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Success in Transition Preparation for Post-Secondary Students with Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Interdisciplinary Honors in Sociology and Special Education

Bridgewater State University

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\*- All subject's names have been changed to protect the privacy of all survey subjects.

## Introduction

Students with disabilities face a wide range of barriers in their transition from school-to-work that their family and community can help them to overcome. The transition from school-to-work has become a heightened topic of interest, especially when it comes to the transition of a student with a disability. The role that family members play in that transition, their knowledge of the student's transition plan, and their active participation are critical (Riesen et al., 2014). However, demographics and the economic environment can create barriers in the parents/guardians' access to resources. Parental involvement with their child's education is designed to decrease as the student grows older, such that the student develops individual self-advocacy efforts and self-independence, but this can hinder the student. Students with disabilities, and their education, should have the positive influence of parents or guardians on their education and overall outcomes, independent of their demographics or economic environment.

Transition planning that includes long-term goals for education, vocational training, and reviewing postsecondary opportunities for the student typically begins at or before the age of 14, depending on the student's disability (Osgood, 2010). While special educational services (occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech/reading, small group setting, adapted physical education, etc.) for these students extends into early adulthood, many of these services are no longer available once the student reaches the cut-off age. The goal of transitional planning for students with disabilities is to explore their postsecondary endeavors which could include going to college, having the adaptive skills to be as independent as possible, and/or being able to find employment in their community (Hoover, 2016).

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Legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, were designed to help individualize transitional planning to each student's needs (Trainor et al., 2016) and to help these students bridge the gap, between them and students who do not have disabilities, in postsecondary opportunities (employment, vocational rehabilitation, postsecondary education, and independent living). Despite the intent of IDEA 2004, only 21% of working age individuals with disabilities are employed (Riesen et al., 2014), making less money (Hoover, 2016), with less than 25% of students enrolled in a postsecondary education program (Brewer et al., 2011). This leaves student relying on community and family supports in the transition stage and facing wider gaps in postsecondary opportunities when compared to their peers without disabilities (Hirano et al., 2016).

In this study, I surveyed ten of the 27 Bridgewater State University's Extraordinary Expectation- Career- Education-Life (EXCEL) Program participants. The EXCEL Program is a fully inclusive postsecondary program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive special educational services from their high schools' post-secondary program and whose school districts have created a partnership with the EXCEL Program. This program was started as a grant-funded program through the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) and was awarded funding to implement the first MAICEI Residence Life Pilot Program on campus. Once a school district has created a partnership with the EXCEL program, the district can recommend their students to apply based on eligibility criteria. Eligible EXCEL students must meet the following criteria: currently receiving special education services in a Bridgewater State University EXCEL Program partnering school district, applicant's school district must agree to fund student's participation in program (approximately

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\$10,000 per year for non-residential), documentation of an intellectual disability, age 18 to 22 and has not passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the Massachusetts' statewide standards-based assessment or age 20-22 and has passed the MCAS requirements but is enrolled in a post program because of significant functional disabilities, transition needs, and demonstrates emotional stability and maturity, no history of disruptive or challenging behavior, eagerness to continue learning in a college setting, solid high school attendance record, expresses interest in living and working as independently as possible in their community after completing the program, a vision supported by family/guardian, able to identify job-related interests and career goals, demonstrates communication skills adequate to interact with other on the BSU campus, has the ability to adhere to the BSU Code of Conduct, able to identify job-related interests and career goals, and whose ultimate goal is paid employment. Students enrolled in this program are dually enrolled in both their high school and at the university. While participating they are enrolled in courses, take part in campus internships, work with job coaches and education coaches, are actively paired with a peer mentor to help them assimilate to college life, and some have the chance to partake in living in the residential halls on campus. Students enrolled in programs like EXCEL have greater access to job training and experiences in the greater community. But, access to such programs is often dependent on the knowledge of the parents and the school district, and this can differ by a community's economic demographics.

The aim of this study was to better understand the impact that high-income and low-income communities have on parental access to knowledge and resources to support their child(ren) with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Students with disabilities who have their parents/guardians involved within their education and transitional planning process often

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have more positive overall outcomes, but the parents/guardians' involvement and access to resources and knowledge of the transition can be limited by their demographics and the resources available through the school district. The data collected from the survey subjects reinforces the critical role that parents/guardians play in their child(ren)'s education and transitional planning process and the impact that high- and low-income communities have on accessibility to necessary resources and opportunities for the student and their family.

## **Literature Review**

### **Barriers Faced in Transition**

The goal for many students with disabilities as they exit high school is to find employment, go to college, and have the necessary adaptive skills to be able to be as independent as possible in the adult world (Hoover, 2016). In the United States, students who are on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) begin planning their transition to postsecondary opportunities at or before the age of fourteen, depending on their disability. When a student reaches the transitional age where school ends, the services they require, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, as well as their access to the community and their peers, are often cut dramatically. The planning of the transition from school-to-work and into adulthood is a long journey with demands from the student, the parents, and their school systems. With these supports and services now cut-off, it can hinder the parents' ability to help their child through the transition into adulthood (Osgood et al., 2010). These vulnerable youth face multiple challenges requiring specific supports into adulthood that could be and should be provided by multiple sources, however barriers within the community can hinder the student's ability to achieve. In assessing barriers faced in transition, students with

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disabilities face numerous poor post-school outcomes (Test et al., 2018), including the lack of legislation and interagency coordination for transition services (Osgood et al., 2010), parent's unrealistic expectations for post-graduation outcomes (Riesen et al., 2014), lack of previous training experience and community support (Hoover, 2016), and different levels of family involvement (Hirano et al., 2018).

The dynamic process of transitioning from school-to-work requires support and involvement of community, secondary-school special educators, and the student's family (Riesen et al., 2014). Post-school outcomes for individuals with disabilities show that they continue to fall behind their peers without disabilities in multiple categories including employment, education, and independent living (Test et al., 2018). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2017, that employment rates for individuals with disabilities were 18% compared to 66% for individuals without disabilities (Test et al., 2018). Only 21% of working age individuals with disabilities are employed part-time or full-time (Riesen et al., 2014) and students with disabilities are less likely to live independently and find financial stability than their peers (Test et al., 2018). Additionally, only 76% of individuals with disabilities are expected to enroll in some type of postsecondary education/training compared to 94% of their peers without disabilities (Test et al., 2018).

In the past 30 years, legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives have tried to enhance post-school employment opportunities for students with disabilities, but chronic underemployment remains an issue (Riesen et al., 2014), leaving individuals with disabilities to fall behind their peers in employment (Hirano et al., 2018). As Osgood et al. (2010) explains, the simple identification of the entire population and the ability to declare overall policy directions is difficult. Osgood et al. (2010) conducted a study at Pennsylvania State University, to examine

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the transition to adulthood for youth involved in social services and the policies that supported them in their transition. These authors describe four major issues in public policy of concern in vulnerable youth groups with disabilities: eligibility criteria that excludes these youth, inadequate funding for transition services, lack of coordination across systems, and the lack of training for professionals to aid these specific youth (Osgood et al., 2010). To improve upon these issues, Osgood et al. (2010) discusses different policy options that could help to create an inclusive system of support that would aid these groups as they reached adulthood. To improve policies that improve the transition for students with disabilities, Osgood et al. (2010) says that each special education student must have a plan with long-term goals for education that specify the services needed to achieve these goals.

The community that surrounds an adult with intellectual and developmental disabilities could play a major role as an inclusive support system by increasing resources and providing additional sources of help to the student in their transition (Hoover, 2016). Hoover (2016) describes five community resources that can be used to help solve the dilemma that comes in asking the community to take a key role in helping a student with special needs to transition out of school and into adulthood: service learning, summer employment, community mapping, community-based instruction, and vocational-based community instruction. Riesen et al. (2014) finds that by offering activities such as pre-employment training, vocational training skills, and integrated summer employment, communities can enhance the student's chance of securing competitive employment post-transition. Hoover (2016) points to summer employment as an important opportunity for students with disabilities who are still in school, yet only 17% are likely to work during the summer and only 57% are employed after leaving high school. This is significantly lower than the 66% of their peers in general education who are likely to be

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employed after leaving high school (Hoover, 2016). Vocational programs could also help the student to build community support systems (Riesen et al., 2014) and acquire new skills for independent living and employment (Hoover et al., 2016). Playing a key role in the student's acquisition of competitive employment options and long-term opportunities in their transition to adulthood, participating in vocational programs during school can help the student to succeed (Riesen et al., 2014). By participating in vocational programs during school, the chance of success in transition is increased, as it plays a key role in the student's acquisition of competitive employment options and long-term opportunities as they transition. However, Riesen et al. (2014) finds that even with additional experiences in vocational programs, finding stable employment remains a major issue.

Over the last decade, participating in meaningful career awareness for students with disabilities has become a major concern (Riesen et al., 2014). Riesen et al. (2014) reports that students in transition lack employment skills and that when their parents set unrealistically high expectations for these students, the change of a successful outcome decreases. Hirano et al. (2018) reports family involvement as a particularly important role in helping the student with disabilities to succeed in their post- high school endeavors, but families still see a lack of school-home partnerships despite there being numerous State-mandates for implementation. Regrettably, parents are more likely to be invited as passive participants in their child's education and transition planning (Hirano et al., 2018). Yet, students were 41 times more likely to attend post-secondary education if their parents were involved in their education than students whose parents were not involved (Hirano et al., 2018). Hirano et al. (2018) discussed that families also face their own barriers in their ability to be involved in their child's education including limited resources, stress, and lack of knowledge of transition planning. Typically, the

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family's motivation is not of concern, but rather the long ranging demands that come with transition planning and the limited opportunities for the individuals with disabilities to pursue that can be the biggest barriers of all (Osgood et al., 2010)

Facing multiple barriers, students with disabilities are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged and at a higher risk of health and communication problems (Test et al., 2018). Due to lack of interagency collaborations especially within the realms of education and healthcare, it is hard to find a community with a shared focus dedicated to the delivery of transition services (Test et al., 2018). The lack of coordination across and between providers and inadequate training about young adult developmental issues for service professionals can create major issues and barriers within the success of the transition into adulthood (Osgood et al., 2010). In a study conducted at Utah State University, Riesen et al. (2014) surveyed 264 secondary school special educators and vocational rehabilitation Counselors to analyze their participation and involvement in the student's transition. Those surveyed reported teaching a wide range of disabilities and identified the three highest rated categories that they faced as teachers supporting a student in their transition from school-to-work: lack of student involvement/skills, parent/family involvement, and interagency collaboration (Riesen et al., 2014). Results from the Riesen et al. (2014) study indicate that transition professionals do not help to create school-to-work networks that might successfully support the student's transition. Test et al. (2018) reviewed the Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkages for Exceptional Students (CIRCLES) model to show that a seamless transition for students with disabilities was possible, but it was dependent on the functional relationships between schools, adult education programs, disability related agencies, and the students' community resources. Thus, it appears that seamless transitions for students with

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disabilities are possible, but with lack of interagency collaborations, the students transitioning find themselves lacking an adequate support system.

