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APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: TRANSITION STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES

BY

JERRY LYNN PETREY

THESIS APPROVED:

Dr. Ann Burns

Chair, Advisory Committee

Dr Abby Poffenberger

Member, Advisory Committee

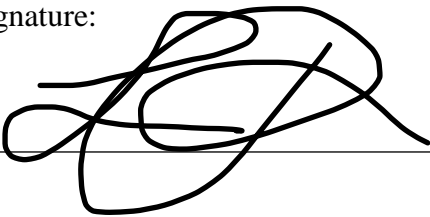
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DISABILITIES

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JERRY LYNN PETREY

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my children. I want them to dream big and challenge themselves every day to reach for even greater heights. Madelynn, Tate and Millie, you will always be my greatest accomplishments.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Dr. Sherwood Thompson, he will always hold a special place in my heart and I am forever grateful to have had the honor to learn from him.

Lastly, I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my wife, Rebecca. She is my best friend and biggest supporter. She is my everything. Thank you and I love you.

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It is with extreme appreciation that I acknowledge my dissertation committee. It's a story that has had many twists and turns and they have instilled confidence in me the whole way. Dr. Ann Burns is a remarkable person for embarking on this roller coaster of an experience. Her patience, wisdom and expertise were invaluable to my study and learning, especially joining, without hesitation as chair so late in the process. I appreciated Dr. Burns willingness to assist me in completing my best work possible. I also appreciate the time she spent reading my work, and the constant communication with me to fully understand my vision. Dr. Abbey Poffenberger's expertise is unsurpassed, and she was instrumental in applying perspective and knowledge assessing and critiquing my writing. I appreciated the opportunity to learn from and work with such a humble, caring, and talented individual. Dr. Norman Powell I've known from the very beginning. His work with organizations aimed at helping students with at risk behaviors, many of those with disabilities added valuable perspective and knowledge to my own study. I appreciate all the time you met with me and offered advice and information that helped me in my research.

I am also appreciative of the support of my home school district, Madison County. Especially to my friends and colleagues, Shanna Reeder and Shannon Cornette, for seeing the value in my study and supporting my journey.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my wife and family. Obtaining my doctorate degree was a dream that without their support I would not have been able to achieve. I am grateful and blessed because I never would have had the courage to pursue this dream without their encouragement and confidence in me. I love and thank you.

ABSTRACT

Transition policy and procedures are integral for districts promoting students with disabilities to successful post school outcomes in career or in higher education. School districts are given a set of standards that must be addressed in their curriculum but are not clearly delineated by state and national organizations. Additionally, transition programs in the secondary curriculum have not been examined extensively, and most research investigated particular individual disabilities in higher education settings or studies involving independent living or employment after school has been completed.

This qualitative appreciative inquiry study sought to understand commonalities in the policies and procedures of the implementation of transition strategies by school districts in central Kentucky. In this study, nine school districts with seventeen stakeholders involved with setting and implementing transition practices for students with disabilities were surveyed using open-ended questions and a conversational approach.

Participants in each of the groupings indicated that self-determination is used for interactions with students to focus on life skills and that career exploration and post-secondary goal setting has been a district initiative. These findings could be instructive for policy implementation when designing transition strategies for high school districts in the area of special education. Finally, limitations and suggestions for further research are presented.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, transition, special education, self-determination, causal agency theory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	10
Transition Services	10
Background of Problem	11
Purpose and Significance	13
Research Questions	16
Research Design	17
Theoretical Framework	21
Key Definitions	26
Summary	28
II.LITERATURE REVIEW.....	30
Transition Related Practices	31
Youth One Year Out Survey	38
Self Determination.....	39
Causal Agency Theory Application in Education	40
Appreciative Inquiry in Education	46
III.METHOLOGY	61
Using AI Approach to Improve Transition Outcomes in Education	61
Data Collection	56
Pilot Focus Group.....	56
Proceedures.....	58

Risks, Benefits, and Trustworthiness	74
Participant Demographics and Setting.....	76
Researcher Perspectives and Biases.....	78
Data Analysis	81
Methodology Limitations	82
IV.RESULTS	84
Findings	84
On Transition Planning and Digital Communication in a Pandemic.....	88
Positive Core: Positive Perceptions of Transition to Post School Outcomes for Students with Disabilities	89
Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Resource Tools, Grade Year to Start, and Support from KDE Regarding Transition.....	95
Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Youth One Year Out Survey	103
What are the Most Important Steps a School District Must Take to Improve Student Response Rates on the YOYO Survey.....	111
Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Evidence Based Practice (EBP)	113
What Evidence Based Practices (EBP) does your district use the most?	114
Should Self Determination be Taught in School and to What Extent?.....	115
How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?.....	118
Summary of Findings.....	126
V.SUMMARY	130
Interpretation of the Findings.....	131

Recommendations.....	131
Youth One Year Out	134
Evidence Based Practices	141
Limitations	143
Suggestions for Future Research	144
Conclusion	146
References.....	161
Appendix A: Copy of IRB Application	162
Appendix B: Copy of Email Cover Letter	164
Appendix C: Copy of Consent Letter	166
Appendix D: Copy of Interview Questions	170

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

PAGE

No table of figures entries found.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to Transition Services

What is transition for students with intellectual and physical disabilities and what does it look like for them and their families? Education has long tried to solve the enigma of improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Transition is described as the process of moving from the protected life of a child to the autonomous and independent life of an adult. A large part of this is acquiring a fulfilling and meaningful occupation. Participation in an occupation facilitates social engagement, skill development and a feeling of connectedness and worth (Foley, Dyke, Girdler, Bourke, Leonard, 2012). Nationally in the United States, transition to post-secondary studies for a student with disabilities has not always been a focus and assured success. Often, families with children that have disabilities have many more questions than answers as their child enters into a life after high school.

As a nation our focus has begun to shift to the importance of successful post school outcomes for students with disabilities. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), invested in multiple efforts to increase community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. The first effort, The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) aimed to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits. The second movement called *Employment First*, is a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated

employment and community life. In the state of Kentucky, since 2018 it has become a policy that competitive and integrated employment in the community shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who want to become employed. The opportunities and resources are there, and school districts need to find ways to integrate these systems of focus to help with successful post school transitions for students with disabilities.

Background of the Challenge

Every school district is set up to promote students through every level of academics with a focus on preparing each for a flawless transition at each level but far too often the best district policy will fail if not properly administered. According to the Nation Center of Educational Statistics, between the school years 2011–12 and 2018–19, the number of students served in public schools listed with a disability increased from 6.4 million to 7.1 million and the percentage served increased from 13 percent of total public school enrollment to 14 percent of total public school enrollment. Despite a long-standing emphasis on the importance of supporting adolescents with an intellectual disability to transition from school to meaningful post school education and employment outcomes (Wehman, 2012), data continue to suggest that only approximately 10% of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States are competitively employed in the community (Butterworth, Hiersteiner, Engler, Bershsky, & Bradley, 2015). In comparison to worldwide numbers, the United States is right on par. According to an article from the Washington Times (2005), The World Health Organization uses an estimate of 600 million with disabilities worldwide, or 10 percent of any population are currently employed. On top of those low

numbers, the Centers for Disease Control report, 61 million adults in the U.S. have some kind of disability. Those numbers are broken down as follows: 26% of the adult population, or roughly, 1 in 4 adults; 13.7% of adults have a mobility disability; 10.8% have cognitive or intellectual disabilities; 5.9% of adults have hearing impairments; and 4.6% have vision impairments (Pulrang, n.d.).

This translates into a substantial section of our labor force being left out. It's not only the transition from high school to the workforce that pose a challenge. It is also those with disabilities that move on to post-secondary education and skill training. The data from the National Center for Education Statistics, examining a nationally representative sample of all students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in SY2018-2019, indicated that roughly 19% of all undergraduates and 12% of all post-baccalaureate students self-identify as having some form of an intellectual/physical disability. Compounding these low numbers, students with disabilities have lower college graduation rates than their peers and earn less once they join the workforce (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2018).

The results of a 2011-2012 Gallup Organization telephone interview poll indicated a troublingly low employment rate and post-secondary education/training for adults with disabilities. The report from the Gallup Organization concluded that the transition outlook for these individuals was unlikely to change until new ways are found to meaningfully incorporate this population into the labor force (Siperstein, 2013). This means that high school may be the last opportunity for students with disabilities, through the secondary transition programming, to prepare for life after school. In 1985, Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe conducted a study of 462 youth with disabilities from nine

Vermont school districts who exited high school between 1979 and 1983. Their results indicated that 55% were in paid jobs, but only 67% of these were full-time, 72% who graduated high school earned less than \$5.00/hour and those who dropped out, over 84% earned less than \$5.00/hour.

By the mid-1990s and early 2000s, there had been some progress, but for young people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 29 the employment rate was only 57% compared to a 72% employment rate for individuals without disabilities (Test et al., 2009). The research provided by stakeholders will seek to help improve ways to enhance tools used by school districts in the state of Kentucky to increase the number of post-secondary transition successes of students with disabilities. In the end, it is the responsibility of the education system to equip students with requisite skills to survive and prosper after they graduate (deFur & Patton, 1999).

