem-solving, and decision making, enable students to assume greater responsibility and control (Wehmeyer, 2002).

Many students and parents expressed a strong desire to be independent, be autonomous, and advocate for themselves. While the findings of this study revealed that all participants live at home with their parents, they desire to live independently, and some are working toward that cause. This finding is supported by Wehmeyer (2002), who indicated that when students with disabilities show they can make things happen and take responsibility for planning and decision-making, others change how they view them and what they expect from them. Results revealed that the idea of being independent and having independence as an adult was a commonality for all student and parent/guardian interview participants. Both students and parents/guardians

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identified independence as having vocational skills, life skills, and attending college as important aspects of independence.

People with disabilities have emphasized that having control over their lives, instead of having someone else make decisions for and about them, is important to their self-esteem and self-worth (Wehmeyer, 2002). All participants expressed the desire to live independently, away from their parents/guardians, and in their apartments. This level of independence provides self-sufficiency and autonomy for accessing adult life. Some participants believe they can control their destiny, and they took active steps in seeking independent living spaces and employment. Some desire to acquire driver's licenses and venture into owning a business, access public transportation, and improve reading skills. This self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities that lead them to set goals for themselves and take the initiative to reach these goals. This student-centered planning is the foundation for increasing self-determination and developing self-advocacy for students with MMID, which directly supported Kohler and Field's Taxonomy for Transition Programing Framework (2003) and Test's et al. Conceptual Framework Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities (2005). This framework suggests students with MMID successful transition planning centered on the student promoting self-determination and empowerment.

Seventy percent of parent/guardian participants equated independence to making decisions. For these parents/guardians, the ability of their adult children to make their own decisions was the pathway to being independent. Participants practicing self-determination, parent participants also indicated their desire for their adult children to live independently and obtain a driver's license or ability to use public transportation. Parents/guardians additionally

expressed their desires for their adult children to complete daily living skills such as cooking, doing laundry, and making their beds.

Findings revealed participants showed self-determination by speaking about economic goals such as obtaining a job and paying bills. Student participants were asked about their ITP goals and plans after high school. Ninety percent indicated getting a job. Participants expressed their desire and importance of working. They shared their transition experiences from high school and how it relates to their lives as adults working or aspiring to get a job. Carter et al., 2012; Kaehne & Beyer, 2014; Raghavan et al., 2013; Sankardas & Rajanahally, 2015) suggested that gainful employment is a desire all adults have to be independent and care for daily living needs, wants, and desires. However, for students with MMID finding gainful employment is often a barrier and more complex. Seventy percent of parent/guardian participants indicated the importance of their adult children working and earning their own money to live independently and be more independent. Also, forty percent of parent/guardian participants indicated that having an apartment and their adult children living on their own was vital to their children's independence.

Limitations of the Study

Every study inherently possesses advantages and disadvantages, drawbacks, and limitations. While the purpose of my research was accomplished, the following limitations could affect the interpretation of the results. Despite these limitations, this study is important and sought to explore students' and parents' experiences by allowing only their voices to be explored. This provided a personal aspect of students' experiences that could inform best practices for students with MMID from their perspective.

My first limitation existed due to the student participants' cognition. Their ability to

process information and provide rich and in-depth information could be limited. Participants in the study are students who experience a variety of disabilities, and these varying disabilities may have prevented them from articulating ideas and opinions correctly and consistently.

A second limitation is gathering interview data exclusively from a small group of students and guardian guardians. Even though they provided rich data that yielded great results, a more extensive group selection would have provided even more detailed and accurate data that represented this venerable population of students. Also, accessing other data sources such as examining transition documents and teacher and staff interviews would have entirely represented the transition process.

Finally, my 25+ years working with students with disabilities created familiarity with the research topic. Having expert knowledge of best practices and good practices around secondary transition could potentially taint my perspective. I am passionate about this group of students and work with them daily. I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the inequities and lack of access students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) face as I spent many years working with them. In addition, I had a previous relationship with some of the participants, which may have influenced the information of what and how they shared information with me.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The key findings and the study results point towards implications for policy and practice for special education teachers, administrators, colleges, and universities. These implications for policy practice could significantly impact educational institutions and the community. Therefore, addressing the need to examine the experiences and postsecondary transition outcomes for young adults with mild to moderate disabilities.

High school personnel must take a more hands-on approach to help students with ID self-advocating during the ITP meetings. Findings from this study point to the integral role of the teacher in the ITP process and the post-secondary transition process. However, results also suggested that key personnel (e.g., administrators) were absent. High school personnel must take a more hands-on and coordinated approach. This will allow students to participate in the decision-making process concerning their transition. Findings indicated that parents and students felt that they were not fully involved in the transition process. School personnel, specifically administrators, should have more knowledge and training around transition planning for all students, including students on alternate curriculum.