The lack of support these students with disabilities receive from their communities and the lack of resources that their communities provide them and their families in their transition overall reduces the student's achievement of a successful outcome to decrease. Riesen et al. (2014) reports that more attention be put towards creating collaborations between different agencies in order to eliminate barriers that students often encounter in their transition from school-to-work. Osgood et al. (2010) describes the need for special attention to be paid to these groups of vulnerable youth in their transition to adulthood as they have reached the age in which their eligibility for certain services will be cut off. Rather than seeing these vulnerable groups of youth as helpless dependents, policy makers, employers, parents, and educators might want to consider these groups as individuals using these services to shape their own futures (Osgood et al., 2010). Students with disabilities require individual support inside and outside of the classroom and while multiple community providers may be needed in order to help the student during their transition, it can help them to achieve their postsecondary goals and succeed in their transition to adulthood.

### **Ethnicity and Transitions to Adulthood**

Students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds may have a harder time adapting to and adjusting to adulthood. According to Guan and Fulgini (2015), transitioning to adulthood has the child taking higher roles of responsibility and making important decisions about their education, career, and romantic goals. Cultural orientations are rooted in the transition to adulthood and stress the importance of family relationships (Guan & Fulgini, 2015). However,

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racial and ethnic minorities often encounter discrimination in access to schooling, housing, and employment, which can lead families facing economic inequalities (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Coming to a new country can also strain close familial ties that reflect cultural values and adaptive strategies (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). In failing to consider language, culture (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016), and the background of the family (Guan & Fulgini, 2015), can compromise equity and the shared decision making between parents of children with special needs and professionals (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016).

Today, first-and-second generation immigrants represent almost 30 percent of the young adult population in the United States (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Many families who immigrate face the unique challenge of maintaining intergenerational relationships as their family spreads across the country (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). The family's and parent's perspective of their child with disabilities is critical in the development of the child's IEP and knowledge of the child's education and opportunities in post-graduation can have a positive impact on the child's overall success in adulthood (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016). If the child is not able to succeed as they enter adulthood, they may fall back on the parents to provide support.

Finding financial stability in adulthood can be challenging for many young adults. Known as the hidden source of inequality, parent's support for their children during the transition to adulthood can help their child to stay afloat during times of financial instability (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). According to Guan and Fulgini (2015), as the child enters adulthood, those of European backgrounds are more likely to receive an increase of parental support, whereas children of Asian or Latin American backgrounds are likely to have parental support that remains stable. Hardie and Seltzer (2016) find that Black and Latino parents are less likely to be able to provide their child financial support when compared to White parents. White

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parents are more likely to offer financial and emotional supports, while Black and Hispanic parents are more likely to lend a type of practical support (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016).

Immigration status, cultural differences, language comprehension, and financial status has an impact on how parents play their roles in launching their child into adulthood (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Parent involvement has evolved overtime and taking leadership in their child's lives can carry different meanings throughout the United States (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016). Hardie and Seltzer (2016) used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth of 1997 to look at data gathered on 6,962 young adults to examine differences in support that parents provide to their young adult children with the variables of immigration status and race/ethnicity. Hardie and Seltzer (2016) observed that immigrant families are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged and earn less than non-immigrant families. Parents who are better educated are more likely to provide their advice and support to their young adult children regarding their educational pathways (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). However, little research has been focused on leadership opportunities among parents of children with disabilities and the impact of critical skill and leadership building is not largely reported (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016).

Shepherd and Kervick (2016) conducted a study at the University of Vermont, in which 16 parents, of which one fourth were from culturally diverse backgrounds, participated in a 30-hour internship experience. Even though these parents were from different parts of the country and their child's disabilities differed, these subjects were able to connect on similar issues and results showed that these parents made positive contributions to policy at local, state and national levels through their internships (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016). Shepherd and Kervick (2016) observed through their study that family members who participate in their child's education

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bring wisdom, experience, and a passion to improve the system of care that their child will one day depend on as they enter adulthood.

Relationship involvement, gender, family size, and socioeconomic status are all individual difference factors that can impact and shape adult trajectories for individuals with disabilities in accessing postsecondary education opportunities and the ability to create a support system to ease their transition (Guan & Fulgini, 2015). Guan and Fulgini's (2015) research on social supports for fourth, seventh, and tenth graders reveals that family supports may be the lowest during adolescence and can recover as the child becomes a young adult. Guan and Fulgini (2015) find that as young adults begin to shift into adult roles, their relationships with family and friends evolve as who they turn to for comfort and advice may change. Hardie and Seltzer (2016) found that there were perceptions of support in terms of financial and educational/career advice that were impacted by the family's socioeconomic resources and racial/ethnic and immigrant disparities. For those who received higher levels of support, Guan and Fulgini (2015) reported a greater expectation to reciprocate support within their families.

Funding agencies need to dedicate resources especially to parents from diverse backgrounds who have fewer opportunities to participate in experiences that help to develop parental leadership within their child's education (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016).

### **Employment Opportunities in post-transition**

Students with disabilities enter adulthood with results of lower rates in employment opportunities and higher rates of dependency (Brewer et al., 2011). However, a student with post-secondary goals in their IEP is 2.4 times more likely to apply for vocational rehabilitation services and employment opportunities than students without goals implemented into their

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transitional planning (Brewer et al., 2011). Students with an intellectual and/or developmental disability are among the least likely of all students to gain competitive employment (Francis et al., 2016), have access to training programs (Honeycutt, 2017), and achieve their post-secondary goals set forth in their transition planning (Brewer et al., 2011).

For many young adults with disabilities who want to live away from their parents following their exit from high school, it can depend largely on their ability to be independent and retain a stable source of income (Brewer et al., 2011). The young adult's success in having these opportunities can be impacted by individual characteristics such as participation in previous work experience (Brewer et al, 2011), attending post-secondary education opportunities (Grigal, 2012), and parental involvement/dependency (Francis et al., 2016). Brewer et al. (2011) reviewed the National Longitudinal Study Two and found that youth with disabilities have a 57% employment rate, while youth in the general population, when surveyed one to four years after graduation, have a 66% employment rate. Brewer et al. (2011) found that individual characteristics such as age, grade level, and type of disability did relate to the likelihood of participating in work experience. Honeycutt et al., (2017) observed that individuals had a higher chance of being employed if they were White or male, had less severe disabilities, and resided in higher-income households. Students ages 19 to 21 were three to five times more likely to have participated in a work experience/opportunity than students who were 15 and 16 years old and if the student had autism, they were more likely than any other disability category to have participated in a work experience (Brewer et al., 2011). Students with autism and intellectual disabilities were less likely to be successfully referred to vocational rehabilitation, but more likely to participate in work experiences (Brewer et al., 2011). Taking part in different experiences and opportunities, such as work experience, post-secondary education, and

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community participation can help the student to find success in their transition and increase the statistics of students with disabilities finding and securing competitive employment.

Almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of jobs in the United States require skills associated with at least some education and attending higher education programs can help the individual secure a higher paying position (Grigal, 2012). Over the last few decades, the United States has increased the amount of opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to attend postsecondary education programs (Francis et al., 2016). As of 2010, Grigal (2012) and the National Center for Education Statistics Survey found that 88% of two-and-four-year institutions have enrollment of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities at their universities. Yet less than 25% of young adults with disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education opportunities compared to 41% of their general education peers (Brewer et al., 2011). Francis et al. (2016) found that students who attend postsecondary education were able to expand their social networks, enhance their independent living and work skills, and showed signs of heightened self-esteem. Attending higher education opportunities can help a student to secure a better job that can earn higher wages in a competitive employment market (Grigal, 2012).

Brewer et al. (2011) looks at several strategies/models used by schools to play a central role in helping their students transition to adulthood. Brewer et al. (2011) evaluated the New York State Education Department and their grants for sixty Model Transition Programs in 2007 to school districts throughout the state of New York to specifically look at young people transitioning into adulthood and how they embraced increasing societal expectations of community engagement in employment, higher education, and community participation (Brewer et al., 2011). New York State created these models to strengthen the partnerships between the New York State Vocational Rehabilitation System and the New York State school districts, to

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increase participation of youth in postsecondary opportunities, and to nurture interagency collaborations between the New York State school systems and their community service partners (Brewer et al., 2011). In observing 14,733 young adults over the age of fifteen years old over an eighteen-month period, Brewer et al. (2011) found a large correlation between work experience in school and post-secondary employment. Brewer et al. (2011) results also showed that individuals who participated in career development activities and trainings were 4.1 times more likely to find competitive employment than those who did not participate. Individuals who had postsecondary goals written into their transition planning in their IEPs were 2.6 times more likely to participate in work experiences (Brewer et al., 2011). For students with disabilities in transition from school-to-work, previous work experience and pursuing a post-secondary education opportunity can help the student to succeed. There is an added benefit if the parents of these students are knowledgeable of postsecondary opportunities and involved in their child's education.

Students with disabilities who are in the midst of transitioning out of high school rely heavily on the guidance and support of their parents and their community and they continue that reliance into adulthood. Parental involvement and communication with their child's school is impacted by laws and policies that follow the student as they begin their transition into adulthood (Francis et al., 2016). Many parents find themselves at a loss on how to stay involved with their child's education as they move to postsecondary education options, where high school may offer opportunities for the parent to volunteer and be involved, colleges limit parental involvement opportunities to almost nothing to help the student build their own sense of independence (Francis et al., 2016). While many university professionals expect their students to serve as their own advocates, many universities do not understand that this may be the first time the student is

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advocating for themselves on their own. The student may not know what accommodations they need in order to succeed (Francis et al., 2016). Universities expect parents of children in transition to be transitioning themselves from the role of the caregiver to the role of the advisor and be able to support their child in decision-making; however, parents of children with disabilities have a long history of protecting and advocating for their child. Transitioning into the role of the advisor may be harder for parents of children with special needs than for parents of their child's peers (Francis et al., 2016). If the parents are to attend a parent professional workshop, the parents are more likely to be able to transition into the role of the advisor and be able to help their student to succeed (Francis et al., 2016). Francis et al. (2016) reviewed prior research that indicates positive parent involvement as a way to improve the child's self-determination, but many parents are unprepared to support their child and often report being uninformed of available resources. When parents are equipped with skills to advise and teach their child to resolve conflict and cope with stress that comes with attending college, students are more successful. With little research done into parent involvement in high school and postsecondary education options, it is hard to define the important role that parents play in their child with disabilities life before, during, and after their transition out of school (Francis et al., 2016).

Brewer et al. (2011) calls to the community to build and create more employment opportunities for youth with disabilities where the community can play a key role in helping the student to succeed in their transition to adulthood. If a student participates in pre-vocational training, job search training, an internship, or job skill training, they are more likely to have improved vocational rehabilitation referral outcomes and a successful outcome overall (Brewer et al., 2011).