Purpose and Significance Statement

The purpose of this research was to examine current district transition policies and practices for students with disabilities that are exiting to post school life. The research looked at various transition strategies centered around the Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey that a Kentucky school district can utilize to improve the use of data driven results. I am the former Employment Specialist for Madison County Schools, who worked with students with moderate to severe disabilities, to improve successful post school outcomes for my students. I am now the Postsecondary Transition Specialist for The Kentucky Department of Education looking to improve these results statewide. The YOYO tool will increase participation among stakeholders concerned with the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities as they graduate or age out of the

secondary school setting. The research examined the current district transition policies and practices in place throughout Kentucky school systems as they relate to students with disabilities. The reason I want to pursue this research was based on past results of the YOYO survey for the Madison County school district. I want to explore ways to increase the participation rate above the recommended 65% among the districts exiting students enrolled in special education in responding to the YOYO survey. With an improvement in student participation response numbers completing the YOYO survey, the confidence and reliability of transition data should increase. Accurate data is reliable, provides insight, and an effective way to make the right decisions. Schools must be in a position to respond to what's going on around them. Data that is high quality allows for a greater chance for not only the schools to respond to the data, but the students to prosper as well. Christopher Roberts with Data Entry Outsourced, a global innovator in data entry (2019), indicated five reasons why high quality data should matter to organizations. These reasons include; enables the organization to make better decision making, improves productivity, leads to lower costs by eliminating mistakes, allows the organization to focus on evidence based practices to the right population and directly impacts the organization's relationship with stakeholders. The increased response rate would increase data quality and accuracy, while providing a clear understanding of current transition policies being used in the school district and the effectiveness of them creating positive post school outcomes for students.

The results of the youth one year out data show that students with disabilities are not graduating into competitive integrated employment or post-secondary education with the same preparation, plan, or skills necessary compared to their non-special

education peers. The YOYO Former Student Survey is conducted each spring by a random sample of Kentucky Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or school districts who, in turn, follow up with every student who received special education and graduated or exited the previous year. This is to ensure that all students with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. In addition, this should make sure each school is prepared to develop a transition plan utilized by all stakeholders that will ensure a greater amount of success for post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. These changes will increase the percentage of students graduating with positive post school outcomes, with competitive integrated employment, postsecondary education and independent living.

This research study provided the opportunity to consult with the staff at The Kentucky Post School Outcome Center (KYPSO). The center develops and administers the Youth One Year Out former student interview, or YOYO survey. The center works with state and local partners to identify factors that lead to successful transition from high school to adult life for students with disabilities. The KYPSO staff and I developed instruments to identify evidence-based practices (EBP) being utilized effectively statewide and shared results with school boards and transition stakeholders. The research showed how using evidence-based practices increased post-secondary outcome data including participation in answering the YOYO survey, further education/training, and employment of former students a year removed from high school. This research identified and interpreted the results of the YOYO survey and helped Madison County

Schools district administration teams to develop effective adaptive assessments to identify evidence based practices to improve post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The research questions examined transition policies for students with disabilities in different school districts within the state of Kentucky. The research was guided by the aspect of student centered transition planning. This can lead to improved self-determination, increased rates of employment, enhanced success in post-secondary settings, greater happiness, and improved participation in the community for students with disabilities (Hatfield, 2017). The results stemmed from focus group questions surrounding their Youth One Year Out survey results, the use of an Evidence Based Practice, a point person or team assigned to interpret, distribute and train stakeholders on results of data and possibly shape policy for students with disabilities and their impact toward successful post-secondary outcomes.

- What transition policies are currently in use for districts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP) to transition aged (14 years old to 21 years old) students with disabilities?
- Are districts using the KY Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey to guide policy for successful post school outcome student participation?
- Are districts with improved YOYO survey participation percentages implementing self-determination, an evidenced-based practice (EBP), to improve participation rates among exiting students with disabilities?

Research Design

Pilot Focus Group

The research uses an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach with a focus pilot group of four stakeholders with varying levels of transitional experience for students with disabilities. AI is defined by Dr. David Cooperrider, the founder in 1990, as the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (2005). I chose to use this approach because AI allows my research to take positive strengths from each school district that responds and build a strong practice that helps the group as a whole. The deficiencies and problems of an organization can be easy to find but do nothing to solve the issues at hand. Instead of outsiders labeling all of the problems that exist in education, I show how AI offers the opportunity for insiders to identify the positive core of their collective practice to build capacity within the district. In the process of appreciative inquiry, in its positive core, an organization enhances its collective wisdom, builds energy and resiliency to change, and extends its capacity to achieve extraordinary results (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The problem with most educational reform efforts is that they ignore data and tests of an existing system and attempt to force change onto people, they continually see the pendulum of reform swing from side to side for years. Interventions have to be minimal; they have to be quick and as painless as possible (Elliott, 1999). If not, educators become numb, burned out and emotionally drained. When this happens, no real lasting change takes place and the only ones that end up losing are the students. With AI I sought ways of involving those stakeholders in positive and constructive ways of implementation of data that already exists but is not targeted. I chose to show

ways districts can enhance transitional outcomes for students with disabilities through networking ideas with the data provided through the YOYO survey. The research shows systematic discovery when it is most effective and most capable in leading to changes in education and providing real impact for students with disabilities.

The pilot group involved a Director and Assistant Director of Special Education, Thomas More College Vice President of Enrollment Management, and an educational consultant from the Southeast South Central Cooperative. The pilot group collaborated on assembling a series of ten open-ended questions inquiring about self-determination, causal agency theory, Youth One Year Out data and the knowledge of current transition practices being utilized by stakeholders in their districts. The group also determined two questions that would set the positive core and destiny as a way to develop an action plan going forward for districts. The questions the group prepared to distribute met the following criteria:

- Follow the 4-D Cycle of Appreciative inquiry
- Districts that have appointed personnel to receive, interpret and distribute YOYO data.
- Include Districts that have a similar percentage of students with disabilities as the Madison County School district (17.1%).
- Include Districts with a three-year span of student participation percentages identified from their YOYO data.

Focus Study Group

My focus study group was obtained by working in tandem with the Kentucky Postsecondary Outcomes Center to create and distribute a needs assessment survey to

see what schools are currently doing with the youth one year out survey data. This assessment determines who the stakeholders are that are assigned by the districts to look at YOYO data, their knowledge base of the survey and if they are using the data to its full potential. The site of this study was within several Kentucky school districts determined by the results of a needs assessment survey distributed by the Kentucky Post School Outcomes Center (KYPPO). The study involved seventeen stakeholders and represented nine different school districts within Kentucky, each with intimate contact to guide and initiate the ways student data is received, interpreted and distributed to administration at the board level and passed on to the classroom teacher. These stakeholders included eight Directors of Special Education, two employment specialists, and seven teachers in the area of Special Education dealing with transition. The school districts were chosen by the following criteria:

- Districts that have appointed personnel to receive, interpret and distribute YOYO data.
- Districts that have a similar percentage of students with disabilities as the Madison County School district (17.1%).
- Districts with a three-year span of student participation percentages identified from their YOYO data.

The study looks at district policy using EBP in and around the Youth One Year Out survey data, and improving transition preparation and participation for students with disabilities for postsecondary outcomes. The qualitative research utilizes survey questions, based in appreciative inquiry methodology, distributed to stakeholders involved in determining, teaching, and communicating post school outcome results for

students with disabilities. The culmination of responses determined these key components:

- What training has been implemented to stakeholders within their district concerning transition strategies for students with disabilities?
- Knowledge and utilization of evidence-based practices, centered around self-determination and the causal agency theory
- Communication of transition policies at varying levels of education within the special education domain

The research analyzed what evidence-based practices are currently being utilized within the districts by stakeholders and reviewed what services could be enhanced and used to communicate, promote and help students with disabilities and their families transition to post school success. The results of the focus group questions will allow other school districts to design their transition policies to decrease barriers, improve student participation in completing the YOYO survey, and increase ways to utilize these benefits among school stakeholders of the YOYO data for improved postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

The research results enhanced stakeholder confidence in the use of the YOYO data to help guide transition policy. It helps increase the way districts choose current transition policies that lead to productive post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The research also allow districts to visualize ways to increase and encourage student participation in completing the survey a year after exiting High School. The conclusion of this research was with the intent of developing or guiding evidence-based transition programs through self-determination and the causal agency

theory that improved the postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The end of this study school districts:

- a. Increased the way a district prepares a student with disabilities for post school life
- b. Influenced how soon districts started meaningful and effective transition activities for students with disabilities
- c. Resulted in an increase in family and student participation in the postsecondary YOYO survey
- d. Increased the confidence and use of YOYO data results to judge the effectiveness of their districts transition policies

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination and Causal Agency Theory, Vital Evidenced Based Practices in Transition for Students with Disabilities

Because of the challenges and barriers identified throughout the literature, students with disabilities are graduating from high school unprepared for the adult world. In an article out of The Journal for Vocational Rehabilitation (2011), researchers, Test and Grossi found that even having a compliant transitional Individual Education Plan, may or may not correlate to what is actually occurring in practice or the provisions of transitions services. Two interesting facts came to light.