High school, college, and guidance counselors must know the potential paths and pathways for students and resources on alternate curriculum such as regional centers, trade schools, and vocational centers and have these resources available for parents and students. Results showed that administrators and counselors were not involved in the transition process. High school college counselors should not rely solely on the teacher to provide this level of support. This support could be lessened if self-determination programs are incorporated into their curriculum for students with MMID to give them a head start.

As of July 1, 2021, the California Department of Developmental Services started the Self Determination Program for adults with developmental disabilities. The study found that only one parent knew of such a law and had taken advantage of it for her child. However, if other parents were aware of this law, they could have benefited. There should be a policy to promote self-advocacy and involvement in transition planning, given this new addition. Schools should provide more vocational, social skills, and self-advocacy training opportunities for all students with MMID, whether on diploma or certificate of completion graduation track. Results showed

that while students were on the diploma track, they did not receive the necessary skills to transition to independence. Students should be given their voice. Therefore, self-advocacy skills should be encouraged to provide a voice for students transitioning as early as middle school.

The ITP must be comprehensive and specific to students' interests, aptitude, and achievements with disabilities. It is an important legal component of the student's IEP in addressing how the school will meet the transitional needs of its newest high school graduate. However, students transitioning into postsecondary educational settings experience many challenges. Students with MMID are not fully privileged to educational funding and the many resources available for students with disabilities. They must self-identify and advocate for themselves to acquire resources. Students are not always aware of such resources, so they don't have equal opportunities to benefit from the available resources for students with disabilities on college and university campuses. As a result, these students fall between the cracks and go unnoticed sometimes for years. Participants indicated that they were not given opportunities to share their ideas, needs, and wants for their transition goals; therefore, resources were not accessible. Colleges and universities should be more transparent with these resources and make them more readily available for students with MMID.

A shared relationship with colleges and universities would benefit students with MMID. Results indicated that when students enter colleges, they are academically challenged and have difficulty accessing college resources. Students mentioned that they found it arduous to maneuver their way around campus. If college personnel and counselors familiarize themselves with incoming students with disabilities, they could establish a relationship and mediate this problem. These colleges and universities could also assist in sending a transfer specialist and

planning a visit to local schools. They could share resources and discuss how the college accommodates students with disabilities.

According to federal law, students must self-select to disclose their disability in college. They must go to one of the following agencies to get support: The Disability Services Office, the Center for students with disabilities, the Student Success Center, or whatever name is allocated to such program. This visit could be eliminated if colleges and universities provide an extended preliminary tour for incoming 1st year students and students new to the college and university. This will allocate more time to prepare students to request services, which form to take to professors to share accommodations and recommend a peer for payment. Students indicated that they could not maneuver around campus due to a lack of knowledge about the surroundings.

Most importantly, colleges and universities' students and personnel should develop a mindset of inclusion. The way students with IDs are viewed is critical, and there should be a great sense of sensitivity in how these students are viewed. It would be beneficial if Adjunct Professors, Lecturers, and Professors take a tour to visit the student in the resource centers on campus as part of the Welcome Back Initiatives each year to familiarize themselves with the services being offered, the changes made to services that were offered, and the new services being offered to support a new population such as re-entry. Together, these recommendations would equip students with MMID with the necessary skills to make transitioning from high school to post-secondary life easier.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a gap in the literature specifically related to students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities transitioning from high school to post-secondary living. This dissertation provided an opportunity for this marginalized group to share their voice. Student and parent/

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guardian perspectives and experiences described the importance of continuing research on this group of individuals. The present study offers recommendations for young adults with mild to moderate disabilities in examining the experiences and postsecondary transition outcomes. These recommendations are also beneficial to care providers of young adults with ID and educators and community members. Young adults with ID must receive appropriate assistance and accommodations, continually learn to become independent, develop valued social roles, and have their voices heard to enhance social inclusion. To meet such accomplishments, it is important to provide the necessary abilities to prepare them to succeed in life, academically and socially. This might seem like an arduous task. However, with collaboration and effective planning, the task can be achievable. My goal was to conduct a phenomenological study to address the need to examine the experiences and postsecondary transition outcomes for young adults with mild to moderate disabilities. As a result, I propose four recommendations from the findings for others to consider when utilizing this research.

First, I propose expanding this study by broadening the pool of participants and widening the area and location to recruit potential subjects with a larger population, including students with MMID who transition to college. It would be beneficial for stakeholders, parents, educators, and the community to have a more distinct view of the challenges posed to young adults with ID transitioning from colleges to universities.