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## **Support/Services and Development**

A clear vision of successful for a young adult's development is needed in order to be able to promote the healthy development of a child (Scales et al., 2016). Self-advocacy, self-determination, and independence skills are an important key component in a successful transition (Fowler et al., 2018). Scales (2016) indicates that only a minority of adolescents are prepared enough to have a successful transition into young adulthood. Students with disabilities who attend college have steadily increased since the 1980s and now amount for 11% of college students (Fowler et al., 2018). As the amount of students with disabilities attending college continues to increase, the college community of staff, faculty, families, and the student need to be prepared to foster partnerships before, during, and after attending the college or institution to help the student achieve a successful outcome (Fowler et al., 2018). Fowler et al. (2018) looked to previous research that indicated that purposeful collaboration in helping the student to prepare for their postsecondary education plan and identifying supports on campus that can help the student to succeed before they begin their transition has led to more successful outcomes for these students. It is critical for the community to understand the differences between high school and college in order to create systems of support that can help the student remain in and complete their postsecondary education (Fowler et al., 2018). Lee and Goldstein (2015) observed social supports benefitting an individual's well-being and helping intervene in the individual's association between stress and distress (Lee & Goldstein, 2015).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) mandates that schools incorporate post-high school transition planning into their students' IEP (Fowler et al., 2018). Schools must provide these students with a summary of performance document that enhances the connections to postsecondary services and supports that are available

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to the student and their families (Fowler et al., 2018). Organizations and institutions who educate students with disabilities have a unique opportunity to be proactive for the student in creating a supportive environment and interagency collaborations that can help the student in their transition (Fowler et al., 2018). For students with disabilities who choose to pursue a postsecondary education opportunity, it is up to the universities' campus to recognize and provide supports to these diverse learners that promotes student learning and engagement in the classroom and in the community (Fowler et al., 2018).

In a survey of 636 college students, Lee and Goldstein (2015) focused on three relationships specific sources of social support: family, friends, and romantic partners to examine the functioning of social support when loneliness within the individual occurred. Both social support and stress are seen to be associated with loneliness and as the student enters adulthood, social and relational challenges are important to consider in the success of the transition (Lee & Goldstein, 2015). To leave the familiar role that the child has grown into in the family to take on new responsibilities within young adulthood can be challenging (Scales et al., 2016). In their last year of high school, many students lack the adequate access to supports and trainings that can help in a successful transition to adulthood (Scales et al., 2016).

## **Predictors**

Every year in the United States, millions of students graduate from high school and although current high school graduation rates reflect the highest level in United States' history, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities still face a gap of almost 20% (Sprunger et al., 2018). For a student with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the access to supports and services, aid and knowledge of the parent and their involvement, and previous

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employment/work experiences can all have an impact on the student's success in their outcomes and can be predictors in that success (Sprunger et al., 2018). Previous post-school outcome studies have continued to report low graduation rates, difficulty finding independent living, and poor competitive employment rates for students with disabilities (Sprunger et al., 2018).

Findings from multiple studies suggest that there is a need for proven transition practices that can help both the students and their families to succeed in creating a successful school-to-work transitional outcome. Trainor et al. (2016) analyzed the National Longitudinal Transition Study that was conducted and federally funded from 2000 to 2010 to understand transition experiences and perspectives of almost 11,000 young adults with disabilities that were classified under one of the twelve Individuals with Disabilities Education Act identified categories. Trainor et al. (2016) looked at the school and transition planning that were available specifically to individuals with high incidence disabilities and results painted a positive view of transition for these specific individuals. In a study conducted by Sprunger et al. (2018) in a collaboration with the Indiana Department of Education, Sprunger et al. (2018) surveyed special education directors, assistant directors, program coordinators, and secondary special education teachers to identify transition predictors in a school-based application. Respondents reported that they had a comprehensive knowledge of transition knowledge in areas such as career awareness, work experiences, and vocational education; however, special education directors respondents were more likely than parents to report that they had a comprehensive knowledge of the transition system (Sprunger et al., 2018). The results pointed to specific ways in which to support transition programs: need to know and use interagency collaborations at the local level, give students opportunities to participate in vocational education and employment experiences, include students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in general education, and continue to

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change and grow their program to help each individual student through the transition process (Sprunger et al., 2018).

Students, especially with high incidence disabilities including learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, continue to experience poor post school outcomes (Trainor et al., 2016). There are several benefits found in having effective inclusionary practices in school that can support the student's success academically and socially (Sprunger et al., 2018), yet only 10% of students with high- incidence disabilities have transition goals that are meant to maximize the student's functional independence in their transition (Trainor et al., 2016). These students were likely to be involved in their transition planning meetings, but the ways in which they participated varied by student (Trainor et al., 2016). Transition planning is linked to successful outcomes for students with disabilities and while it has been legally mandated for schools in the United States to provide transition planning for students on IEPs and 504 plans, legislative mandates and lack of interagency collaborations have hindered many students in transition (Trainor et al., 2016).

### **Parent Involvement/Parental Assistance**

Today, young adults are more likely to take longer to launch their careers, delay getting married, and spend more time in their postsecondary education (Swartz, 2017). Schools are required to make efforts and encourage parents to become partners in decision making regarding their child's education including consent to evaluation and determination of eligibility for services even though parent participation is not mandated (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). A positive predictor of post school outcomes for students with disabilities, an increased level of parental involvement can certainly impact their student's success in adulthood (Hirano et al., 2016).

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Academic achievement can be massively impacted by parent involvement and the contributions to family decision making about the future for the student (Holmes et al., 2018). Teachers and administrators often report that one of the greatest challenges is getting parents who are hard to reach involved in their child's education and transition planning (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). Parent expectations for the future have been shown to predict post-secondary outcomes of individuals with disabilities that can help the student to be successful (Holmes et al., 2018). Parents setting postsecondary education goals for their students with disabilities has become a relatively recent phenomenon in the world of special education (Martinez et al., 2012). Martinez et al. (2012) views prior research indicating that roughly one-third of parents with children with special needs expect their child to pursue postsecondary education opportunities after high school. However, parents may struggle to get involved as members of their child's education team because opportunities to volunteer and get involved decrease as their child begins to age (Martinez et al., 2012). Youth with IQ below 70 transition with a lower than expected probability to engage in responsibilities such as chores and males were more likely than females to engage in a job training or work position (Holmes et al., 2018). Parents of male students had higher expectations than parents with female students and age and household income were determined to not predict parent expectations (Holmes et al., 2018). Nevertheless, parental expectations on their child's future can impact their child's outcomes (Holmes et al., 2018).

The average cost to provide community services for adults on the autism spectrum is \$26,500 per year. Holmes et al. (2018) became increasingly focused on systematic, family, and individual factors that impact positive outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum. Prior research showed Holmes et al. (2018) that individuals, specifically on the autism spectrum, achieve limited independence, are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, face social

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isolation, need ongoing support throughout adulthood, and are less likely to participate in postsecondary opportunities.

Parents of youth with autism spectrum disorder are often responsible for making critical decisions for their children in terms of realistic and appropriate postsecondary activities and opportunities (Holmes et al., 2018). Although several studies have shown an association between parent expectations and adult outcomes in youth with autism spectrum disorder, Holmes et al. (2018) observed that the connections between them are not well understood. Further, Holmes et al. (2018) found that there is a great deal of variability in overall outcomes for adults on the autism spectrum. Parents who have sons and daughters on the autism spectrum may have different expectations for their children, which can affect what transition related activities the parents choose. In the study by Holmes et al. (2018), 298 parents of adolescents were surveyed about how parental expectations related to the transition-based activities of their children. Holmes et al. (2018) found that parents who play an active role in identifying and having their child participate in specific activities can positively and/or negatively impact their child's preparation for their transition and adult life.

Martinez et al. (2012) conducted a survey on parent involvement in the transition process of children with intellectual disabilities, international education consultants surveyed parents in the United States about their awareness of post-school options for their children, setting expectations for their children, and the ways in which they accessed information about opportunities and resources available to their children who were about to enter their transition from school-to-work. Key findings in this study indicated that parents did not fully understand the transition process and did not have full access to information and knowledge about opportunities for their child to participate in postsecondary education opportunities (Martinez et

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al., 2012). Although they are small, parent expectations are a contributing factor in preparing their children to transition to adulthood (Holmes et al., 2018).

### **International Systems**

Today, the life expectancy of people with a disability is increasing (Ellison et al., 2011). Across the globe, the healthcare sector has been caught off guard by the increasing rates of survival of youth with special educational needs (Kingsnorth et al., 2011). There is a lack of research in students with disabilities transitioning out of school and in the research that has occurred, the voices of youth with intellectual disabilities are under-represented (Mill et al., 2010). Young adults with an intellectual disability are less likely to move out of their family home than those without a disability (Dyke et al., 2013)

In England, youth with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face a range of challenges in their transition from school (Robinson et al., 2018). The main issue for many people with special educational needs and disabilities is what they are transitioning into (Robinson et al., 2018). In this study, Robinson et al. (2018) examines the role and scope of services are needed in supporting the transition of vulnerable young people from school-to-work environments and individuals with special needs face disadvantages as they transition to the labor market.

In Canada, the lack of appropriate adult services has resulted in extensive waiting lists, gaps in continuity of services post-transitions, and shortages in service provision (Kingsnorth et al., 2011). The goal of this study, conducted by Kingsnorth et al. (2011) at the University of Toronto, was to provide informational, emotional, and affirmation of support during the stressful time of transitioning a student with disabilities into adulthood. Over a one-year period, 11

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transition peer support group sessions were held with an overall attendance of 30 individuals attending a median of two sessions and the membership of these transition groups was dominated by parents of youth on the verge of transitioning (Kingsnorth et al., 2011).

In Australia, when a student begins a transition, they are moving from a generally secure and supported school environment to an adult life with a wide variation of adult roles that may include employment, friendships, independent living, and day activities (Dyke et al., 2013). Statistically, youth with intellectual disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to live independently and parents compare the period of transition stress as second only to the time of their child's initial diagnosis and getting services for early intervention (Dyke et al., 2013). At the University of Western Australia, Dyke et al. (2013) sought the perspectives of eighteen mothers of young adults with Down syndrome or Rett syndrome, where transition was described as a crucial task of moving the student from a protected lifestyle to an independent life of an adult, where opportunities and statuses varied for each. Dyke et al. (2013) noted that mothers of youth with Down syndrome were more likely to report that their child faced more difficult pathways to attaining stability as they entered adulthood. These authors also noted that students with Down syndrome and Rett syndrome faced environmental barriers in the areas of services, policies, and support as they entered their period of transition from school-to-work (Dyke et al., 2013).

In a study performed at the University of Sydney, Mill et al. (2010) asked six youth with intellectual disabilities what they thought about their role in becoming independent within their families. In negotiating autonomy within the family, Mill et al. (2010) noted their approaches: defiant, passive, and proactive; and that inevitably the transition to adulthood is not conflict-ridden between the student and their families.

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As an individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities begins to age, they want to remain living in their own home rather than to be moved to an institution; however, without additional supports, moving to an institution or residential age care may be inevitable (Ellison et al., 2011). Today, individuals with special needs are living longer, which is creating issues for the government and policymakers in ensuring that the needs of these individuals are met as they begin to age (Ellison et al., 2011). If the move is inevitable, it can cut the individual off from access to their social networks, independence, and more likely to experience depression (Ellison et al., 2011). Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities face barriers in accessing aged care and health services as the disability services and age care sectors do not work together and rather act as different departments (Ellison et al., 2011). This study conducted by Ellison et al. (2011) explored the perceived needs of people aging with a disability and asked students with disabilities, family members, and support staff what value age care supports provided. Community-based aged care supports give opportunities to participate in activities such as social participation, self-determination, and work experience that can have positive effects on health, well-being, and longevity, but people with disabilities have limited access to these supports (Ellison et al., 2011). Without access to community-based age supports, staff reported subjects would lose skills and deteriorate quickly, but there is this perception in Australia, that a person with a disability who is aging and receiving support from the disability sector and the aged based care sector is “double dipping” in services (Ellison et al., 2011).