1. They do not know if a compliant transition IEP equates to quality services and improved outcomes.

2. It is clear that when students take an active role in planning and leading his/her conferences or IEP meetings, it promotes self-determination skills, including goal setting.

Successful transition is more complicated than just having a transition component in an IEP at the age of 16. It also includes continuity of special education services, coordination of interagency collaboration, and the capacity of educators to teach students with disabilities using evidence-based transition practices (Chang, 2018).

Identifying practices that are evidence-based may result in improved transition outcomes for students with disabilities. Evidence-based practices are instructional methods or practices used to teach or deliver specific skills and services that have been shown to be effective based on high-quality research and should be used to inform and enhance the decision making process (Cook, Tankersly, & Landrum, 2009).

Unfortunately, a compelling body of evidence shows that schools and adult support provider organizations too often do not implement evidence-based practices to promote self-determination to improve integrated employment outcomes (Shogren et al., 2018). Both school districts and local vocational rehabilitation agencies are under increasing demand to demonstrate that they are using evidenced practices and empirically supported interventions to improve the effectiveness of school transition plans and vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices (Tansy, Bezyak, Chang, Leahy, and Lui, 2014).

In education we look for proven data that offers clear solutions with strong evidence of success when administered in the classroom. According to Michael Wehmeyer in his book *Framing the Future*, the strongest evidence-based practice is

self-determination, and it is vital to successful school and post-school outcomes as we have for any “transition” related practice for students with disabilities. One reason for promoting self-determination skills for students with disabilities is that these young people have a tendency to be sheltered and protected by their families and schools (Gragoudas, 2014). In order to counteract this tendency, acquisition of self-determination skills must begin being taught early, by parents, teachers and peers (Moore, 2014). Introducing the skills earlier in the educational process is more effective than deferring them until high school (Martin et al., 2013).

Self-determination is a central concept in special education practice and policy (Denney & Daviso, 2012). Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, established in 1969 and a long standing research unit of Kansas University, defines self-determination as “making or causing things to happen in a person’s life”(Landing / Homepage, n.d.). Their mission statement is to enhance the quality of life, self-determination, and inclusion of Kansans with developmental disabilities and their families through research, training, technical assistance, and community service activities (About, 2020). Researchers have consistently identified self-determination as a key factor to success in postsecondary education and enhanced quality of life for students with disabilities. It has received significant attention in the disability field and has been identified as an important outcome of special education support and services and as a predictor of success in adulthood (Shogren & Shaw, 2016). Additionally, researchers have an understanding of the links between self-determination and post school success outcomes. The most effective education activities for post school success are the multi-component interventions, those that target multiple self-determination skills of goal-

setting, problem solving, decision making, choice making, and self-advocacy (Shogren et al., 2018). In fact, findings from large, randomized trial studies of efforts to promote self-determination with adolescents with disabilities have established a causal effect (with multiple interventions) on a) student involvement in educational planning; b) enhanced self-determination; c) access to the general education curriculum and educational goal attainment; and d) more positive employment and community inclusion outcomes (Wehmeyer, 2015). Unfortunately, even with the proof of positive gains, Wehmeyer found that all available evidence suggests that efforts to promote self-determination remain fringe activities, occurring only when a dedicated educator or administrator decides to elevate such efforts to the forefront.

The studies showing the success of self-determination in post school success has led to the development of a theoretical framework called Causal Agency Theory (CAT) to guide intervention implementation and evaluation. This theory is an extension of the functional self-determination theory developed by Karrie A. Shogren, Michael L. Wehmeyer, Susan B. Palmer, and Anjali J. Forber-Pratt in 2015 out of Kansas University (Shogren et al., 2018). The functional model of self-determination provides both a refinement of the definition and a theoretical structure within which the development of the construct could be framed. CAT separates itself by showing that instead of having to consider the “function” that the action serves for the person, the person using self-determination is “acting” as the primary causal agent (2018). In other words, the “act” is not defining the person, but the person is defining the act and thus causing the outcome. It is a classic which came first, in CATs case the person is the main player and decides the action that precedes the outcome.

Causal Agency Theory (CAT) is an empirically validated model that provides a theoretical framework for developing and enhancing supports to enable people with disabilities to develop greater self-determination by engaging in agentic action to set and go after goals. CAT builds upon two fundamental aspects of self-determination (Shogren, 2015). According to Shogren, the first is the building of a dispositional characteristic over a period with proper support and opportunities. The second and most central is contextual factors. Contextual factors are listed as: personal, family and community, and systems and policy factors. These factors shape opportunities for the development and expression of self-determination, necessitating consideration of the implementation of interventions to teach skills associated with self-determination. This allows the evaluator a framework to promote self-determination through assessment, development, implementation, and evaluating interventions. This process will allow school districts to teach and create opportunities for students with disabilities to take leadership roles in their transition planning process, engage in the goal setting process and advocate for their future.

Compounding the difficulty of promoting and adopting self-determination and the Causal Agency Theory in education is the fact that, with all this research, the numbers show that students with disabilities are less self-determined than their peers without disabilities. Those results can lead to an assumption that students with disabilities cannot reach a threshold to be taught to become self-determined. The numbers are skewed because students with disabilities have fewer opportunities to make choices and express preferences across their daily lives (Shogren, n.d.). Therefore, the ultimate goal is the increase of opportunities for students with disabilities to become

more engaged and to be presented with scenarios where ownership of transition and their future becomes commonplace for them through the promotion and use of self-determination evidence based practices. Because research shows that self-determination status has been linked to the attainment of more positive academic (Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, & Wood, 2007) and transition outcomes, including more positive employment and independent living (Martorell, Gutierrez-Rechacha, Pereda, & Ayuso-Mateos, 2008) and recreation and leisure outcomes (McGuire & McDonnell, 2008), and more positive quality of life and life satisfaction (Shogren, 2015).

Key Definitions

Key terms used in this dissertation are based on education, psychological and occupational therapy terminology.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (Cooperrider, 2005).

Transition is used to discuss the challenges faced by adolescents, specifically focusing on students with disabilities, as they move from the educational system into adulthood. Enrolling in further schooling or training, entering the workforce, becoming a parent, accessing agency supports, and living independently are some examples of factors that are included under the term transition (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

Disability is a reference to any condition that adversely affects a student's performance on a consistent basis on which they are performing significantly below their peers.

Multiple categories of eligibility, from mild to severe, under Kentucky guidelines qualify as an educational disability. Any individual who meets the eligibility guidelines for a given disability is then offered services through a special education program in

which they experience fewer barriers to their learning (Kentucky Administrative Regulation, 2008).

Evidence Based Practices are instructional methods or practices used to teach or deliver specific skills and services that have been shown to be effective based on high-quality research and should be used to inform and enhance the decision making process (Cook, Tankersly, & Landrum, 2009).

Causal Agency Theory is an empirically-validated model that provides a theoretical framework for developing and enhancing supports to enable people with disabilities to develop greater self-determination by engaging in agentic action to set and go after goals (Shogren et al., 2018).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers, birth through age 2, with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth ages 3 through 21 receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B.

Postsecondary indicates the period after exiting high school; therefore, the term postsecondary outcome refers to the result of exiting.

Self-determination is defined as “making or causing things to happen in a person’s life”. (Landing / Homepage, n.d.)

Youth One Year Out survey (YOYO) determines the percent of students identified with disabilities who exited high school and were “1) Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school; 2) Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school; 3) Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school” (www.kypso.org).

Summary

Becoming a successful contributor and provider to society is the ultimate goal for any student exiting high school. Each student member wants to be prepared to find a lifelong activity within a career, further their education or training and continue to grow their own networking circle for social wellbeing. The outlook beyond high school should include that same possibility for students with disabilities but in most cases, it can look vitally different. For positive post-school transition to occur there should be adequate planning which involves everybody who can have an input towards students’ needs and interests.