A second recommendation is to consider pairing parents and students in the study to get a holistic perspective of the support provided in the home and school. The responses varied greatly when the parent and students were paired while conducting the study. For instance, one parent said, "He doesn't advocate for himself." Yet, when this question was posed to the student, he

exclaimed, "I advocate for myself all the time." I recommend pairing to get a clearer picture of the family's experience and compare parent and child responses.

A third recommendation is to incorporate more teachers' perspectives by surveying and interviewing teachers and to survey Regional Center representatives since they provide resources and support to families outside of school resources. Teachers play an integral part in the students' lives as they are tasked with teaching, nurturing, training, and other duties. They would provide valuable information based on their interaction and experience with the student.

The fourth recommendation would be to extend this study using a mixed-methods approach to better understand the problem. This method can provide stronger evidence in conclusion through convergence and collaboration of findings. Furthermore, a mixed-method research approach allows the researcher to add insights and methods that might be omitted when only a single method is adopted (UK Essays, 2018). Finally, this method allows the researcher to simplify to increase the simplicity of the results. Since the mixed methods of research are all about incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the researcher can produce the complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice (UK Essays, 2018). Both approaches combined can lead to a better understanding of the research purpose as they can provide more insights, allow validation, and provide more information. Finally, the fifth recommendation would be to complete the study using students with MMID who transitioned to colleges and universities. This transition would allow the researcher to gather specific data on the successes and supports needed for students with MMID as they navigate college campuses.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study examined the experiences and postsecondary transition outcomes for young adults with Mild to Moderate Disabilities. The study results depicted

participants' responses describing their experiences transitioning from different educational levels to post-secondary life. They used valuable examples to describe their experiences and provided details that assisted the research study. Participants allowed us to understand how they saw, viewed, approached, and experienced the transition process. Participants presented several different viewpoints on how they were supported through the transition process. For the most part, results revealed that this process has not been a smooth and welcoming one. This could be due to the lack of communication, as both student and parent participants mentioned.

The participants from this study were very outspoken about the role of the teacher being the nucleus for helping develop transition skills necessary for students to become self-determined. The most critical factors of self-determination that were prominent themes throughout this study were the notions of independence, autonomy, and self-advocacy. Self-determination refers to each person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. Throughout all interviews, the desire for adult students with MMID to demonstrate self-determination by gaining independence by securing employment, making money, and living independently, away from their parents, and in their apartments.

The important role that high school transition programs play in supporting students in developing skills to acquire independence is significant. Being independent and having independence as an adult was common for all student and parent/guardian interview participants. Both students and parents/guardians identified independence as having vocational skills, life skills, and attending college as important aspects of independence.

A significant life skill identified by student participants as essential was transportation. Having better access to transportation and a driver's license was viewed as having the freedom and autonomy of having immediate access to come and go and complete daily living desires,

managing life, and having a sense of independence. However, acquiring a driver's license requires understanding how to operate a vehicle, being responsible and attentive, understanding the laws of the road, and being able to navigate the surrounding areas. Although thirty percent of student participants want to either have or get a driver's license, it is my opinion that they may lack the resources and may not be aware of the requirements for getting a driver's license. For example, only one student participant expressed the desire to learn how to drive and get a car. Others were satisfied with knowing how to use public transportation, ride their bikes, or use rideshare. No participants mentioned any awareness of programs that aid students with MMID with acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to learn the road laws, obtain a driver's license, and operate a vehicle safely and responsibly.

Surprisingly, although cooking is a valuable life skill of benefit for someone living independently, only two students mentioned any desire to cook. Participation in either a high school vocation or CBI program or learning through the Regional Center helped them acquire this skill. On the other hand, forty percent of parent/guardian participants identified cooking as a life skill that indicates independence. They conveyed that they would like their children to be able to cook full meals or use a microwave so that they would be able to be more independent at home. Participants also indicated that this level of independence provides self-sufficiency and autonomy for accessing adult life; cooking for oneself is vital to being self-sufficient.

Student participants indicated that college access was necessary or it was, in fact, a goal during the transition process. The study results revealed that only four student participants attended community college or trade school after high school. The one student that participated in trade school learned several trades and considered his experience successful; however, the three participants that attended community college didn't finish and eventually dropped out. It is

apparent that high school programs do an adequate job of helping students with MMID transition into post-secondary careers or educational opportunities; however, there appears to be a significant decrease in support once a transition to community college happens. Either an intense amount of support may be needed at the community college level throughout the entire academic career of students with MMID, or the reality may be that career and trade programs are the best options for them to gain independence which provides self-sufficiency and autonomy in adult life.