Findings from the study conducted by McCoy et al. (2019) show that young people with special educational needs are three times more likely than their peers to experience a negative transition into secondary schooling.

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## Why It Matters

Research on parent and professional relationships indicates that school and agency professionals often fail to use family systems and definitions of parent participation often vary among both professionals and family members (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016). In fact, little research has been conducted on models that teach leadership skills and provide opportunities for parents of students with disabilities to get involved in policy development and systematic change within the special education system (Shepherd & Kervick, 2016). Policy development and changes in the system could provide more postsecondary opportunities such as employment (Brewer et al., 2011), independent living (Sprunger et al., 2018), and postsecondary education (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). It is upon the administrators to develop a relationship between their school and the parent of the student with special needs, but programs and policies make it hard to develop these relationships and reach certain goals (Hirano & Rowe, 2016).

As schools work to increase parent involvement, they need to consider that a parent's perception and the cultural differences of each individual family (Test et al., 2018). The public education system not only fails the student, but also the family when they do not take culture and background into consideration of decisions made for the student. The system also fails the family when many parents report that they do not fully understand the transition process and have very little knowledge and access to resources and information about postsecondary opportunities (Martinez et al., 2012). Parents play an active role in locating and engaging their child in activities that can help them gain skills and prepare the adolescent for adult life (Holmes et al., 2018) and they are the key to launching their child into adulthood (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Students with disabilities in the midst of transitioning from school-to-work can rely heavily on

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their parents and caregivers for guidance as both the student and the parent change roles (Francis et al., 2016).

Parents have a sense of self efficacy to help their child to succeed (Hirano & Rowe 2016) and for parents of students with disabilities having the knowledge and a well-knit pre-established support group can make the student's transition into adulthood smoother and at greater odds for success in their postsecondary endeavors. Very little research has been done into the impact that high income and low income schools have on the parents in gaining access and knowledge of the transition process and system.

Yet, this research is very important because this will allow us to call for more legislation aimed towards students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their transition from school-to-work, understand the overall parental perception of their child(ren)'s education and transition plan, and call for more research to be conducted within this specific population. As a future special education teacher who wants to work with students ages 18-22 and help them to prepare for their transition from school-to-work, the transition process and the transition stage is a multi-year journey that impacts the student, the parents/guardians, the students' family, and the community. As a collective, we can help to ease the transition process and break down barriers within the community in order to help the student succeed.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Model**

This study uses a convenience sample observed at one specific point in time within one specific community. This survey was limited by the size of the program, the number of school districts that chose to partner and participate within the program, and the number of students

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enrolled. For this study, researchers surveyed one postsecondary program at a four-year university that works with young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have a college experience and grow in their independent skills. The interim director of the EXCEL Program at Bridgewater State University was sent an email that detailed the research that I requested to carry out within their program. Permission was granted and subjects were all sent an email to request voluntary participation (Index #1- Recruitment Email).

The EXCEL Program at Bridgewater State University in Bridgewater, MA partners with local school districts in southeastern Massachusetts where students ages 18-22 who are on IEPs/504 plans and receive special education services from the district's special education department can become participants of the EXCEL Program. The participants of the program enroll in college course(s) and can choose to audit or take the course(s) for credit. Participants are paired with an education coach, they participate in person-centered planning, mock interviews, set goals for the semester and the program course, and have the opportunity to live on campus after one semester of participating in the EXCEL program. I chose the program based on the age of the participants within the program, the collective school districts participating in the program, and the availability of the program. The survey was sent to potential subjects asking for information about the supports they have received, extracurriculars they have participated in, and the involvement/ role their parents have played in their education and transition planning. The subjects were asked a series of questions regarding age, sex, ethnicity, education, income, resources made available to them by the school district, ease/accessibility to resources, availability of interagency collaborations provided through their specific school district, and personal advocacy of the participant and their parents that have helped the participant to succeed in their postsecondary goals.

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The EXCEL Program uses a person-centered planning approach to help students discover their personal interests and career goals. The goal of such programs is for the student to become as independent as possible and for the education coach to decrease their daily support as the year progresses. Each EXCEL Program student is paired with a daytime peer mentor, who is an undergraduate BSU student. EXCEL students gain confidence, independence, develop social skills, and become involved and immersed within the BSU campus community. Participants enrolled in this program are advocates for themselves in both personal and classroom matters and, whether these decisions are made individually or shared, the student is aware of their parents/guardians' involvement with their education. In this study, subjects were asked about their perceptions of their parents/guardians' involvement with their education, but also of how the subject themselves felt supported and guided by their school in their transition process planning.

### **Subject & Setting**

The Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) began in 2007 to create partnerships between local school districts and two-and four-years public universities around Massachusetts to serve the target population of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities ages 18-22. The EXCEL Program at Bridgewater State University is a grant-funded independent program under the MAICEI that began in 2011.

The EXCEL Program at BSU partners with the southeastern Massachusetts school districts of Attleboro, Bridgewater-Raynham, Brockton, Carver, Duxbury, Easton, Freetown-Lakeville, Hanover, Marshfield, Norton, Pembroke, Pilgrim Collaborative, Silver Lake Regional, Somerset-Berkley, and Weymouth Public School districts. Researchers used the Census Reporter's 2018 American Community Survey for the most recent data on the school districts'

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population, median household income, and population of poverty. Attleboro's school district population is 44,548 and the median household income is \$74,255 with 8.9% of the population living in poverty. Bridgewater-Raynham's school district has a population of 41,407 and the median household income is \$94,854, with 7.7% of the population living in poverty. Brockton's school district population is 95,781 and the median household income is \$63,043, with 9.6% of the population living in poverty. Carver's school district has a population of 11,661 and the median household income is \$66,406, with 5.6% of the population living in poverty. Duxbury's school district population is 15,703 and the median household income is \$128,333, with 4.1% of the population living in poverty. Easton's school district population is 24,306 and the median household income is \$104,719, with 4% of the population living in poverty. Freetown-Lakeville's school district population is 20,544 and the median household income is \$98,132, with 4.4% of the population living in poverty. Hanover's school district population is 14,397 and the median household income is \$120,000, with 2% of the population living in poverty. Marshfield's school district population is 25,754 and the median household income is \$96,514, with 7.3% of the population living in poverty. Norton's school district population is 19,634 and the median household income is \$108,423, with 6.3% of the population living in poverty. Pembroke's school district (which also includes Pilgrim Area Collaborative) population is 18,304 and the median household income is \$103,920, with 3% of the population living in poverty. Silver Lake Regional's school district population is 24,150 and the median household income is \$96,646, with 5.3% of the population living in poverty. Somerset-Berkley's school district population is 24,886 and the median household income is \$80,250, with 4.1% of the population living in poverty. Lastly, Weymouth's school district population is 56,384 and the median household income is \$79,034, with 6.2% of the population living in poverty.

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The Bridgewater State University EXCEL Program requires participants to attend a partner school district, receive funding from their school district in order to attend, be recommended to the program as a strong candidate, have documentation of an intellectual/developmental disability, currently receive services from their school district, fit into Tier 1 (ages 18 to 22 and has not passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) requirements) or Tier 2 (ages 20-22, has not passed MCAS requirements, but is still eligible for special education services), demonstrate an emotional stability and maturity, committed to school program and an eagerness to continue learning, interest in working and living independently, desire to grow in self-advocacy and self-determination skills, ability to identify career goals, and demonstrate communication skills when working with peers and staff.

### **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Subjects and parents have more knowledge and access to resources on transition planning and transitioning from school to work in mid-high income and high income school districts.

**Hypothesis 2:** Subjects and parents have more access to support in transitioning their students from school to work in mid-low-income and low-income school districts.

**Hypothesis 3:** Subjects and parents who participate in extracurricular activities (jobs, clubs, organizations, etc.) in both high- and low-income school districts have more knowledge on transition planning and transitioning from school-to-work.

**Hypothesis 4:** Subjects and parents have access to more interagency collaborations in transition planning in higher income school districts.

### **Operationalization**

Socio-economic status: In order to conduct this survey, an individualized socioeconomic status (SES) was created to separate the fifteen school districts into a four-tier table based on the median household income within the school district. The data was collected from the United States Census Bureau 2019 Massachusetts QuickFacts and the Census Reporter American

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Community Survey report from 2018. The average median household income for Massachusetts, according to the Census Bureau 2019 Massachusetts QuickFacts, is \$77,378. The first tier is inclusive of median home income values that are considered low-income school districts of \$0 to \$70,000 and two school districts fit within this tier. The second tier is inclusive of median home income values that are considered mid-low-income school districts of \$71,000 to \$95,000 and four school districts fit within this tier. The third tier is inclusive of median home income values that are considered mid-high income school districts of \$96,000-\$110,000 and six school districts fit within this tier. The fourth tier is inclusive of median home income values that are considered high income school districts of \$111,000-\$125,000+ and two school districts fit within this tier. In this study, Pembroke and Pilgrim Area Collaborative fall within the same school district as the Pilgrim Area Collaborative is the vocational program of the Pembroke School District. Subjects of the survey will not report that they attend the Pembroke School District, but instead that they attend the Pilgrim Area Collaborative and will be classified into the same tier as Pembroke School District.

**Table 1: Level of Income Tier for Districts Represented in Study**

Tier Number	Massachusetts' Median Home Income
Tier 1 (Low Income)	Less than or equal to \$70,000
Tier 2 (Mid-Low Income)	\$71,000-\$95,000
Tier 3 (Mid-High Income)	\$96,000- \$110,000
Tier 4 (High Income)	\$111,00-125,000+

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## **Survey Instrument**

In this study, the Bridgewater State University Qualtrics Survey Software was utilized to create the survey, administer the survey, and collect the survey's data. Qualtrics is an online web-based survey instrument where data can be stored and collected while keeping the privacy and confidentiality of the survey subjects involved as required by the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA). The survey was designed to collect specific demographics information details about students' education and participation in the EXCEL Program. (Index 2- Survey). Question # 3 asked for the subject's age, Question #6 asked if the subject had received their high school diploma, and Question #7 asked how many semesters the subject had participated in the EXCEL Program. These questions coincide with each other because if the subject has received their high school diploma, it can reduce the amount of semesters and increase the age at which they begin their time in the EXCEL Program. Question #10 asked the subject how many people lived within their household including themselves, Question #11 asked the subject how many heads of household lived at their house, Question #12 asked the subject how many of the heads of household work, and Question #13 asked the subject for the income of their household. These questions also coincide because if there are less people living within the house and the household income is higher, it can mean that there is a larger budget to be used on the student and private pay resources outside of the classroom.