While special education laws exist to guide the educational systems to help all students meet that goal, some still fail to meet that mark. This study will examine how districts in Kentucky can increase the student participation completing the YOYO survey through the promotion and implementation of self-determination EBP to improve transition results for students with disabilities. The Youth One Year Out survey includes the results of all of a districts’ exiting students with disabilities despite their level of disability, financial situation, and resources that impact the success experienced by students with disabilities once exiting high school. It is understood that students with

disabilities can have a variety of challenges and barriers that can lead to a less of a likelihood to be employed or further their education successfully after high school. However, when school districts are presented with predictors for such populations that include evidence of transition results from increased participation from the YOYO survey, increased self-determination EBP, and parental expectation, those likelihoods should start trending more positively. Training the policymakers in the use of these tools and best practice, should start to negate the disadvantages that influence the postsecondary outcome for youth with disabilities. The preparation and implementations of best practice should better equip students with disabilities from not only Madison County, but all Kentucky school districts with the skills necessary to gain successful postsecondary outcomes through additional policy and educational support.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Transition Related Practices

Transition aged students with disabilities in the high school setting are required to be provided individualized services through age appropriate assessments in the area of postsecondary goals. Then school staff gather information to identify the student's interests, preferences, and skills. Based on the information, school staff develop appropriate measurable postsecondary goals and implement those goals using evidenced based practices. Test, Fowler, and Kohler (2009) conducted a review of the literature on secondary transition to identify evidence-based practices designed to teach students with disabilities specific transition-related skills. The review resulted in identifying 64 evidence-based practices to teach 26 different transition-related skills. For example, the evidenced based practice and community based instruction can be used to teach several transition skills such as safety, communication, employment, and community integration skills. Another practice is using self-management instruction to teach students' academic, social and job specific skills. In addition, based on the literature reviewed, Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering and Kohler (2009) were able to identify in-school evidenced based predictors that lead to better-quality post school outcomes. Predictors apply to transition planning and instruction in the following ways:

- (a) provide practitioners information about secondary transition program characteristics that are empirically linked to better post-school success for students with disabilities,
- (b) can be used to develop, expand, and or evaluate secondary transition programs, and

(c) help IEP teams design annual IEP goals and transition services that are more likely to help students achieve their stated post-school goals.

For instance, interagency collaboration is not only a predictor for better education and employment after high school but also a requirement under IDEA 2004. According to the literature, students with disabilities were more likely to have better outcomes in employment and education when they received assistance from 3 to 6 community agencies as compared to students who received assistance from 0 to 2 community agencies (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering and Kohler, 2009). By using evidenced based practices and predictors, school systems, vocational rehabilitation and other adult agencies can collaborate, coordinate, and implement individualized transition services, so that students with disabilities can graduate with improved post-school outcomes.

Some of the solutions parents have regarding life after high school are provided through legislation. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, students with disabilities are granted a free and appropriate education (FAPE) through special education and related services to prepare them for further post-school education, employment and independent living. In addition, IDEA requires state and local education agencies (LEA) to provide transition services to students with disabilities to help them graduate into positive post-school activities, including post-secondary education, integrated employment, independent living, or community participation (IDEA, 2004). These services should begin at age 16 years old or earlier if appropriate (i.e., Kentucky begins transition at age 14) and may include:

- 1) Instruction such as learning to complete a college or job application or to use an ATM machine for banking
- 2) Related Services may consist of an Occupational Therapist helping a student use adaptive keyboards for work and school or an Orientation Mobility Specialist training a student how to go from their dorm room to their classes safely
- 3) Community Experiences entails a student job shadowing at a local garage or using the local gym
- 4) The development of employment and other post school adult living objectives such as a job coach training a student to complete a job task or helping the student complete an application for an apartment; and
- 5) When appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills such as cooking, laundry or personal skills and functional vocational evaluation to determine the ideal job match for a student

These transition services and activities are implemented through the student's Individual Education program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan that describes the student's strengths and needs, measurable annual goals, specially designed instruction, related services and supplementary aids and services necessary to meet the student's educational needs. The IEP is developed during the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meeting. The ARC ensures the IEP is implemented and reviewed and revised based on the progress of the student's measurable annual goals once every year. The parent and student can ask questions and plan for life after high school during the ARC meeting. Parental participation and input in the IEP development and implementation is an important requirement under IDEA.

There are a number of opportunities and programs available for students preparing to exit secondary school. Many of these education and training opportunities involve formal or informal connections between educational, Vocational Rehabilitation, employment, training, social services, and health services agencies (NSTTAC, 2012). There are 6.6 million public school children enrolled in special education in the United States, 13% of all public school students. Yet just 65% of students with disabilities graduate on time, well below the 83% four year rate for students without disabilities overall. Many students with disabilities who do earn their diplomas find themselves unprepared for the real world (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2018). According to the Kentucky Department of Education Madison County KY school report card, Madison County is a district with a 17.78% student with disabilities average. Their five year average graduation rate for students with disabilities exceeded the national average by 18.3 percent at 83.3. If we look at graduation numbers alone, this may lead stakeholders in Madison County to assume transition for students within the disability population has been a successful one. What's not highlighted is how many of those that exited the program go on to positive post school outcomes? This is where the response rate for the YOYO survey could be a real asset. The school district could gain valuable information from exiting students with disabilities a year removed from high school, to assess the effectiveness of their transition policy and increase the data quality by increasing the number of students that respond to the survey. The YOYO data provided by KYPSO, show 7 categories. Each one of these categories can be broken down and disaggregated into disability type, ethnic background, gender and financial information among other categories. The category headings and information are as follows;

- **Data Quality:** This report shows information about former students with disabilities who dropped out of high school. They are asked to provide their reasoning for dropping out, and what might have helped them stay in school
- **Education by Employment:** This describes education categories compared with employment categories. It can filter by multiple categories of disability, education level, and gender among other data points
- **Education Details:** The data points show education information in greater detail, including type of school and degree, and living arrangements
- **Employment Details:** This data shows employment information in greater detail, including duration of employment, whether it was more than half-time, and whether it paid at least minimum wage
- **Employment Supports/Satisfaction:** This information provides additional employment information, including supports and accommodations, and job satisfaction
- **Community Participation:** This report shows details about former students' current living arrangements, and whether individuals have a driver's license, or are registered to vote
- **Dropout Rate:** This report shows information about former students with disabilities who dropped out of high school. Students are asked their reasons for dropping out, and what might have helped them stay in school

Data within each category is shown only for Kentucky, broken down by cooperative and school districts.

Another requirement under IDEA to ensure students are receiving a FAPE, is a State Performance Plan (SPP). The IDEA requires states to submit a State Performance Plan (SPP) and an annual report on the status toward meeting the targets on the indicators contained in this plan. This report of status is called the Annual Performance Report (APR) and is submitted on or around February 1st of each year. To determine Kentucky's status toward achieving these goals, the Office of Special Education and Early Learning (OSEEL) collects data from local school districts, parents, and other sources (Public Reporting of IDEA Part B Data: Kentucky Department of Education, n.d.). IDEA introduced accountability procedures by requiring states to write a State Performance Plan (SPP) and to provide an Annual Performance Report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education.

The APR has two indicators that are relevant to secondary transition. Indicator 13 on Secondary Transition of the APR examines the compliance in including the 8 components that must be in a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) in relation to transition. 100% Percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated. These goals are based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs (Indicator 13 Checklist, 2012). Although it is expected that states report that 100% of students' IEPs (age 16 and older) contain the 8 components required in transition IEP. Data from all public schools in Kentucky's APR in 2017 indicated that 99.4% of students age 16 and up had appropriate measurable post-secondary goals that

met all the mandated components (“Public Reporting of IDEA Part B Data—Kentucky Department of Education,” n.d.). Without 100% compliance in transition IEPs in the state of Kentucky this could have the potential to have a negative effect on post-school outcomes for these young adults.

Having said that, having a compliant transition IEP may or may not correlate to what is actually occurring in practice or the provisions of transitions services. One question we do not know is if a compliant transition IEP equates to quality services and improved outcomes (W & Teresa, 2011). The second indicator in APR for transition is Indicator 14. The Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) obtains this data, and it requires that states report annually on three measures of post-school success. Percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in effect at the time they left school, and were:

- I14A. enrolled in higher education
- I14B. enrolled in higher education or competitively employed
- I14C. enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school (Kentucky’s Post School Outcome Center (2012).

Examples of efforts that are being made include enhancing strategies to increase interagency collaboration, providing assistance and training to districts, and promoting use of Curriculum Based Instruction (CBI). Some of the areas that indicator 14 is designed to improve in transition IEP compliance for schools are as follows:

1. Determine if there are trends among groups

2. Disseminate data related to Indicator 14 to all relevant stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers)
3. Review district and school policies and procedures
4. Review inter-institutional agreements and interagency agreements to determine if provisions need to be changed or added to improve postsecondary outcomes
5. Identify and implement evidence-based practices that are known to impact employment and/or postsecondary education outcomes
Training, Professional Development, and Technical Assistance
6. Identify areas of need and develop a schedule of professional development (Indicator 14, n.d.)

While the Indicator 14 data is useful to get a quick snapshot of post-school outcomes, it recognized that the experiences of youth are far more complex than these measures. This type of data and outcomes are not mutually exclusive and different factors must be weighed in determining a successful transition program. Legislation is vital in providing the first step to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the services that they need in order to lead to the most optimal transition outcomes. Since legislation outlines rights of individuals, it is important that students and their families are aware of what the law says. Since various forms of legislation exist to address the topic of secondary transition it is also important for young adults and families to know what mandates are relevant to them at different periods of time. Transition programming should include providing resources to students and families on relevant information and legislation. In the following sections, the youth one year out survey

(YOYO), both National and State survey data summaries and transition policies will be discussed.