Despite having a MMID, the adult student participants also desire to be autonomous and advocate for themselves. Autonomy is the state of self-determination and independence that the participants in this study identified as their ability to govern their own lives by making decisions and generating income. Making decisions and making their own money from their jobs were sub-themes identified of autonomy based on student participants' and parent/guardian participants' responses. Decision-making is a process that requires multiple levels of thinking and the ability to gather information and evaluate the complexity of circumstances. For these students, making their own decisions is related to adult life and independence. It is significant for them to make choices about their jobs, school, health and wellness, and relationships. It is important to note that problem-solving skills, navigating risks, and anticipating outcomes are critical factors for students with MMID, especially regarding making and managing their own money.

Student participants equated having money, saving money, or making money with accessing independence now and in the future. Having their own money is vital to their independence. Making their own money allows student participants to achieve economic goals such as obtaining a job and paying bills. For the student participants, making money gave them

access to acquire goods, dine out, socialize, and treat others. This idea of autonomy made them feel in control of their own lives; however, the student participants need to be cautious of the potential for others to try to take advantage of their MMID, especially when it comes to managing their own money. One parent participant discussed the negative impact of her child's poor decision-making, which caused him to be a victim where he lost and never recovered $2,000 from his bank account. That kind of poor decision-making could have devastating consequences on any student participants' ability to remain independent, live on their own away from their parents and in their apartments, and their ability to pay bills.

Self-advocacy is the step towards self-determination. It is the ability to advocate for oneself and being able to understand and communicate one's individual needs. The participants in this study view self-advocacy as an important skill to understand and express their individual needs. The majority of adult student participants stated that they never advocate or speak up for themselves. Many parent/guardian participants believed that their children couldn't participate in the conversation during the IEP/ITP meetings. Because parent/guardian participants felt they were not personally equipped with or knowledgeable of the process, they allowed their children's teachers to determine the best course for their children's futures. They felt the teachers could know what was best for their children. Although many expressed that they did not have the opportunity to advocate for themselves, at least some student participants (20%) and parent/guardian participants (40%) shared that advocacy opportunities were experienced while enrolled in K-12 schools, especially during middle and high school.

In conclusion, I offer several recommendations on multiple levels: individual-level, parental level; school site/district; and higher education/institutional level. These recommendations served to improve the experience for youth with disabilities. This unique

group of students must acquire the necessary skills and overcome the many challenges they face at work. Although extensive research has been conducted surrounding this topic, there continue to be gaps in the literature. Research documenting adequate supports that aid students in successfully transitioning from high school to higher educational settings are limited. The transition process varies by state, disability, and by academic rigor.

Additionally, Kohler and Field (2006) and Gil (2007) have provided several recommendations to address the lack of support for SWD students transitioning into college settings. Legislation has historically attempted to address the unique needs of students with disabilities. However, data have demonstrated that minimal academic progress has been made. Therefore, reform and policy implementation need to support students with MMID to successfully transition to college, career, and pursuit of a self-determined and independent life (Harris 2006).

EPILOGUE

Through my dissertation, you have read about the challenges faced by young adults with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities. I aimed to give the students and parent/guardian a voice and provide a blueprint to improve transition planning and seek best practices. This I have aimed for the past 13 years, but in many aspects, little or nothing has been done to improve the challenges faced by students with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities. Students with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities yearns for normalcy and, in many respects, seek to acquire such. We read the many excerpts of their struggles, successes, failures, joys, sorrows, pains, and grief. But they are not giving up. Here are a few other quotes that remind us that their struggle continues.

- *For me, I use self-advocacy when the teachers are not communicating. I have to say, okay, why are we not communicating? Let's set up a meeting to communicate. So, you can let people know what will happen in my next phase of life."*
- *"I had to tell the P.E. I need to sit close because of my hearing, and I need a sign language interpreter."*
- *"If I was living on my own, I'm independent because I'm paying my bills. I have a job, and I could be living in a house on my own."*
- *"I want to live by myself, but my main goal was to improve my reading."*
- *"Now that I'm thirty, I need to buckle down and get my place. My plan is still to get an apartment. I've been applying, and I'm waiting. That's my plan."*
- *"My goals after high school were going to college and trying it out, but it got hard, and I didn't have help."*
- *"I told him I would go to college and make something myself. Then I went to the community College. I went there, but I didn't finish".*

With the exhaustion from trying to do it all, parents of students with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities also struggle with feelings of guilt, depression, and fear for the future. Apart from frustrations in accessing services, these parents also face challenges

in beliefs and myths about parenting and parenting children with impairments. You can experience these feelings through some of their quotes.