## **Limitations**

There were several limitations in this research. The current state of the COVID-19 pandemic restricts what types of surveys and research can be undertaken in the field and how it can be performed. The program's response and whether or not they agreed to participate may have also been impacted due to the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants'

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ability to access a computer or technology/internet in order to access their email and complete the survey may also be impacted due to the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was chosen within the state of Massachusetts, where all school districts are more likely to have a higher socioeconomic status than most of the United States. This program was chosen based on the age of the participants, availability of the program, and representation of school districts involved within the program and emailed information about the research being carried out. Traditionally, parent involvement has a positive impact on the student's education and postsecondary outcomes and a lack of information on how the parent can get involved within the public school and the student's classroom may also limit results of this research and how the student responds to the question from their point of view.

This study is also dependent upon the responses received from the program's participants. Of the participants asked to participate, it may be possible that only high income or low-income school district's students responded, making the need to open up to more programs with higher need. There is limited racial representation in this study of the ten subjects, seven self-identified as Caucasian/ White/ European. Additionally, this study measures student perceptions of parental involvement where parents did not answer similar questions about their own involvement.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Very little research has been done examining the impact that high- and low-income school districts and communities have on the parents/guardians in gaining access and knowledge of the transition process and system. However, the little previous research that has been done can still

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guide this study examining what they mean for the success in the school-to-work transition outcomes of these students.

The EXCEL Program has 27 students this Fall 2020 semester. These students attend classes, participate in virtual job shadowing, and receive education coaching and career coaching. Of the 27 students, six of them are living on campus in the residential halls during the Fall 2020 semester. Ten of the 27 subjects in the EXCEL program chose to voluntarily participate in this survey (Oliver, Hazel, Scarlett, Emmett, Miles, Declan, Elijah, Henry, Everett, and Maeve\*). The researcher did not collect EXCEL survey subjects' names, but randomly assigned them to a name in order to personalize each subject's responses. All ten survey subjects are citizens of the United States of America. Nine out of the ten survey subjects qualify for an IEP or 504 Plan. There was an age range of four years between the survey subjects. One was 18 years old, three were 19 years old, four were 20 years old, and two were 21 years old. Race did not vary as much as the age range did. Seven of the subjects were White/European/Caucasian, one was White/Native American, and two did not state their ethnicity. In the United States, students who are on IEPs begin planning their transition to postsecondary opportunities at or before the age of fourteen, depending on their disability. Six subjects claimed that they began transition planning when they were older than 14 years old. Two were 14 years old and one was 12 years old when their IEP teams began transition planning.

Overall, parental expectations about their child's future can impact their child's outcomes (Holmes et al., 2018). Previous research by Holmes et al. (2018) reports that parents of male students had higher expectations than parents of female students, but age and household income were not determined to predict parental expectations. In this study, out of the ten survey subjects, seven were male and three were female.

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## **EXCEL Program Participants**

In this section, I will introduce each of the ten survey subjects to provide background information on their education, (including their participation within the EXCEL Program), their extracurriculars/employment/vocational rehabilitation participation, their employment/internship experience, their parents/guardians' involvement within their education, and their role in their own decision making. None of these names are actual names of EXCEL subjects.

### **Subject #1: Oliver\***

Oliver is a 21-year-old unknown ethnicity/race male who is diagnosed with autism and a specific learning disability. Oliver is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. Oliver has received a high school diploma and receives one on one support and speech/reading support within the classroom. He is in his second semester as a participant of the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Pilgrim Area Collaborative. Outside of the classroom, Oliver has participated in vocational rehabilitation or life skills activities for two years, he does not currently work outside of school or participate in an internship, and he participates in sports/Special Olympics/ Unified Sports and band/orchestra as extracurricular activities. He lives in a household of two people and reports that two heads of household, both of them work, however Oliver is uncertain of the household income.

Oliver's transitional planning began after the age of 14 and he strongly agrees that the school is supporting him in accessing information about his transition. Oliver feels confident in his school district's plans to help him transition because as he wrote, "Yes because they helped me get on the right tracks and do future planning." Oliver's IEP team asked Oliver's parents/guardians to get involved within his education because they want to help him in the

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future. While Oliver is the sole decision maker on independent matters, Oliver and his parents/guardians are Oliver's classroom advocates. When asked if the IEP team asked his parents or guardians if they wanted to get involved in his education (Question #24), Oliver wrote, "Yes because they wanna help me in the future." Oliver's parents/guardians are involved within his day-to-day education and involved within the transitional planning stages with his IEP team but would like to be more involved. Oliver compared his parents/guardians' involvement in his education in middle school to his education in high school/ vocational program and stated that his parents/guardians' involvement had increased. Oliver's parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options and found these available within his community: supported shared living, applying for an apartment for the student, and Oliver starting his own business. It is unknown as to whether or not the Pilgrim Area Collaborative, Oliver, and Oliver's parents/guardians have developed an interagency collaboration.

**Subject #2: Hazel\***

Hazel is a 19-year-old Caucasian/Native American (25%) female who is diagnosed with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Hazel is a United States citizen, who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 Plan. She is in her third semester as a participant of the EXCEL Program through the partnership with the Mansfield School District. Hazel did not receive a high school diploma and receives occupational therapy services through her school. Outside of the classroom, Hazel has participated in vocational rehabilitation or life skills activities for less than one year, she does not currently have a job or work through an internship, and she participates in sports/ Special Olympics/ Unified Sports as extracurricular activities. Hazel's household consists of six people, where there are two heads of household that live within the house and two heads of household work. Hazel is uncertain of the household income.

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Hazel's transition planning began after the age of 14 and she agrees that the school is supporting her transition in providing transition information. Hazel's IEP team did not ask her parents/guardians to get involved within her education, but her parents/guardians do have some involvement within her education. Both Hazel and her parents/guardians act as classroom advocates for Hazel and her parents/guardians play a role in making decisions on medical, academic, and independent matters about Hazel. Hazel's parents/guardians attend her IEP meeting every six months/ year, actively email/phone call/ in contact with her teacher, and are involved within the transitional planning stages of her IEP team. Hazel's parents/guardians know and understand her postsecondary goals listed within her IEP which are as Hazel wrote "I wanna try to go to college for nursing." Hazel compared her parents/guardians' involvement in middle school to their involvement in high school and stated that her parents/guardians' involvement had somewhat increased. Her parents have researched post-secondary options and found these available within her community: supported employment (Department of Developmental Services (DDS)) and job training through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Hazel feels confident in how her school district plans to help her transition from school-to-work and stated that her school has helped her to develop an interagency collaboration between her and her parents/guardians, the school, and the agency, but she is unsure in how as she wrote, "I don't know."

### **Subject #3: Scarlett\***

Scarlett is a 20-year-old unknown ethnicity/race (she preferred not to answer) female who is diagnosed with an intellectual disability and an anxiety disorder. Scarlett is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. Scarlett did not receive a high school diploma and receives one-on-one support and is placed within a smaller group setting within the classroom.

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She is in her second semester as a subject of the EXCEL Program through the partnership with the Mansfield School District. Scarlett lives within a four-person household that includes herself, with two heads of household and both heads of household work, but Scarlett is uncertain of the household income. Scarlett and her parents/guardians play a role in making medical, academic, personal, and independent decisions about Scarlett. Scarlett currently works outside of school. It is important to note that Scarlett chose to only complete the survey up to Question #17.

#### **Subject #4: Emmett**

Emmett is a 20-year-old Caucasian male who is diagnosed with autism. He is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/504 plan. He is in his third semester as a subject of the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Pilgrim Area Collaborative. Emmett did not receive his high school diploma and receives one-on-one support and speech/reading within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Emmett has participated in vocational rehabilitation for more than four years, participates in Best Buddies, and has a job as an extracurricular activity. He lives in a household of three people. Two heads of household live within the house and both of them work, however Emmett is uncertain of the household income.

Emmett's transition planning began after the age of 14 and he strongly agrees that the school is supporting him by providing transition information. Emmett feels confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work as he wrote "That I got a lot of support." When asked if his IEP Team asked his parents/guardians to get involved with his education, he reported yes and wrote "They (Emmett's parents/guardians) always have been involved with my education plans". Emmett's parents/guardians play a role in decision making, but it is unknown as to whether Emmett is his own classroom advocate or if that role is shared with his parents/guardians. Emmett's parents/guardians have developed a professional

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relationship with his teacher and are involved within his classroom. His parents/guardians attend six month/yearly IEP meetings, actively emailing/phone call/ in contact with his teacher, involved within the transitional planning stages with his IEP team, and are a part of his IEP team. Emmett's parents/guardians know and understand his postsecondary goals listed within his IEP which are as he wrote "To live independently and getting a job." Emmett noted that his parents/guardians' involvement with his education had increased from middle school to high school. His parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options for Emmett and found these available within their community: day habilitation programs, supported employment (DDS), job training through MRC, and supported shared living. It is unknown as to whether or not an interagency collaboration has been created between Emmett's school district and any of the opportunities made available to him through his transition process.

**Subject #5: Miles\***

Miles is a 21-year-old Caucasian male who is diagnosed autism. He is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. He is in his second semester as a participant of the EXCEL Program through the Pilgrim Area Collaborative. Miles did not receive his high school diploma and receives one-on-one support within the classroom. Outside of school, Miles has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for more than four years, he participates in Best Buddies and life coaching as extracurriculars, and he works through an internship. At home, Miles lives in a four-person household. There are four heads of household that live within the house, but only one head of household works, and Miles is uncertain of his household's income.

Miles and his IEP team began transition planning when Miles was 14. Miles and his parents/guardians play a role in making joint decisions on medical, academic, personal, and

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independent matters and both act as classroom advocates for Miles. Miles strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on his transition process. Miles also feels confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work. Miles parents/guardians were asked by Miles' IEP team to be involved within his education as he wrote, "Team meetings." They have developed a professional relationship with Miles' teacher and are involved within his classroom. They also attend his IEP meeting every six months/year, involved within the transitional planning stages with his IEP team, and a part of his IEP team. Miles' parents/guardians know and understand his postsecondary goals listed within his IEP which are as Miles wrote "Volunteering." Miles noted that his parents/guardians' involvement within his education had somewhat increased from middle school to high school. Miles' parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options and found these available within their community: day habilitation programs and staying at home (if the parent prefers this option). Miles stated that his school helped him to develop an interagency collaboration in his transition planning process.

**Subject #6: Declan\***

Declan is a 20-year-old White/European male who is diagnosed with autism. He is a United States citizen, who stated that he does not qualify for an IEP/ 504 plan. This is his third semester in the EXCEL Program through MHS. Declan did receive his high school diploma and receives one-on-one support and is placed in a smaller group setting within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Declan has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for one year, he is involved in Best Buddies and band/orchestra as extracurricular activities and he works through an internship. Declan lives in a four-person household. There are

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two heads of household that live at Declan's house and both heads of household work, but Declan is unaware of his household's income.

Declan was older than fourteen years old when his IEP team began transition planning for his transition. He strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on his transition. Declan also feels confident in the way that his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work as he wrote, "Me becoming more independent." Declan's parents/guardians play a role in decision making in the medical, academic, personal, and independent matters and both Declan and his parents/guardians are his classroom advocates. Declan's parents/guardians were asked to get involved in his education by his IEP team by as Declan wrote "They helped me study." Declan states that his parents/guardians have some involvement in his day-to-day education and volunteer once a year with his classroom. Declan compared his parents/guardians' involvement in middle school to their involvement in high school and stated that their involvement had stayed the same between middle and high school. Declan's parents/guardians have not researched post-secondary options for him and the school has not helped to develop an interagency collaboration to aid in the transition planning process.