Youth One Year Out Survey

In an effort to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, schools must report annually on the number of students who have been competitively employed or enrolled in postsecondary education one year after graduating from high school (IDEIA, 2004). This has led to the creation of the Kentucky Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey. The purpose of the YOYO survey is to determine the percent of students identified with disabilities who exited high school and were:

- 1) Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school
- 2) Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school
- 3) Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school” (KYPSO)

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) have identified and evaluated evidence-based effective practices and predictors to help professionals and parents focus on improving the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities in the areas of competitive employment and postsecondary education or training (NSTTAC). A number of predictors of competitive employment have been identified both statewide and nationally, including high school employment experiences, parental expectations of post-high school employment, and student involvement in transition. The strongest predictors were employment experiences

during high school, inclusion in general education and parental expectations of a post-high school employment. Furthermore, these predictors show a positive correlation in post school outcomes and employment (KYPSO Newsletter, 2012).

1. Students with disabilities working in high school were 3.8 times more likely to be competitively employed a year later than those who didn't work during high school
2. Districts that involve students with disabilities in their future transition's meetings have found they are 2.6 times as likely to be enrolled in higher education training
3. At home support for students with disabilities that have high parental expectations show significant positive post school success

We know that post-high school employment outcomes of young adults with disabilities are likely to be influenced by multiple factors, but the use of year out data provided by former students has to be used more effectively by school administration. Since one of the most interesting challenges facing educators is to develop and implement transition programs that improve the postschool outcomes for students with disabilities that lead to improved postschool outcomes. Any data that can help prepare youth, guide district best practice policy and improve post school success for students with disabilities has to be a priority.

Self-Determination

Following the 1990 IDEA (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act) revisions have supported the development of self-determination skills in students with disabilities. IDEA was amended in 1997 and 2004, requiring student involvement in the

Individualized Education Program (IEP)(Moore, 2014). Research has shown having more control over one's education has a positive effect on an individual's well-being and empowerment. It also suggests that people with disabilities deal with their conditions better when they feel as if they have more control over their fate. The greater amount of control that people have over their lives, the more responsibilities they take for their own actions (Gragoudas, 2014). Including students in planning and decision-making engages them and motivates them to work toward the goals they set. Planning must take into account the student's strengths, preferences, interests, and needs (Moore, 2014). When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults (Denney & Daviso, 2012).

The attention to self-determination was part of an effort to improve a range of post-school outcomes and to support youth with disabilities in taking more control over every aspect of their lives. Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination (Shogren et al., 2018). The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) conducted a systematic correlational literature review of all publications between 1984 and March of 2009 that met certain indicator criteria used to develop the evidence-based in-school predictors of improved postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. The results of the study identified self-determination as one of sixteen evidence based predictors of post school success in education, employment, and/or

independent living for students with disabilities (Moore, 2014). In addition, active student engagement in the transition planning process is encouraged by IDEA 2004, and has been identified as a meaningful, evidence-based way for students to develop their own self-determination (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

An article published in the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *Virginia's self-determination project* (2014), introduces a statewide project in Virginia to make sure students with disabilities didn't fall behind a national initiative to ensure that young people become college and career ready. The project became known as "I'm Determined." It was created to assist students with disabilities in middle and high school to obtain the skills necessary to become college and career ready by implementing and integrating the components of self-determination both in the school and community. Schools focused on providing direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determined behavior beginning at the elementary level and continuing throughout a student's educational career. Five primary intervention strategies were developed that assisted students to cultivate needed self-determined behaviors and promote self-confidence. The interventions are listed below with a brief description of each:

- **One-Pager-** a tool to improve communication between the student with a disability and his/her special education and general education teachers
- **Good Day Plan-** is used to help students with disabilities identify what factors play a role in whether or not they have a good day
- **Goal Setting and Attainment-** a graphic organizer to visual representation of the steps needed to accomplish the goal

- **Student-led IEPs-** The IEP is developed by a student with a disability, teachers, administrators, parents and other team members
- **Student-led Conferences-** Students with disabilities lead the traditional parent teacher conference
- **Lesson Plans** based on the core components of self-determination- plans created by general and special education teachers that embed core content with self-determined skills at all grade levels

The findings of the “I’m Determined Project’ showed increased confidence, self-acceptance, advocacy, and leadership skills in students with disabilities, in addition to improvements in communication. The stakeholders use data gained to target areas of need and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts to increase student participation in each process. Educators in leadership roles should model self-determination and value it in their teachers as well as their students. Administrators should help teachers to find self-determination resources and enhance their skills for implementation (Denney and Daviso, 2012).

Causal Agency Theory

Earlier in my theoretical framework I explained how Shogren et al. (2015) introduced Causal Agency Theory to explain how people increase their levels of self-determination by enhancing supports, and to set and go after goals. Increasingly though, the term self-determination has become laden with multiple meanings and intents that have resulted in confusion and misunderstanding as frequently as clarity and utility. It has become a buzzword, implying different things to different people. The lack of clarity in meaning and intent has hampered efforts to apply self-determination to areas

like disability services or education. In an attempt to lessen confusion over what one means when they use the term “self-determination” when speaking of individuals with disabilities is the shift to consider “how and why” people become self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2004). Individuals with disabilities, particularly people who currently exert little or no “control” in their lives, should be supported to increase their opportunities to exert such “control” including learning skills that better enable them to do so. Causal Agency Theory provides multiple “points of action” for intervention that can promote and enhance the potential that people will become causal agents.

CAT is born out of the premise of soft determinism. Determinism in itself is the philosophical doctrine positing that events, in this context human behavior and actions, are effects of preceding causes. The soft determinism position states that an act can be both caused and free and that every action is caused somehow; but not every action is compelled. John Locke, a British philosopher, wrote in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) that proposed that all human thought comes from sensation and reflection and, consequently, all human action is caused by human thought. Locke included in this category the ideas of power, volition, and liberty. He defined power as the ability to make or receive change. According to Locke, the human mind has the “active” power of beginning or ceasing its own operations as activated by a preference. He noted that the cause of the volition is irrelevant because it is the agent, not the will, which is free. Human beings act freely just insofar as they are capable of translating their mental preferences to do or not to do into their actual performance of the action in question (Wehmeyer, 2004).

Today we recognize numerous determinants of human behavior, including physiological, structural, environmental, and/or organismic factors. CAT was developed as a means to explain how people increase their levels of self-determination. It builds upon two fundamental aspects of self-determination. According to Shogren (2018), the first is the building of a dispositional characteristic over a period of time with proper support and opportunities. The second is contextual factors such as, personal, family and community, and systems and policy factors. CAT is a lifespan approach to the development of self-determination and the importance of goal-focused actions. CAT posits three essential characteristics of self-determined action:

- Volitional action- people act with intention to initiate goals based upon their preferences and interests
- Agentic action- involves people identifying and navigating pathways that enable them to progress toward a chosen goal
- Action control- people act with self-awareness and self-knowledge in an empowered, goal-directed manner (Di Maggio et al., 2020)

Michael L. Wehmeyer and Dennis E. Mithaug (2006) proposed a number of “operators” at work in Causal Agency Theory. The primary operators in causal action involve the capability to perform causal actions or behaviors, subdivided into causal capacity and agentic capacity. Di Maggio (2020) presents research literature that confirms people with intellectual disabilities can become more causally or agentially capable by improving a number of existing causal or agentic capacities by having more opportunities to exert control over resources that impact their lives through systems

change or self-advocacy. People who are causal agents have certain capacities that enable them to respond to a challenge to their self-determination.

Two types of capabilities are important to causal agency; causal capability and agentic capability. Causal capability refers to the mental or physical capacity that enables a person to cause or make something happen. Agentic capability refers to the mental or physical capacity that enables a person to direct causal action (Wehmeyer, 2006). These two types of capabilities involve both mental and physical capacities of the subjects employing both causal and agentic results. They display a causal action and allow them to direct their behavior to achieve either the desired change or the maintenance of a circumstance or situation is preferred practice. Individual limitations that are of note that could hinder causal or agentic action can be mitigated by a wide array of supports, such as technological devices, social networks and supports in the classroom (2006).

CAT Application in Education

Causal Agency Theory provides a framework to assess, develop, implement, and evaluate interventions to promote self-determination. Shogren (2018), shows where researchers developed curricula to teach and create opportunities for students with disabilities to take leadership roles in the transition planning process, advocating for their future. The lack of understanding and training for teachers, professionals, and parents has caused significant gaps between research and implementation of self-determination strategies (Denney and Daviso, 2012). In a study of a student involvement curriculum, it was found that students with disabilities who received

instruction using the Self Directed IEP curricula increased their participation in IEP meetings, engaged in more leadership activities during the meeting, and were better prepared to express their interests, strengths, and support needs (Shogren, 2018).