- *"Students aren't allowed to sit in the IEP; he never sat in the IEP."*
- *"The teacher wrote the goals. And once he read them to me, I, I agree."*
- *"They would not have me involved, but I was very persistent."*
- *"I had it. Everything is written down what I wanted for him."*
- *"He is determined. He has a job, and he knows that if he works hard and saves some money, he can go to amusement parks."*
- *"He's able to go to work on his own without any help, and he wakes himself up and keeps his work schedule. "*
- *"He just wants to have an apartment, but he wants to learn how to cook for himself and be independent."*
- *"I proudly say he has got a job and is doing trade work. He went to a trade college and learned three different trades.*
- *"She [Mary] said she wanted to be a veterinarian, so they put her in Biology classes; her major was biology. She had the most challenging classes, and she was not given help, guidance, or instruction…. She was not doing well.*
- *"He [David] went to community college for ten years and still didn't accomplish a degree or anything. It was a waste of time."*

There is no question that we as a community have to do more for our young adults with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities. It is up to us to take the challenge where they left off and propel them forward. Our children are determined to succeed, but we must work harder to pave the way for a better and brighter future for them.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Research Study Seeks Participants

If you are a Student/Young Adult
- Between 22 to 30 and identified as mild to moderate ID.

- A graduate of an accredited private, public, or charter school in the Los Angeles County Area.
- Comfortable reading and speaking in English
- Willing to participate in a 60-90 minute video-recorded interview conducted via Zoom
- Potential participants may participate in this study if they have a secondary disability. (e.g., down syndrome, autism)
- If referrals are received who meet the criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study.

If you are a Parent, Caregiver, or Guardian of
- young adults identified with a mild to moderate ID between the ages of 22-30
- a young adult who recently completed high school with an ITP within the past eight years. Range of graduation dates 2015-present.
- No minimum education level is needed for parents/caregivers/guardians to participate in this study
- Comfortable reading and speaking in English
- Willing to participate in a 60-90 minute video-recorded interview conducted via Zoom
- If referrals are received who meet the criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study.

Then: You are invited to become a study participant.

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Appendix B
Email Invitation to Participate in Study

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled "*A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences and Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Young Adults with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities*" Your participation is voluntary.

Please take 3 minutes to peruse the inclusion criteria:
- Be a parent/caregiver/guardian of a student identified with a mild to moderate ID.
- No minimum education level is needed for parents/caregivers/guardians to participate in this study
- Be a student ages 18 to 30 and identified as mild to moderate ID.
- Recently completed high school with an ITP within the past three years. Range of graduation dates 2015-present.
- Be a graduate of an accredited California private, public, or charter school.
- Potential participants may participate in this study if they have a secondary disability. (e.g., down syndrome, autism)
- If referrals are received who meet the criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study.
- Comfortable reading and speaking in English
- Willing to participate in a 60-90 minute video-recorded interview conducted via Zoom

If you agree to participate, read and click "agree" on the electronic consent letter and provide your name, email, and phone number below. I will reach out to you via phone or email.

Name:
Phone:
Email:

Thank you in advance for your time and helping me collect the necessary data to complete my dissertation.

Danielle Frierson
Doctoral Candidate
Claremont Graduate University
focused2phinished@gmail.com

Hello _____,
        My name is Danielle Frierson, and I am a doctoral candidate at Claremont Graduate
School.
You completed the survey for my study entitled "*A Phenomenological Study Examining the
Experiences and Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Young Adults with Mild to Moderate
Intellectual Disabilities*" and answered yes to the pre-screening questions. I would like to follow
up with you and collect additional data.

Zoom/ Telephonic Script:
Please provide me with two dates and times within the next week when we can schedule a 60-
minute Zoom interview.

Date	Time

Let me confirm the date and time (repeat stated information). Thank you for your cooperation. I
look forward to speaking with you on (repeat stated information)
_____.

I will email the semi-structured interview questions, confirmation of the Zoom interview, and the
letter of consent for the interview within 24 hours.

Confirmation Email Script:
Hi _____,
I have attached the letter of consent for the interview and the semi-structured interview
questions.

Please read, sign, and return the informed consent to me via email at
focused2phinished@gmail.com, least 24 hours before our Zoom interview on
_____.

My Zoom meeting ID**: _____.**

I look forward to speaking with you on _ _/_ _/2021

Thank you,
Danielle Frierson
Doctoral Candidate
Claremont Graduate University
focused2phinished@gmail.com

Appendix D
Interview Protocol

Interview Information:

Time	
Date:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: □ Student □ Parent □ Guardian	

Opening Script:

Thank you once again for your participation in this research study about your experience of the transition process for young adults with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. How are you doing today? I want to begin by reviewing the consent form with you, and I will read verbatim the informed consent. Do you have any questions? Please sign the consent form and send it back to me now? Thank you. Before we begin recording, do you need a brief break? Can I start the recording now?