**Subject #7: Elijah\***

Elijah is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who is diagnosed with autism. He is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. This is his third semester in the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Hanover Public Schools. Elijah did receive his high school diploma and receives one-on-one support and is placed in a smaller group setting within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Elijah has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for one year, he participates in summer employment, a student film club, and he currently works outside of school as his extracurricular activities. Elijah lives in a three-person

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household. There are two heads of household that live within Elijah's house and both of them work, but Elijah is uncertain of the household income.

Elijah's IEP team began his transition planning when Elijah was twelve years old. He strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on his transition process. Elijah also feels confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work as he wrote, "Yes, I'm in EXCEL". Elijah compared his parents/guardians' involvement in middle school to their involvement in high school and stated that his parents/guardians' involvement had decreased. Elijah's parents play a role in medical, academic, personal, and independent matters that have to do with Elijah. His parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options but did not list any that were seen available within his community. Elijah did not answer Question #24 (When beginning transitional planning, did the IEP team ask your parents or guardians if they wanted to get involved in your education?), Question #25 (How involved are your parents/guardians in your day-to-day education?), Question #26 (How are your parents/guardians involved with your classroom?), Question #29, Question #31 and Question #32.

**Subject #8: Henry\***

Henry is an 18-year-old Caucasian male who is diagnosed with an intellectual disability and a visual impairment. He is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. This is his first semester in the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Somerset-Berkley Public School District. Henry did not receive his high school diploma and receives smaller group setting placement, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech/reading within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Henry has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for four years, he participates in sports/Special Olympics/ Unified Sports, Best

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Buddies, and does not currently work or participate through an internship as extracurricular activities. Henry lives in a four-person household. There are two heads of household that live within Henry's household, both heads of household work, and Henry reports that the income of his household is between \$121,000-\$149,999.

Henry was older than fourteen years old when his IEP team began transition planning for his transition. Henry strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on his transition process. Henry does not feel confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work as he wrote, "Because I am close to that age and am attending excel (EXCEL) at this time." Henry did not answer whether or not his parents/guardians were asked by his IEP team to get involved in his education (Question #24). His parents/guardians are involved in his day-to-day education and have developed a professional relationship with his teacher and are involved within his classroom. Henry's parents/guardians and Henry play a role in making decisions for Henry in matters of medical, academic, personal, and independence. Henry is his own main classroom advocate within the classroom. His parents/guardians attend his IEP meeting every six months/year, actively email/phone call/ are in contact with your teacher, involved within the transitional planning stages with his IEP team, and a part of his IEP team. Henry compared his parents/guardians' involvement in middle school to their involvement in high school and stated that his parents/guardians' involvement had stayed the same between them. Henry's parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options and found these available within their area: institutions, support employment (DDS), job training through MRC, and pursuing vocational rehabilitation training. Henry's school has not helped him to develop an interagency collaboration with any of the opportunities that were made available to him in his transition planning process.

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**Subject #9: Everett\***

Everett is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who is diagnosed with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and anxiety. He is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/504 plan. This is his third semester in the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Mansfield School District. Everett did receive his high school diploma and receives placement in a smaller group setting, occupational therapy, speech/reading, and alternative MCAS testing within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Everett has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for two years, he reports that he does not participate in any extracurricular activities (but does participate in Best Buddies), and currently works through an internship. Everett lives in a five-person household. There are two heads of household that live within his house, but only one works. Everett reports that his household income is between \$141,000-\$160,999.

Everett was fourteen years old when his IEP team began transition planning for his transition. Everett agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on his transition process. Everett feels confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work because as he wrote “Because the (they) are letting me go to (Everett’s employer) to get more experience.” Everett’s IEP team asked Everett’s parents/guardians to get involved in his education through as he wrote, “They sent an email asking if I (Everett) wanted to go to the IEP Meeting.” Everett’s parents/guardians have developed a professional relationship with his teacher and are involved within his classroom. Everett’s parents/guardians and Everett play a role in making decisions for Everett in matters of medical, academic, personal, and independence and they also share the responsibility of advocating within the classroom for Everett. Emmett’s parents/guardians attend his IEP meeting every six months/year, actively

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email/phone call/ are in contact with his teacher, are involved within the transitional planning stages with his IEP team, and are a part of his IEP team. Emmett's parents/guardians also know and understand his postsecondary goals listed in his IEP, but Everett did not list what they were when asked in Question #26. Everett compared his parents/guardians' involvement in middle school to their involvement in high school and stated that his parents/guardians' involvement had stayed the same between them. Everett's parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options and found these available within their area: supported employment (DDS) and job training through MRC. Everett's school has helped him create an interagency collaboration with the opportunities that were made available during the transition planning process with the company he interns for through as he wrote, "Weekly calls with (Everett's employer)."

**Subject #10: Maeve\***

Maeve is a 20-year-old White female who is diagnosed with autism. She is a United States citizen who qualifies for an IEP/ 504 plan. This is her first semester in the EXCEL Program through the partnership with Weymouth School District. Maeve did receive her high school diploma and receives one-on-one support within the classroom. Outside of the classroom, Maeve has participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills activities for less than one year, she participates Best Buddies, and she currently works through an internship as extracurricular activities. Maeve lives within a five-person household. There is one head of household that lives within the house and the head of household works; however, Maeve is uncertain of the household's income.

Maeve was older than 14 years old when her IEP team began planning for her transition from school-to-work. Maeve does not feel supported by her school in accessing information on her transition process. Maeve feels confident in her school district plans to help her transition

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from school-to-work because as she wrote, “Because I (Maeve) feel comfortable.” Maeve’s IEP team asked her parents/guardians to get involved in her education and she stated, “So they can help me.” Maeve’s parents/guardians are involved in her day-to-day education but would like to be more involved. Maeve’s parents/guardians and Maeve play a role in making decisions for Maeve in matters of medical, academic, personal, and independence and also share the responsibility of advocating within the classroom for Maeve. They currently volunteer on a weekly basis as their involvement within her classroom. Maeve’s parents/guardians have research post-secondary options and found this available within her area: stay at home (if parents/guardians prefer this option). Maeve’s school has not helped her to develop an interagency collaboration with any of the opportunities made available to her in her transition planning process.

### **Parent Involvement as an Access Point**

If these schools want to increase parent involvement, previous research by Test et al. (2018) asks that schools consider the parents/guardians’ perception and the cultural differences of each individual family. This includes demographics of the subject and their family. Subjects in this survey received diagnoses of autism, intellectual disability, visual impairment, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorder, and specific learning disability. Eight of the ten survey respondents were diagnosed with autism. Four of the ten subjects had multiple disabilities. Parent/guardian involvement within their child(ren)’s education can be solely based on the subject’s diagnosis and incidence within the disability. Parents/guardians’ involvement can also be impacted by the family’s economic environment.

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**Table 2: Diagnosed Disability for Subjects in Study**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Diagnosed disability</b>
Oliver	autism and specific learning disability
Hazel	autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
Scarlett	intellectual disability and anxiety disorder
Emmett	autism
Miles	autism
Declan	autism
Elijah	autism
Henry	intellectual disability and a visual impairment
Maeve	autism

In this study, eight subjects lived with two heads of household within the house, one lived with one head of household, and one lived with four heads of household. Three subjects live within a household where only one head of household works, six subjects live within a household where two heads of household work, and one subject lives in a household where three heads of household work. Only two of the ten subjects were aware of their family household income, but because all of the subjects reported their school district, they can be classified into an income tier based on the average household income of their school district. This is shown in table #3.

The findings show that eight of the ten survey subjects do not know their household's income. Out of the ten survey subjects, three were from the Pilgrim Area Collaborative, three

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were from the Mansfield High School, one was from Hanover Public Schools, one was from Weymouth Public Schools, one was from Somerset Berkley, and one was from MHS (researcher could not determine what school district this survey subject was from as the EXCEL Program has multiple partnerships with school districts whose high school acronyms are MHS).

**Table 3: Tier Classification of School Districts Represented in Study**

Tier number/ Massachusetts Median Home Income	School Districts that fall within
Tier 1(Low Income)/ Less than or equal to \$70,999	N/A
Tier 2 (Mid-Low Income)/ \$71,000-\$95,999	Somerset-Berkeley and Weymouth
Tier 3 (Mid-High Income)/ \$96,000-\$110,999	Pembroke/Pilgrim Area Collaborative
Tier 4 (High Income)/ \$111,000-\$125,999	Hanover and Mansfield

Whether or not the subject and their parents/guardians play a role in the decision making of independent, academic, medical, and personal matters for the subject (90% of survey subjects shared the decision making with their parents/guardians, while 10% were their sole decision makers) can also make an impact on the subject's day-to day education, parental expectations of the subject's overall outcome, and the subject's overall outcome in the transition from school-to-work. In comparing parent/guardian involvement from middle school to high school/vocational program, two subjects reported that their parents/guardians' involvement had increased, two subjects reported that their parents/guardians' involvement had somewhat increased, three subjects reported that their parents/guardians' involvement had stayed the same, one reported that parents/guardians' involvement had decreased, one reported that their parents/guardians were not involved within their education, and one did not report their parents/guardians' type of involvement. The involvement of parents/guardians in their child's education may have changed

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from middle school to high school, but the impact of the parents/guardians' involvement is still seen as the subject grows older.

## **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Subjects and parents have more knowledge and access to resources on transition planning and transitioning from school to work in mid-high income and high income school districts

Previous research shows that the access to supports and services, aid and knowledge of the parent and their involvement, and previous employment/work experiences can all have an impact on the student's success in their outcomes and can be predictors in their success (Sprunger et al., 2018). This hypothesis would expect results that show subjects and parents who go to school districts that are classified within the income range of \$96,000-\$125,999+ would have access to and more knowledge of the resources that surround transition planning and the eventual transition from school-to-work.

In this study, mid-high income (tier 3) in table #1 is inclusive of median home income values that are considered mid-high income school districts. Their income would range between \$96,000-\$110,999. Pembroke's school district (which also includes Pilgrim Area Collaborative (PAC)) population is 18,304 and the median household income is \$103,920, with 3% of the population living in poverty. Pembroke and PAC's school district fall into tier 3: mid-high income in table #3. Tier 3: mid-high income includes subjects Miles, Oliver, and Emmett. Miles participated in an internship, his parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, he feels confident in his school district's plans to help him transition from school-to-work. Oliver did not work or participate in an internship, his parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, feels confident in his school district's plans to help him transition from school-to-work. Emmett works outside of school five days a week, his parents/guardians have

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researched post-secondary options, feels confident in his school district's plans to help him transition from school-to-work and strongly agrees that the school has supported his transition by providing transition information. In findings from this study, all three subjects classified into this tier had parents/guardians who researched post-secondary options and reported support shared living (2/3), day habilitation programs (2/3), applying for an apartment for the student (1/3), possibility of starting their own business (1/3), staying at home (1/3), supported employment (DDS) (1/3), and job training through MRC (1/3) as opportunities.