Enabling people with disabilities to make choices and work toward goals will enable supports and services to be matched to wishes, interests, and capabilities. This will promote greater engagement and motivation for the student and the teacher. If these options are sufficiently rich, the person's goals and choices will become more and more self-determining. This also promotes systems change by shifting the focus from what is available to what is aligned with the person's interests, preferences and needs (2018). We should never assume that limited capability and the capacity of a student should limit the peak of self-determination. It just means support should start earlier and vary across all settings in the educational process of that student.

Appreciative Inquiry

A lot of research surrounding appreciative inquiry comes from an application in business and industry, but recently small amounts of research has started to take place in the field of education. AI's basic premise is to foster a collaborative approach to identifying an organization's potential through its members by appreciating the good that is inherent in an organization, envisioning what might be, collaboratively co-constructing a path to achieving the vision, and sustaining the vision (Cooperrider, 2003). I am looking to create a network of collaboration to facilitate change and a lasting positive approach to transition. Collaboration can lead to partnerships that augment individual and organizational accomplishment through successful problem solving and enhance the ability to successfully adapt to change (Franz, 2003).

Approaching partnerships with school organizations from an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective creates an environment for building trust, affirming partnership members, increasing bridging capital, and addressing challenges as part of a life sustaining growth experience (Calabrese, 2006). The words that Dr. Cooperrider used to comprise the technique of AI, makes up the very heart of it.

Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' (kwir), v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY (Cooperrider, 2005).

Let's appreciate what data already exists in education, how to improve what information it provides and inquire ways we can work together to promote the change we seek. The reason I chose AI as the framework of my study is the premise that as an intervention it elicits a narrative of successful partnerships and collaboration among participants that then creates a vision through which the future can be seen and planned. Effective partnerships are often the result of collaboration and continuous learning where partners empower each other (Somekh, 1994). It is not just another reform created by legislation by individuals outside the classroom but led by a team of educators shaping future events with things that are working and already in place to

promote positive results. AI is based on the notion that organizations move in the direction of what they study. The topic for study, around which several questions are developed, proves the “fateful choice” and should be affirmative. This, in turn, drives the organization or team to examine and understand its own positive core values and potential positive outcomes (Cooperrider, 2003).

Education should be a more cooperative field and have an open network to share and link positive practice being produced to create successful post school outcomes state wide for students and families. Appreciative Inquiry is further defined as the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. In AI, intervention gives way to inquiry, imagination, and innovation. Through mass mobilized inquiry, hundreds and even thousands of people can be involved in co-creating their collective future (Cooperrider, 2005). This is the working definition of AI that I will choose to guide the rest of this study.

Positive Core of AI

AI is built on the belief in a positive core. This shift from problem analysis to positive core analysis is at the heart of positive change. Positive thinking and positive knowledge generate positive emotions which can expand and extend people’s modes of thinking and action (Fredrickson, 2003). This is the process of inquiry that an organization can enhance its collective wisdom, build energy and resiliency to change, and extend its capacity to achieve extraordinary results (Cooperrider, 2005). AI believes human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about and

this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated.

Inviting people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high-point moments, lived values, traditions, core and distinctive competencies, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit and soul, and visions of valued and possible futures can identify a “positive core.” From this, AI links the energy of the positive core directly to any change agenda. This link creates energy and excitement and a desire to move toward a shared dream (*The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook : For Leaders of Change*, n.d.).

The single most prolific thing a group can do if its aims are to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to make the positive change core the common and explicit property of all (Cooperrider, 2005). In essence, we succeed when everyone believes in a project and has a personal stake in the outcome. Education reform continues to be bogged down in problem analysis which leads to looking backward to yesterday’s causes, and it rarely results in new vision and is notorious for generating resentment.

Assumptions of AI

Out of the positive core comes the birth of assumptions. AI is based on the belief in 8 simple assumptions.

- In every society, organization or group, something works
- What we focus on becomes our reality

- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities
- The act of asking questions of an organization or a group influences the group in some way
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past
- It is important to value differences
- The language we use creates our reality (Hammond, 2008)

Belief in the assumptions is pivotal to the success of AI. “For Appreciative Inquiry to be successful, you have to believe and internalize the assumption” (*The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*). These assumptions are directly correlated to the principles on which AI is founded.

Original Principles of AI

The five original principles of appreciative inquiry created by Dr Cooperrider in his article *A Positive Revolution in Change* (2005), gives us the basis of understanding the appreciative interview and the building of the questions to ask our focus group, which describe the basic tenets of the underlying AI philosophy. A brief summary of all five original principles:

- The Constructionist Principle- Words Create Worlds Reality, as we know it is a subjective rather than objective state. It is socially created through language and conversations
- The Simultaneity Principle- Inquiry Creates Change Inquiry is intervention. The moment we ask a question, we begin to create change

- The Poetic Principle- We Can Choose What We Study, Organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning. What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes—even creates—the world as we know it
- The Anticipatory Principle- Images Inspire Action, Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future. The more positive and hopeful the images of the future are, the more positive the present-day action will be
- The Positive Principle- Positive Questions Lead to Positive Change
Momentum for large-scale change requires large amounts of positive effect and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core

Appreciative Interview

Dr. Raymond L. Calabrese of Wichita State University, a leading proponent of AI, states in the International Journal of Educational Management (2006), there are webs of connectivity through which the members of the organization collaborate toward common goals. Maturing these webs of connectivity are at the heart of appreciative inquiry. Through the appreciative interview process a positive core map is designed. A carefully designed one-on-one dialogue among organization members and stakeholders using questions related to highpoint experiences, valuing, and what gives life to the organization at its best (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). I want to create questions that make stakeholders feel they are part of a positive solution to generate waves shared throughout the district, resulting in new excitement and positive change for the future. The primary role of participants according to Cooperrider (2005) in an AI process is to

be students of organizational life. AI engages all levels of an organization and its stakeholders in a cooperative learning and co-creation process. To be a student of organizational life emphasizes curiosity and learning in the most pragmatic sense. AI is the study of the best of what has been and what can be (p. 48). In the process, best practices inspire action toward dreams for a collective future that are grounded in reality and hence believable and feasible. The appreciative interviews will then create the dialogue that will be used for all districts to identify the positive affirmative topics, and spread the strengths that are collectively shared in the state. After the positive affirmative topics have been revealed, the stakeholders can build the future around those strengths using a 4-D cycle that will be described in the next section.

4-D Cycle in AI

It's safe to say that no two appreciative processes are alike, and this study will be evidence of that. Each part of the D cycle is designed to address a unique strategic challenge faced by the organization or industry. Each is designed to optimize participation among stakeholders. This means that the four Ds of AI—discovery, dream, design, and destiny—can take many forms of expression (Cooperrider, 2005). Applying AI involves using four or five steps as a process for change around the positive core of the strengths that exist in the system including memories of the best and visions of what can be. In some of the literature, the process is referred to as the 4-D cycle while in others the 5-D cycle. Both cycles in essence are very similar with the only difference being the “affirmative topic” being introduced in the 4-D model and the “define” being the label for clarifying the work around the positive core in the 5-D cycle. For the purpose of this study the 4-D cycle will be used and referred to.

Discovery

The first “D” in AI is discovery. This is where the process seeks to find the positive core and the positive capacity that makes up the group as a whole. Appreciative inquiry’s basic premise is to foster a collaborative approach to identifying an organization’s potential through its members by appreciating the good that is inherent in an organization, envisioning what might be, collaboratively co-constructing a path to achieving the vision, and sustaining the vision (Cooperrider, 2003). AI invites systemwide dialogue and learning through a process of appreciative interviewing. During appreciative interviews, people uncover what gives life to their organization, department, or community when at its best. AI seeks answers to questions that look for the positive from people by asking;

- What are we doing well in transition?
- Detail a transition policy that worked really well within the district
- How do we increase what is working well?

Discovery allows the group throughout a system to connect and study examples of what makes them their best, to analyze and map their positive core, and to investigate their root causes of success. As they connect, they build relationships, organizational wisdom expands, useful and innovative knowledge is shared, and hope grows (Cooperrider, 2005). The discovery phase seeks to elicit the participants’ own values, skills, and knowledge of teaching and best practice. Researchers recognize that people learn collaboratively by adapting their knowledge to their experiences (Allen,

2002). AI provides a practical way to ignite this spirit of inquiry on an organization-wide basis (Cooperrider, 2005).

Dream

To dream is to imagine what the future might hold for an industry or individual. The purpose of the dream phase in AI is very similar. It is an invitation to people to lift their sights, exercise their imagination, and discuss what their organization could look like if it were fully aligned around its strengths and aspirations. During the dream phase, interview stories and insights get put to constructive use. These are the questions that elicit dreams;

- What might be?
- What is the world calling for?
- Please envision results, and how things might work well in the future

Stories, analysis, and maps of the positive core serve as essential resources for the visioning stage of AI (Cooperrider, 2005). It takes the consensus information and themes from the discovery phase and builds upon focused ideas and how to get there as a collective group which leads us into the Design phase.