This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. This interview is divided into two parts. During the first part, I will collect demographic background or information and then move into the in-depth collection of your transformational story. If you need to pause the interview for any reason, please let me know as soon as possible. Are you ready to begin with the background information collection?

Part 1: Background Questions:
1. What is your highest level of educational attainment?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender? (female, male, non-binary)
4. What is your ethnicity (Black or African-American, Pan African American, Asian descent, Pacific Islander, (non-Hispanic), Latino, White, other)

Transition Script:
Thank you for those answers. We are now ready to enter the second half of the interview, where we explore your post-secondary transition experience. These questions have been designed to explore how you describe the process of developing the ITP. You may ask for a break and end

this interview at any time. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Do you have any questions?
Closing Script:

Thank you for sharing your experience and voice of self-advocacy, self-determination, insights,

individual transition process, best practices, and recommendations. Once I have transcribed this

interview, I would like to send you a copy for your review. Can I email this document to you?

Thank you once again,

Danielle Frierson
Doctoral Student
Claremont Graduate University
focused2phinished@gmail.com

Introduction:
- Introduce yourself
- Discuss the purpose of the study
- Informed consent signature
- Provide format/structure of the interview (audio recording, note-taking)
- Ask if the interviewee has questions
- Define any terms

Tell me about yourself:
a.   What's your name?
b.   How old are you?
c.   What high school did you attend?
d.   What do you do, work or go to school?
e.   What type of work do you do? Or What are you studying in school?
- How do you like it? Why/why not?

Interview questions:

Transition Then

Think about your high school experience and who helped you during that time.

a.   Probe: Was it a teacher, an assistant, or a counselor?
2.   When you were in high school, you had an IEP. What do you remember about the IEP process? Did you attend your IEP?
3.   How did you participate in your IEP?
Probe: Did you ask questions? Did you share your ideas about what you want with the team?
1.   Who was present at your last IEP meeting? *Probe: was your parent, teacher, or maybe someone from the Regional Center*
1.   Thinking about transition planning during high school, who helped you in the transition process? *Probe: was it the transition teacher? Was it your classroom teacher or assistant?*
1.   How was the Transition plan explained to you? *Probe: did anyone explain the transition plan to you? What did they say?*
1.   What were your goals (your plans after high school)? What did you want to do? *Probe: They may have asked you questions like: what kind of job do you want? Do you want to go to college? Do you want a driver's license? Do you want to live alone or with your parents/family or have a roommate? Etc.)*
1.   How and in what ways were you included in creating your transition goals? *Probe: did you talk about it with someone?*

1. Think about self-advocacy (speaking up for what you want): Can you share an experience where you practiced self-advocacy? Or wanted to practice advocating for yourself or speaking up for yourself.

1. What trainings did you participate in to help you meet your transition goals?
   Probe: did you take cooking classes, computers, wood shop, etc. Did you practice banking and grocery shopping?

What's Happening Now?

1. You shared skills that you learned (name them). Now that you are an adult, how are you using those skills?

1. Who is a part of your support system now? *Probe: who helps you with decisions, getting a job, going to school?*

1. Think about independence. What does that mean to you? *Probe: does it mean living alone or with a roommate, going on dates, paying bills, and not asking permission to leave the house?*

1. What are you doing to be independent or maintain independence?

1. You said that you are (whatever they stated). Can you explain how did you get there? *Probe: did someone help you? What steps did you take? Was there an agency involved?*

1. What motivates you to continue doing what you do? *Probe: What encourages or makes you happy about what you do?*

1. Remember we talked about self-advocacy. As an adult, how are you advocating for yourself? Probe: C*an you share an experience you had where you practiced self-advocacy.*

Future Plans

Is there something different you want to do, or are you where you want to be?

1. What plans or goals do you have for your future? How are you going to achieve it? *Probe: what will you do to make sure you reach your goal?*

1. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Appendix F
Parent/Guardian Interview Questions

Introduction:
- Introduce yourself
- Discuss the purpose of the study
- Informed consent signature
- Provide format/structure of the interview (audio recording, note-taking)
- Ask if the interviewee has questions
- Define any terms

Tell me about yourself:
a.   What's your name?
b.   How old are you?
c.   Highest level of education
d.   What high school did you attend?