High income (tier 4) in table #1 is inclusive of median home income values that are considered high income school districts of \$111,000-\$125,999+. Hanover and Mansfield all fall into tier 4: high income in table #3. Hanover's school district population is 14,397 and the median household income is \$120,000, with 2% of the population living in poverty. Mansfield School district was not previously reported in the methodology section because Mansfield was not reported as a partner of the EXCEL Program at Bridgewater State University. However, they are now a partner of the EXCEL Program and three of the survey subjects are from Mansfield High School. Mansfield's school district population is 23,761 and the median household income is \$114,720, with 3% of the population living in poverty. Tier 4: high income has subjects Scarlett, Hazel, Elijah, and Everett. Scarlett works outside of school, it is unknown as to whether or not Scarlett's parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options as she did not report this, and confidence levels and agreement/disagreement on support received by school is also unknown. Hazel does not work or participate in an internship, her parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, feels confident in his school district's plans to help her transition from school-to-work. Elijah works outside of school, his parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in

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accessing information on his transition process and feels confident in his school district's plans to help him transition from school-to-work. Everett participates in an internship, his parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, agrees that he feels supported by his school in accessing information on the transition process. Findings from this survey show that three out of four subjects classified into this tier had parents/guardians who researched post-secondary options and reported Supported employment through DDS and job training through MRC as their available post-secondary options.

This hypothesis was not supported by the findings of this study because tier 3: Mid-High Income showed a range in options available to the subjects, tier 4: high income showed limitations in the availability of options reported (supported employment through DDS and job training through MRC). While all parents/guardians of survey subjects, except one subject's parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options for their child, the amount of opportunities available within their communities differed. Two of the three subjects in tier 3: mid-high income participated in an internship or work experience. Two out of the four subjects in tier 4: high income participated in an internship or work experience.

**Hypothesis 2:** Subjects and parents have more access to support in transitioning their students from school to work in mid-low-income and low-income school districts.

Previous research shows that many students in their last year of high school lack the adequate access to supports and trainings that can help in a successful transition to adulthood (Scales et al., 2016). Key findings in a 2012 study by Martinez et al. (2012) found that parents did not have full access to information and knowledge about opportunities for their child to participate in postsecondary education opportunities.

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In the survey, the researcher asked subjects if they or their parents/guardians had researched post-secondary options (day habilitation programs, institutions, supported employment (DDS), independent employment, job training through MRC, supported shared living, staying at home if the parent preferred the other, applying for an apartment for the subject, the subject starting their own business, pursuing vocational rehabilitation training, or if they had not researched options at all. Eight out of the ten subjects' parents/guardians did research post-secondary options for their student. Declan, the subject who could not be classified into a tier, reported that his parents/guardians did not research post-secondary opportunities for him and Scarlett, one of the four subjects classified into tier 4: high income did not report whether or not her parents/guardians researched postsecondary options or that the school district has or has not created an interagency collaboration. For subjects in this study, this shows that parents/guardians of survey subjects in all tiers are researching post-secondary options and opportunities for their students, however the options that are available to their students vary in each tier.

Mid-low income (tier 2) in table #1 is inclusive of median home income values that are considered mid-low-income school districts that ranges between \$71,000-\$95,999. Somerset-Berkeley and Weymouth all fall into tier 2 in table #3. Somerset-Berkley's school district population is 24,886 and the median household income is \$80,250, with 4.1% of the population living in poverty. Weymouth's school district population is 56,384 and the median household income is \$79,034, with 6.2% of the population living in poverty. Tier 2: mid-low income had subjects Henry and Maeve. Maeve did receive her high school diploma, her parents/guardians did research postsecondary options, she participates in an internship, but she reports that she does not feel supported by her school in accessing information on her transition process. However, she

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also reports that she does feel confident in her school district's plans to help her transition from school-to-work. Henry did not receive his high school diploma, his parents/guardians have researched post-secondary options, he does not feel confident in how his school district plans to help him transition from school-to-work, but strongly agrees that he feels supported by his school in opportunities made available to him. Findings from this survey show that subjects' parents/ guardians had researched post-secondary options and reported supported employment (DDS) (1/2), job training through MRC (1/2), pursuing vocational rehabilitation training (1/2), and stay at home (if parent prefers this option) (1/2).

There were no survey subjects who were apart of the Carver (median household income of \$66,406) or Brockton (median household income of \$63,403) that fell into Tier 1: low income in table #3. Declan could not be classified into a tier as he was uncertain of his household's income and the school district he attends, MHS, could not be identified as it could be one of many partnerships with the EXCEL Program whose school district's high school goes by the acronym MHS. He works in an internship, he did receive his high school diploma, and his parents/guardians did not research postsecondary options.

Findings from this survey do not support this hypothesis as the three subjects had mixed responses on their access to support in transitioning from school-to-work, although both of their parents/guardians had researched post-secondary options

**Hypothesis 3:** Subjects and parents who participate in extracurricular activities (jobs, clubs, organizations, etc.) in both high- and low-income school districts have more knowledge on transition planning and transitioning from school-to-work.

Test et al. (2018) found that only 76% of individuals with disabilities were expected to enroll in some type of postsecondary education/training compared to 94% of their peers without disabilities. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employment rates for individuals

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with disabilities were 18% compared to 66% for individuals without disabilities in 2017 (Test et al., 2018). However, previous research has also shown that if a student participates in pre-vocational training, job search training, an internship, or job skill training, they are more likely to have improved vocational rehabilitation referral outcomes and a successful outcome overall (Brewer et al., 2011). Riesen et al. (2014) found that by offering activities such as pre-employment training, vocational training skills, and integrated summer employment, communities can enhance the student's chances of securing competitive employment post-transition.

In the survey, subjects were asked if they had received their high school diploma, how long they had participated in the EXCEL Program, and what supports they received within the classroom. Subjects were also asked if they had a job, participated in an internship, and if they were involved in the following extracurriculars: summer employment, sports/Special Olympics/Unified Sports, clubs/organizations through their high school, Best Buddies, driver's ed/TDA, after-school program, band/orchestra, theater/drama club, volunteer within their community (place of worship, food bank, etc.), and other.

EXCEL Program subjects include students who have and who have not received their high school diplomas. Out of the ten subjects, five received their high school diploma and five had not received their high school diploma. As to participation within the EXCEL Program, and the number of semesters that survey subjects have attended: two subjects were in their first semester, three were in their second semester, and five subjects were in their third semester. Holmes et al. (2018) in previous research reports that academic achievement can be massively impacted by parent involvement. Within the classroom, seven subjects receive one-on-one support, five are placed within smaller group settings, three receive occupation therapy, one

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receives physical therapy services, four receive speech/reading services, and one receives alternative MCAS testing.

Subjects across the survey participated in extracurricular activities that included summer employment, sports/Special Olympics/ Unified Sports, Best Buddies, band/orchestra, and others (life coaching, winter/spring track, work, and an organization at Bridgewater State University). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, subjects do not currently participate within an internship through the program as they typically would. Instead, this semester students are participating within a virtual jobs program. Four subjects work through an internship and three subjects work outside of an internship. Three subjects did not answer, and no subjects reported working through both an internship and work. Nine of the ten subjects have participated in vocational rehabilitation and life skills trainings. There was quite a range in the number of years in which the subjects had participated: two had participated for less than a year, two had participated for a year, two had participated for two years, one had participated for four years, and two had participated for more than four years.

This hypothesis is supported by the findings of this study. Nine out of ten subjects that were involved within extracurriculars (the one reported that they were not involved within extracurriculars, but reported that they were involved in Best Buddies as an extracurricular outside of the classroom) reported that their parents/guardians were involved with their education and had researched post-secondary options (except for one who did not report whether or not their parents had researched post-secondary options).

**Hypothesis 4:** Subjects and parents have access to more interagency collaborations in transition planning in higher income school districts.

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Previous research showed the researcher that the lack of interagency collaborations have hindered many students in transition (Trainor et al., 2016). In Osgood et al.'s (2010) study, they called for more attention to be put toward creating collaborations between different agencies in order to eliminate barriers that students often encounter in their transition from school-to-work.

In the survey, subjects were asked if their school had helped them to create an interagency collaboration before the transition and if so, how the school had gone about developing the relationships between the subject, their parents/guardians, and the agency.

In Tier 4: high income districts, two of the subjects had created an interagency collaboration with their school district and a transition planning process option, while the other two subjects did not report as to whether or not an interagency collaboration had been reported.

In Tier 3: mid-high income districts, only one out of the three subjects reported that their school district had made an interagency collaboration with a post-secondary option made available to them through their transition planning process. It is unknown as to whether or not the school districts for the other two subjects did or did not make an interagency collaboration relationship for the subjects.

In Tier 2: mid-low income districts, both subjects' school districts had not helped them to develop interagency collaborations made available to them through post-secondary options in transition planning.

Findings from this survey support this hypothesis, subjects and their parents/guardians have access to more interagency collaborations relationships in transition planning in higher income school districts. The findings for tier 2: mid-low income districts show this as neither school district had made an interagency collaboration for the subjects, while subjects in tier 3:

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mid-high income and subjects in tier 4: high income attended school districts that did create interagency collaboration relationships for the subject to use in their transition process.

## **Conclusion**

Previous research demonstrates that young people with special educational needs are three times more likely than their peers to experience a negative transition into secondary schooling (McCoy et al., 2019). Students, especially with high incidence disabilities including learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), continue to experience poor post-school outcomes (Trainor et al., 2016). Holmes et al. (2018) also found that individuals, specifically on the autism spectrum, achieve limited independence, are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, face social isolation, need ongoing support throughout adulthood, and are less likely to participate in postsecondary opportunities. However, previous research has also seen a great deal of variability in overall outcomes for adults on the autism spectrum (Holmes et al., 2018). This is where the parents/guardians' involvement within their child(ren)'s education can have the most impact.

Hirano et al., (2018) reported that family involvement plays a particularly important role in helping the student to succeed in their post-high school endeavors. Students are 41 times more likely to attend post-secondary education if their parents are involved in their education than students whose parents were not involved (Hirano et al., 2018). Hirano and Rowe (2016) found that teachers and administrators often report that one of the greatest challenges is getting parents who are hard to reach involved in their child's education and transition planning. However, families can face their own barriers in their ability to get involved within their child's education due to limited resources, stress, and lack of knowledge of transition planning (Hirano et al., 2018). Martinez et al. (2012) also found that opportunities for parents/guardians to volunteer and

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get involved decreases as their child begins to age and parents are more likely to be invited as passive participants in their child's education and transition planning (Hirano et al., 2018).

The findings in this study indicate that across the three tiers (tier 2: mid-low income, tier 3: mid-high income, and tier 4: high income), parents/guardians are researching post-secondary options for their student and at least, somewhat involved within their child's education and transitional planning process. Parents and educators need to consider this vulnerable group of youth as individuals who are using these services such as vocational rehabilitation/life activity skills, pre-employment trainings, extracurriculars, and participating in internships to shape their own futures (Osgood et al., 2010) and that parent/guardian involvement within their education is vital to their overall outcome in their transition from school-to-work. Additionally, programs like EXCEL allow students to access post-secondary education which for some increases interest in additional educational opportunities.

Most importantly though, in all of this, is that demographics and economic environments were linked to having an impact on the subjects' and subjects' family's access to knowledge and resources to aid the student in their education and transition planning process in this study.