Design

Dr. Cooperrider (2005) noted that during the design phase of AI, people are invited to challenge the status quo as well as the common assumptions underlying the design of their organization. People are encouraged to wonder beyond the data with the essential question being, “What would our organization look like if it were designed in

every way possible to maximize the qualities of the positive core and enable the accelerated realization of our dreams?” In my research, the question might be, “what would transition to post school outcomes look like for students with a disability if every resource was made available for them to reach their dreams?” Cooperrider works a lot in the business world and states that AI leads to the design of appreciative organizations, capable of supporting stakeholders in the realization of the triple bottom line: people, profits, and planet. The education bottom line might be students, outcomes, and community.

Destiny

In the destiny phase, change needs to look a lot more like an inspired movement than a neatly packaged or engineered product. People act on their own provocative propositions, establishing roles and responsibilities, developing strategies, forging institutional linkages and mobilizing resources to achieve their dream. New project plans will be developed and initiated, new relationships will be established, and the group will proceed with vision and a new sense of purpose (Elliot, 1999). If we give people a vision they believe in and are invested in, they become more of an energy of change and capable of maintaining that change. The destiny phase of AI indicates, are the network like structures that liberate not only the daily search into qualities and elements of an organization’s positive core, but the establishment of a convergence zone for people to empower one another—to connect, cooperate, and co-create (Cooperrider, 2005). Any type of change in a system, be it positive or negative, ultimately is through people and their belief, collaboration, and ability to inspire and maintain change.

Application of AI

There are numerous applications of AI in research today referred to as the AI Summit. The whole point of the appreciative approach is to engage all the stakeholders of an organization in a series of one on one conversations in which the power discrepancies are minimized (Elliot, 1999). Cooperrider (2005) explains this application as an exciting and large-scale meeting process that focuses on discovering and developing an organization's positive core, designing strategic processes, and new product developments. Participation is diverse and includes numerous stakeholders. The AI Summit is generally four days long and can involve fifty to two thousand people but in my research, it will be a smaller number. The reason I chose to use this application is its ability to create strong relational ties that enable ongoing and sustainable innovation. Although each AI Summit is unique, successful AI Summits, according to Cooperrider (2005) follow an administrative flow for each of the 4-D cycles. The focus and the participants each have common aspects.

	<u>4-D Cycle Focus</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Discovery	Inquire into the positive core	Engage in AI interviews Reflect on interview highlights
Dream	Invision the greatest potential for positive influence	Share Dreams from interviews Create enactments
Design	Craft propositions where positive core feels alive in strategies and processes	Draft propositions incorporating positive core

Destiny	Invite action inspired by previous 3 D's	Publicly declare actions and ask for support Self-organize groups to plan next steps
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The listing above will be discussed further in the methodology section of this study. My study will direct the focus group through each of these steps to stay in line with the AI approach.

AI in Education

Cooperrider states in his journal article, *A Positive Revolution in Change* (2005), that as a field of leaders we have reached “the end of problem solving” as a mode of inquiry capable of inspiring, mobilizing and sustaining significant system change? What would happen to our change practices if we began all of our work with the positive presumption—that organizations, as centers of human relatedness, are “alive” with infinite constructive capacity? In education the data always pools over the problem areas, either low socioeconomic, minorities, disabilities or a plethora of others.

Initiatives are cycled and recycled, always concentrating on identifying the problems as if we didn't know where the issues would arise. Then stakeholders are asked to solve the problems in educational studies without creating any enthusiasm or belief that would create a passion educators could build a movement of change around. Instead of passion, it creates angst and a feeling of burn out that drains the energy from the most seasoned educator.

Appreciative Inquiry will be a fresh approach to building formative change in education and the way transition data is used to guide school policy and practice. It will increase a sense of purpose for educators avoiding data fatigue and increase positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities. In a year-long study using an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective, *Building social capital through the use of an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective in a school and university partnership* (2006). Raymond L. Calabrese, looked to establish a partnership with an inner-city high school to facilitate an asset-based approach that identified teacher strengths as a foundation to improve the educational practices in the school. He much like my study hoped to bring together collaboration among similar districts to try and improve post school transition practices to increase positive outcomes for students with disabilities. He wanted to identify teacher traits and attitudes that positively influence student retention and graduation rates. Mutuality or common ground between administrators and faculty show the increase of bridging and linking social capital are related to the formation of mutuality-based relationships. Social Capital is a series of networking group relationships based on trust and built on a set of shared values on norms. AI allowed the school districts and the university to form sustainable partnerships where both are equal partners to the research process and share a common vision – the improvement of the educational process. It followed these highlights;

- Appreciate what was good within the school organization
- Envision what might be
- Co-construct a design for the future
- Lay the foundation for sustaining the vision

In the **Discover** phase, the research team conducted individual interviews, focus groups, and reviewed documents and artifacts. The focus on “what is good” also assisted in creating a model for other teachers in the school to follow. Interviews from numerous teachers exclaimed this was the first time in their teaching experience that someone wanted to hear about the good they were doing and was willing to listen to and validate their stories. In the **Dream** phase administrators and teachers shared their visions of school and their teaching relationship within the inner-city school community. The results showed that each group discovered that they were on a similar journey.

Designing a new construct around teachers and administrators in agreement that forming trusting relationships with students was at the core of teachers’ strengths. Thus, jumpstarting the process of formulating a design that would begin building a healthy inner-city high school. Building the **destiny** and maintaining positive momentum showed after one year, this inner-city high school reported substantial progress in student achievement scores in mathematics and science based on the correlation from partnerships formed out of trust and belief in the process of AI.

The study by Calabrese and the university team, produced effective school partnerships focusing constructive ways to produce collaborative beneficial change by affirming members and stakeholders. The application of AI as a theoretical perspective in this case enhanced the relationships between the public school and the university research team. It fostered sustainable partnerships eliminating the focus on problems and concentrated on human potential. As such, teachers and school administrators became more willing to collaborate in an environment where they were not threatened or embarrassed, two critical factors that stimulate the emergence of defensive routines

(2006). This appreciative inquiry model developed new theories, concepts, and descriptions that facilitated organizational change.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents a research design for examining transition strategies as practiced by school districts in Kentucky to study positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The rationale for the appreciative inquiry method in this study will be presented and methods of data collection will be described. Demographics of participants are examined to provide context to their responses. An explanation of both risks and benefits to participants addresses the safety of teachers in this study as it relates to this research. As an employment specialist working with students with moderate to severe disabilities, my biases and personal perspectives are documented, and data analysis procedures are introduced. Finally, methodological limitations are included in anticipation of possible constraints in regard to this study.

Using an Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Improve Transition Outcomes in Education

Appreciative inquiry was developed primarily as a methodology to help corporations and institutions improve their competitive advantage or organizational effectiveness (Elliott, 1999, p. 3). AI is a strengths-based approach to change; it is a process for positive and collaborative inquiry that embraces shared leadership. Educational organizations can have the principles in place to benefit from an AI approach to a variety of processes within the school. Initiating appreciative positive core principles along with collaborating capabilities in an educational system can provide insight into the applicability of using AI as a process for improving transition policy and procedures for students with disabilities. Given these possibilities, the questions that guided this research are as follows:

- What transition policies are currently in use for districts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP) to transition aged (14 years old to 21 years old) students with disabilities?
- How are districts using the KY Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey to guide policy for successful post school outcome student participation?
- Are districts with improved YOYO survey participation percentages implementing Self-determination, an evidenced-based practice (EBP), to improve participation rates among exiting students with disabilities?

Improving transition outcomes for students with disabilities is the driving force behind this research. This study is an examination of how school districts promote student participation in the YOYO survey and the districts use of YOYO survey data. Additionally, I wanted to see if districts that implement EBP of self-determination have any effect on the student response rate percentages concerning the YOYO survey. AI in this setting is informed by the interview process made by stakeholders, a process which involves what Elliot (1999) referred to as an *appreciative approach*, where individuals discover a positive, strengths-based approach to organization development and change management. It is about choosing to construct our organizations with an initial intentional empathy that starts with the features that give joy, satisfaction, a sense of well-being, and delight (p. 12).

This research examines intentional experiences by collecting data from multiple stakeholder interviews, providing insight into the transition policy and procedures involving students with disabilities within districts. With this focus on self-

determination EBP, YOYO survey data, perceptions of transition and how effective it is, the goal of this document is to analyze practices that can lead to improved transitional policy and promote collaboration among districts to improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities in Kentucky. The analysis of all collected data provides a holistic view of school districts transition policy and procedures, and the desired effects on student positive post school outcomes.

This study looked at nine school districts in the Central Kentucky region and how they approach encouraging student response participation in completing the YOYO survey, what EBP they are implementing for transition and the way they are using the results of the YOYO survey. Research has indicated that a minimum of six participants, especially when they represent a homogenous group, can provide a rich narrative and lead to saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The data gathered from this group produced insight into the variety of methods employed to reach the 65% participation rate taking the YOYO survey, and the emphasis that districts put on the YOYO survey data to guide transition policy concerning students with disabilities transitioning to post school environments. The examination through multiple interviews of stakeholders concerning their transition practices provided that data.