Transition Then
1. When thinking of transition planning, who helped you navigate the process when creating the ITP for your child or student in care? How was the Transition plan explained to you? *Probe: did anyone explain the transition plan to you? What did they say?*
2. Looking back, were you able to attend your child's final ITP? And would you share who else was present at the final ITP?
3. How and in what ways were your included in the ITP planning of goals and objectives
4. Since the completion of high school, how have you helped facilitate the goals established in the final ITP
5. What was outside agencies involved in the final IEP meeting?
6. Was there any training offered to help you establish ITP goals for your child? Please describe.
7. How did the school or district share any agency options with you or provide information to help you align the agency with your child's ITP?
8. Is there anything different you would expect from the transition process based on your current knowledge? Is there anything you would have done differently in the schools' facilitation of the ITP during the high school years?
9. If any, describe what you want to achieve for your child's future? Think about all of the areas of their life (i.e., finances, school, employment). How have your goals shifted or changed for your child?
10. At what stage of transition was your child allowed to express their needs and wants and have a voice in the transition process? (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school, etc.
11. In thinking about independent living goals or stages of adulting, describe how they MMIDare accessing their goals and objectives outlined in the ITP. Did they get a driver's

license? Are they driving? Are they living independently in an apartment or shared living home? Do they have employment? Do they have a bank account? Etc...

12. During high school, how was your child encouraged to advocate for themselves?

13. What is the most valuable transition lesson your child experienced to help them reach their transition goals?

What's Happening Now?

Now that your child is an adult, how are they using the skills from high school to help them advocate for themselves?

1. When thinking about self-advocacy, how is your child practicing self-determination? Probe: How are they motivated

1. Who is a part of your child's support system? *Probe: who helps them make decisions, get a job, and go to school?*

Future Plans

Is there something different you would like them to be doing, or are they where you expected them to be?

1. What plans or goals would you like your child to have for your future? How will they complete or achieve those goals?

1. What recommendations would you give to other parents/guardians or students knowing what you know now about transition planning?

1. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

APPENDIX G
Transcript Verification

Dear Participant,

Thank you once again for participating in my research study. Please read over the enclosed transcript to ensure the words accurately represent what you said during our interview. If you desire to add, amend, edit or correct anything, please do so in the margins of the paper. After this, please mail back the entire transcript in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelope within seven days.

Check One:

- No, there are no revisions or additions. The transcript is accurate.

- Yes, some revisions or additions were added in the margins.

Please feel free to call or email with any comments or concerns.

Warm Regards,

Danielle Frierson
Doctoral Student
Claremont Graduate University
focused2phinished@gmail.com

RQ 1: What role, if any, has self-advocacy played in the transition process for students with Mild/Moderate ID?

Theme: Self-Determination

Subtheme: Independence	Code	Student Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*	Parent Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*
	Vocation	21	SQ7, SQ14, SQ16. SQ18, SQ19	*"I want to a full-time job and save my money to get an apartment"; "Getting a job, saving money and getting an apartment"; "if I was living on my own, I'm independent because I'm paying my bills. I have a job, I could be living in a house on my own."*	8	PQ11, PQ15, PQ17, PQ18	*"He can go to work independently without any help, and he wakes himself up and keeps his work schedule"; "He is determined. He has a job, and he knows that if he works hard and saves some money, he can go to amusement parks. He wants to have an apartment, but he wants to learn how to cook for himself and be independent."*
	Life Skill	23	SQ7, SQ13, SQ14, SQ18	*"I want to live by myself, but my main goal was to get my reading better.";*	20	PQ11, PQ18	*"uses public transportation (not driving) cooks full meals"; can cook in the microwave, know how to catch the bus;*

	Code	Student Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*	Parent Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*
							can cook in the microwave
	College	1	SQ18	*"I want to go to college"; I told him I would go to college and make something myself. Then I went to El Camino College, and I didn't finish.*	3		*"The goal is to get him out of high school with his class and go to a trade college right after high school"; "went to Harbor college for 10 years and still didn't accomplish a degree or anything."*

Subtheme: Self-Advocacy	Code	Student Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*	Parent Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*
	None	3	SQ9, SQ17	*"I'm not good at speaking up for myself."; " I'm still working on that."*	8	PQ10, PQ12, PQ14	*"Students aren't allowed to sit in the IEP; he never sat in the IEP"; "I don't think he had any encouragement to speak up or share his thoughts."*
	During School (K-12)	1	SQ9, SQ17	*"I had to tell the PE I need to sit close because of my hearing and I need a sign language interpreter; "I don't like arts and*	9	PQ10, PQ12	*"I want to say it started in middle school. Of course, it was definitely middle school. He had the best teachers ever. He's still using his advocacy skills today."; "It was middle school. The person who was*