Overall, parents/guardians are researching post-secondary opportunities and are at least somewhat involved with their child's education, however tier 2: mid-low income subjects were less likely to have their school district help them to create an interagency collaboration between the subject and a post-secondary opportunity. Tier 4: high income subject also faced limitations in what post-secondary opportunities were available to the subject within the area that the parents/guardians had researched (supported employment through DDS and job training through MRC). Tier 3: mid-high income subjects found themselves in the middle with more post-secondary opportunities available to them than tier 4: high income subjects, but also in the same

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position as tier 2: mid-low income subjects with their school districts less likely to create an interagency collaboration between the subject and a post-secondary opportunity. Each tier in the survey reported limitations and were each impacted by the demographics and economic environments within.

### **Future Research**

In undertaking further research on this topic, I would want to expand the community of survey subjects to all of the inclusive postsecondary programs at two- and four-year universities/institutions, starting in Massachusetts, expanding to New England, and finally across the United States. Collecting more data would allow us to have a larger pool of subjects to examine parents/guardians' impact and the role that they play within their child(ren)'s education. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was chosen within the state of Massachusetts, where most school districts have a higher socioeconomic status than most of the United States. This program was chosen based on the age of subjects, availability of the program, and representation of school districts involved within the program. COVID-19 restrictions limited how the survey was distributed and data was collected, so conducting future research in the post-COVID-19 conditions would allow for a broader collection of research through surveys, interviews, and ways in which the survey was advertised for participants of the EXCEL Program to participate. The research findings would provide more insight into the influence of high-and low-income school districts and communities on the availability and accessibility of resources about the transitional process, and the impact of parent/guardian involvement in their child's education and transition planning process.

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## INDEX

1. **Recruitment email**
2. **Survey**

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## **INDEX 1**

### **Student**

Hello EXCEL Students,

The Sociology and Special Education departments are conducting a research survey on students' access to knowledge and resources that can help aid in your transition out of school and the transition opportunities/possibilities available to you. By clicking on the link to the survey below, we are asking that you consider taking part in the survey and take the opportunity to share your input. This survey is confidential, and names will not be collected as part of the confidentiality.

Here is the link to the survey:

[https://bridgew.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cUTGBWazwE3k1IV?Q\\_DL=DUb8VDFHaoiHlmc\\_cUTGBWazwE3k1IV\\_MLRP\\_2bhVxnqv1CTPcot&Q\\_CHL=email](https://bridgew.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cUTGBWazwE3k1IV?Q_DL=DUb8VDFHaoiHlmc_cUTGBWazwE3k1IV_MLRP_2bhVxnqv1CTPcot&Q_CHL=email)

If you have any questions about the research or the survey, please email Christina Raeke at [craeke@bridgew.edu](mailto:craeke@bridgew.edu)!

Thank you!

### **School District**

Hello (school district),

The Sociology and Special Education departments at Bridgewater State University are conducting a research survey through the EXCEL Program. The 30-question survey will look at your student's access to knowledge and resources that can help aid in your student's transition out of school and the transition opportunities/possibility available to them. The student can choose whether or not to complete the survey in the link sent to them in their email. We ask that you not complete a survey, as it is for the student's insight only, however we wanted you to be informed of the research being conducted.

If you have any questions or would like more information on the research being conducted, please email Christina Raeke at [craeke@bridgew.edu](mailto:craeke@bridgew.edu)!

Thank you!

### **Parent(s)/Guardian(s)/Family**

Hello,

The Sociology and Special Education departments at Bridgewater State University are conducting a research survey through the EXCEL Program. The survey will look at your student's access to knowledge and resources that can help aid in your student's transition out of

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school and the transition opportunities/possibility available to them. The student can choose whether or not to complete the survey in the link sent to them in their email. We ask that you not complete a survey, as it is for the student's insight only, however we wanted you to be informed of the research being conducted.

If you have any questions about the research, please email Christina Raeke at [craeke@bridgew.edu](mailto:craeke@bridgew.edu)!

Thank you!

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**INDEX 2**

You are invited to participate in a survey about your education and access to resources that can aid in the transition from school to work. If you decide to participate in this study, your participation will involve completing one survey that takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. Although you may not personally benefit, this study is important to science/society from school to work. There are no foreseeable risks, and you may refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from this study at any time. Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used.

If you agree to participate, please click the arrow below to continue to the survey. You will have the option to refuse to answer individual questions and may change your mind and leave the study at any time without penalty.

1. Are you a participant of the Bridgewater State University Extraordinary Expectations-Career-Life (EXCEL) Program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. Do you qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. What is your age?
  - a. 18
  - b. 19
  - c. 20
  - d. 21
  - e. 22
  - f. 23
  - g. 24
  - h. 25
  - i. 26
4. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Transgender
  - d. Nonbinary
  - e. Prefer not to answer
  - f. Other
5. What is your race? (Select all that apply)
  - a. African American/African/ Black/ Caribbean
  - b. Asian/ Pacific Islander
  - c. Caucasian
  - d. Hispanic/Latino

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- e. Native American
  - f. Prefer not to answer
  - g. Other
6. Did you receive your high school diploma?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
7. How many semesters have you participated in the EXCEL Program? (Include this semester as 1)
- a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
8. Are you a citizen of the United States of America?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
9. What is your disability (Select all that apply)?
- a. Autism
  - b. Blindness
  - c. Deafness
  - d. Emotional Disturbance
  - e. Hearing Impairment
  - f. Intellectual Disability
  - g. Multiple Disabilities
  - h. Orthopedic
  - i. Other Health Impaired
  - j. Specific Learning Disability
  - k. Speech or Language Disability
  - l. Traumatic Brain Injury
  - m. Visual Impairment
  - n. Other
    - i. Please list
10. How many people live within your household? (Include yourself)
- a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8
  - i. 9

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- j. 10
  - k. More than 10
11. How many heads of household live at your house? (parents/guardians/grandparents)
- a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. More than 4
12. How many heads of household work?
- a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. More than 4
13. What is the income of your household?
- a. \$0-\$20,999
  - b. \$21,000-\$40,999
  - c. \$41,000-\$60,999
  - d. \$61,000-\$80,999
  - e. \$81,000-\$100,999
  - f. \$101,000-\$120,999
  - g. \$121,000-\$140,999
  - h. \$141,000- \$160,999
  - i. \$161,000-\$180,999
  - j. \$181,000-\$200,999
  - k. \$201,000+
  - l. Unknown/Uncertain
14. Are you the sole decision maker in medical, academic, personal, and independent matters or do your parent(s)/guardian(s) play a role?
- a. Sole decision maker
  - b. Parents play a role
15. Do you currently work outside of school or through your internship?
- a. Internship only
  - b. Work only
  - c. Internship and work
16. What types of supports does you receive within the classroom? (Select all that apply)
- a. One-on-one support
  - b. Smaller groups setting
  - c. OT
  - d. PT
  - e. Speech/ Reading
  - f. Alternative MCAS Testing
17. What school district do you attend?

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- a. Leave this answer as a fill in the blank
18. IDEA 2004 states that “..when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include-Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transitional assessments [§300.320 (b) (1)].Transition planning begins no later than age 14, in middle school or early high school, as the student explores what they want their post-school outcome to be. Post-secondary goals and a transition plan that the IEP team determines fit for the individual student are implemented into their IEP in order to begin assessing opportunities and options available for the student’s transition from school to post-school life. At what age did your team begin transition planning for your transition?
- 8
  - 9
  - 10
  - 11
  - 12
  - 13
  - 14
  - Older than 14
19. Have you felt supported by your school in accessing information on your transition process?
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
20. Vocational Rehabilitation is a type of service available to students on Individualized Education Programs and 504 Plans where students learn about job training, how to keep a job, and the goal of the service is to have the student gain employment. Have you been participating in vocational rehabilitation or life skills activities?
- Yes
  - No
21. If you answered YES on Question 20, how long have you been participating in vocational rehabilitation or life skills activities?
- Less than 1 year
  - 1 year
  - 2 years
  - 3 years
  - 4 years
  - More than 4 years
22. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?
- Yes
  - No
23. If you answered YES on Question 22, what extracurricular activities do you participate in? (Select all that apply)

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- a. Summer Employment
  - b. Sports/Special Olympics/ Unified Sports
  - c. Clubs/ Organizations through the High School
  - d. Best Buddies
  - e. Driver's Ed/ TDA
  - f. After-School Program
  - g. Band/Orchestra
  - h. Theater/ Drama Club
  - i. Volunteer within your community (Place of worship, food bank, etc.)
  - j. Other (Please list)
24. When beginning Transitional Planning, did the IEP team ask your parents or guardians if they wanted to get involved in your education? If yes, how so?
- a. Yes, how so? (Please explain it in your own words):
  - b. No, if no, did your parents/guardians advocate to get involved? Please explain in your own words
25. How involved would you say your parents/guardians in your day-to-day education? (Select all that apply)
- a. Little involvement
  - b. Some Involvement
  - c. Involved, but would like to be more involved
  - d. Have developed professional relationship with your teacher and are involved within your classroom
  - e. Actively volunteer within your classroom
  - f. Moderately volunteer within your classroom
26. How are your parents/guardians involved within your classroom? (Select all that apply)
- a. Volunteering on a weekly basis
  - b. Volunteering on a monthly basis
  - c. Volunteering once a year
  - d. Apart of the PTA/PTO
  - e. Attend your IEP meeting every six months/year
  - f. Actively emailing/phone call/in contact with your teacher
  - g. Know and understand your postsecondary goals listed in your IEP (If so, what are they)
  - h. Involved within the transitional planning stages with your IEP team
  - i. Apart of the your IEP team
  - j. Sped PAC
27. How would you compare your parents/guardians involvement in your education from middle school to high school/vocational?
- a. Have not been involved
  - b. Decreased
  - c. Somewhat decreased
  - d. Stayed the same between them
  - e. Somewhat increased

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- f. Increased
28. Have you or your parent(s)/guardian(s) researched post-secondary options?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
29. If Yes on Question 28, what post-secondary options have you seen available within your community? (Select all that apply)
- a. Day HAB programs
  - b. Institutions
  - c. Supported Employment (DDS)
  - d. Independent Employment
  - e. Job training through MRC
  - f. Supported Shared Living
  - g. Stay at home (if the parent prefers this option)
  - h. Applying for an apartment for the student, ex. Section 8
  - i. You (the participant) starting your own business
  - j. Pursuing Vocational Rehabilitation Training
30. Do you feel confident in how your school district plans to help you transition from school-to-work?
- a. Yes, if so what made you feel this way? Please explain in your own words:
  - b. No, if so what made you feel this way? Please explain in your own words:
31. Are you your main classroom advocate or is the responsibility of advocating shared between you and your parent(s)/guardian(s)?
- a. You only
  - b. You and your parent(s)/guardian(s) only
  - c. Your parent(s)/guardian(s) only
32. When discussing and assessing individual opportunities and options for your postsecondary goals and transition plan, an interagency collaboration (for example: between the day HAB program and the school or the supported employment and your family) can be created before the transition from school to post-school occurs. Has your school helped you to develop an interagency collaboration with any of the opportunities made available to you in your transition planning process?
- a. Yes (If so, how?)
  - b. No