| | | | | *crafts, and I had to tell the teacher that"* | | | *over the IEP was also deaf and hard of hearing. She was an advocate for her. She was the one who made it clear that my daughter needs to be able to advocate for herself in not just me telling people what I need from them, but she needs to speak up for herself and let her needs be known"; "At the high school, They would encourage her, you know, to speak up for herself"* |
| | Post Secondary | 9 | SQ17 | *"I'm very much good at speaking up for myself. I don't let people bother me or mess with me. ; "when I wanted to move from my aunt's house, I moved with my friend."* | 1 | | *There's a self-determination program; a new program initiated about a year and a half ago with the Regional Center. He is the first recipient approved to be in the self-determination program. It helps him be more self-sufficient and advocate his likes and dislikes.* |

Subtheme: Autonomy	Code	Student Mentions	Interview Question	*Quotes*	Parent Mentions	Interview Question	*Representative Quotes*
	Making decisions	13	SQ13, SQ14, SQ16	*"Being my own man and not depending on*	7	PQ14, PQ15	*"He needs to make their own decisions"; "she sets her*

				anybody"; *"I do what I want to do, like go to the beach, ride my bike."*			*own schedule and makes her own appointments, and she communicates with the Regional Center on her own. she's very determined to make her own decisions."*
	Money	11	SQ14, SQ19	*"I work, and I want to save money to have my game truck"; I work and save my money, so I can get my apartment"; "I like getting paid, and I treat myself then go get some nice things for my mom. Sometimes I go out and have fun, going out to places, that's about it."*	0		

	Socialization	3	SQ14, SQ16	*"Every morning, go walk and then visit my friends, and I know how to take the buses."; "I go mingle with people and just have a good time."*	5	PQ14	*"He started hanging out with a couple of his friends and socializing with them."; " He believes everyone is his friend and then he gets taken advantage of"; "he loves to socialize, he has friends from soccer, basketball and other groups he's in"*

Claremont Graduate University

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A Study Examining the Experiences and Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Young Adults with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (IRB # 4055)

You are invited to participate in a research project. You will be helping Danielle Frierson. You will not benefit if you volunteer. You will be interviewed if you decide to participate. The interview will be 60-90 minutes. Your participation is your decision. You can decide to stop at any time for any reason. Please keep reading for more information.

STUDY LEADERSHIP: Danielle Frierson is the leader of this study. Danielle is a student at Claremont Graduate University. She is working on a doctor's degree, and her supervisor is Dr. Emilie Reagan. She is a professor at Claremont Graduate University.

PURPOSE: This study will look at transitions from high school for young adults with Mild to Moderate Intellectual disabilities (ID). This study will also look at how their parents supported them.

ELIGIBILITY: To participate, you must:
• be 21 to 30 years old.
• have a mild to moderate Intellectually Disability (you can have a second disability, i.e., down syndrome,   autism).
• have graduated from high school in the Los Angeles County area
• have graduated from high school with an individualized transition plan (ITP) (ITP)
• be comfortable reading and speaking in English
• be willing to participate in a 60-90 minutes interview on Zoom or Google Meet

PARTICIPATION: You will be asked questions about your high school experience. You will be asked questions about after high school experiences. It will take about 60-90 minutes.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal. The risks include sharing stories that may bring up memories about high school that may not be good.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: The study might not benefit you personally. This study will help the researcher, and it will help me complete my doctoral research to complete my paper. This study could help teachers of students with disabilities, and I could help students in middle and high schools.

COMPENSATION: You will be given a $20 gift card from a store or restaurant (e.g., Amazon, Starbucks, Chili's) for participating in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: It is voluntary to participate in this study. You can stop at any time. You can withdraw from the study. You can add or refuse to answer any question. It will not be against you. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future connection with anyone at CGU. If you decide not to participate will not affect your current or future connection with anyone at CGU.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories from this study. I may use the information for future research and share it with other researchers. I will not reveal your name with it. Your responses will be confidential, and your name will be anonymous. I will use fake or pretend names and not your real name.

CGU Adult Consent Form

FURTHER INFORMATION: If you have any questions or want more information about this study, please contact Danielle Frierson at (424) 240-5514 and *focused2phinished@gmail.com.* You may also contact the professor helping me with this project, Emilie Reagan, at emilie.reagan@cgu.edu or 909-6079420.

The CGU Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this project.

If you have any other concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you can contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. You can print and keep a copy of this form. Or, I will be happy to send you a copy of this consent form.

CONSENT: Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form and that someone has answered any questions you may have about this study. You voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant   _____   Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

The researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of their questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher

_____   Date

Printed Name of Researcher

_____

Version: T-1A19C-240920   2 of 2   IRB # 4055