I used the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry and it guided my focus group through an interview derived from the discovery, dream, design and destiny phases. The results focused on transition age education at the high school level, and preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary outcomes. The study is based on low response rates and inconsistent data from exiting students on the YOYO survey. The data received indicates a successful post school outcome for the district students with

disabilities that respond but due to poor data quality and low response it has been identified as a district need to increase the percentage of respondents to the YOYO survey. Increasing the number of respondents helps the district gain confidence in using the data when reviewing current transition programs. Plus, it shows the proficiency of the district and its ability to improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. Currently there is no evidence of best practice or resources identified within the Madison County School district to use and promote post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Therefore, this study looked at ways school districts in Kentucky try to increase student participation in their YOYO survey data and if a correlation can be made between Self Determination EBP and student response rate.

Lastly, the study sought to improve the response rate percentage leading to the utilization of the YOYO survey data as it pertains to shaping transition policy within the district for students with disabilities by its policy makers. The problem with most collaborative efforts in education is that they focus on the problem areas identified from the data (low scores from certain groups) and thus magnify those problems and make the solutions seem too daunting for the staff to accomplish. These problem solving efforts overload staff are slow and do not garner a lot of trust in order to solve the issues. Constant change can lead to burn out and negative feelings instead of involving stakeholders in positive and constructive ways of interpreting and using data they already have available. Appreciative Inquiry has the potential to engage educators in creating a positive future that transforms transition for students with disabilities by building on the strengths and effective EBP that currently exist. The involvement of all people in the stages of discovery, dream, design, and destiny means that they are

involved in creating and implementing the transformations based on personal and collective strengths (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Data Collection

Participants

Pilot Focus Group

The pilot focus group involved individuals representing an area of potential pre and post school transitional stages for a student with disabilities. The group was made up of a Director and Assistant Director of Special Education, Thomas More College Vice President of Enrollment Management, and an Educational Consultant from the Southeast South Central Cooperative. The pilot focus group qualifications were based on their knowledge of the YOYO survey, background in special education transition, leadership in their respective schools, and knowledge of EBP, specifically self-determination. The group's role included determining what aspects of the YOYO survey will be useful in developing training, deciding resources being utilized in education, and who has access to the data and for what purpose. They focused on positive questions that created a sense of openness and elicited truthful responses. An important goal in AI is to remember that asking positive questions affects the organization positively; asking negative questions affects the organization negatively (Martinez, 2002). A positive core around an affirmative topic was established as we worked our way through the 4-D cycle and forming questions around but not limited to the following;

- Describe some frustrating things you see happening in your district that hinders successful transition for students with disabilities

- Describe the best things the district does to promote successful transition for students with disabilities
- Describe a memorable experience as an educator of a student you have witnessed complete a successful transition to post school life
- Describe some transition programs in the district focusing on students with disabilities that excites you
- Without being modest, tell me what it is that you most value about yourself, your work, and your district
- Imagine your district ten years from now, when transition for students with a disability is just as you always wished it could be. What is different? How have you contributed to this dream scenario?

The pilot group met using zoom technology, email and telephone conversations to construct the focus group survey questions. With Zoom sessions there was much less opportunity for unexpected conversations and relationship-building to occur either before or after the interviews. Every attempt was made to do the interviews in person but was limited to offsite locations due to pandemic restrictions for their respective organizations.

Focus Study Group

The survey was sent to forty three potential participants representing twenty eight school districts in the state of Kentucky. Seventeen participants responded and they made up the focus study group, representing a total of nine Kentucky school districts. These districts were comparable to Madison County school districts' 17 percent of students with disabilities. The stakeholders chosen from those districts had

intimate contact to guide and initiate the ways transition strategies are developed, interpreted and distributed to the rest of the district. These stakeholders included eight directors of special education, two employment specialists, and seven teachers in the area of special education. The participants in this research were school personnel with knowledge of the transition policies and currently working in a position that is associated with special education. Participants all have at least three years of transition policy experience and a working knowledge about YOYO survey data and what the data means for students. The school districts were chosen by the following criteria:

- The assigning of a district point person or team designated to receive, interpret, and distribute the YOYO data for the district
- Percentage of students with disabilities is comparable to Madison County KY at 17%
- Percentage of Student participation measured over a three year span in completing the YOYO transition survey among eligible students one year removed from exiting high school

Location

The site of this study includes Kentucky school districts participating in the Kentucky YOYO survey, a student with disabilities percentage rate similar to Madison County School District in Richmond Ky.

Procedure

The pilot focus group collaborated on assembling a positive core topic, a series of ten, but not limited to, open-ended questions inquiring about but not limited to the causal agency/self-determination theory, Youth One Year Out data and the knowledge

of current transition practices being utilized by stakeholders in their districts. All questions followed the 4-D cycle of AI. The questions the group prepared were distributed to forty three identified Kentucky school districts of which nine responded:

- They participated in the YOYO survey
- Have a similar special education population percentage as Madison County school district
- Have a consecutive three-year span of student participation response rate identified from their YOYO data

The YOYO survey is given to any student that exited in the 2019-20 school year, had an IEP in place at time of exit, and exited by: (a) graduation with regular diploma; (b) graduation with alternative diploma; (c) reaching maximum age; or (d) dropping out.

Survey interviews were conducted via email due to limitations due to the Covid 19 pandemic and restrictions of in person meetings. In the interest of safeguarding the health and safety of all participants, no face to face interactions occurred (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). It would have been within acceptable guidelines to interview participants in person with masks on at a distance of at least six feet (CDC, 2021). However, it was determined that this procedure would have inhibited my ability to assess participants' verbal and non-verbal responses and would not have contributed to participants' comfort or sense of well-being, which might have affected the quality of their responses (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). It was noted that email allowed participation to be voluntary and anonymous, creating an environment where stakeholders were motivated to speak and share materials openly, and without

reservation, as they were not subjected to any kind of scrutiny. Participants had the opportunity to adjust and explain responses while establishing a dialogue that fostered candor. These conditions allowed participants to feel that they are not merely subjects, but active collaborators in the research. The implementation of these procedures protected participants and provided a sense of security, which in turn created the best possible setting, due to restrictions, in which to collect honest relevant data.

Emailed surveys provided an open timeline to construct thoughts to the questions, in interview-friendly locales, which provided a more comfortable setting and created an environment more conducive to real thought out answers. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to be interviewed via Zoom online meetings if they felt it would be a safer or more convenient option due to pandemic restrictions. All participants chose to participate via email. Signed consent forms were collected from all participants. This purposefully selected participant group provided insight into the guiding processes that districts utilize in providing meaningful transition strategies and effective post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Professional risk was minimal, as participants were not identifiable, through the use of generic titles to separate information. Following the initial interviews, contact was made with participants to clarify and check accuracy of responses in email transcripts. This follow-up communication was conducted either via telephone or with email and was used as necessary. Participating stakeholders were encouraged to contact me and provide additional commentary or clarification if they felt it was warranted.

Emailed survey interviews with stakeholders involved semi-scripted engagements to develop rapport and put the participant at ease was an important aspect of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the interest of initiating a comfortable atmosphere, interviews began with at least one introductory remark or question. These included but were not limited to:

- How is your school year finishing up?
- Are you OK after this crazy school year?
- An expression of gratitude toward the participant for agreeing to the email interview.

The following questions were decided on and chosen by the pilot focus group, the ones selected were asked of all focus group participants:

Setting of an affirmative positive core topic;

Discovery:

- From your perspective as an educator, describe a specific memorable situation in which a student with disabilities made a successful transition to post school life based on resources the school provided.
- Describe your vision and the progress you envision for your district's transition programming in the future. What do you imagine the most exceptional programming to look like? How is that different from your current programming? What is your role/contribution toward this goal?

1. What are some of the district transition tools used for students with special education planning to exit high school?
2. Why is it important for a district to have a high percentage rate of student participation in the follow up Youth One Year Out survey (YOYO)?
3. What evidence based practice(s) (EBP) does your district use the most for post-secondary transition for students with a disability exiting high school?
4. Has your district utilized data obtained from the YOYO survey to help shape your transition policy? If yes, please explain in what capacity. If not, please explain the limitations of the survey.
5. In general, should self-determination curriculum be taught in the classroom for the future planning of a student with a disability exiting high school? If so, to what extent.
6. In your professional opinion, what year is the most important for a student with a disability to start preparing for transition to post school? Does your opinion mirror your district's initial focus year to begin transition activities? Please explain your reasoning
7. What procedures does your district implement to obtain 65% student participation response rate on the YOYO survey as recommended by HDI? Is the student participation process reviewed on a yearly basis to positively impact future response rates?
8. Describe the positive strategies and/or supports from the Kentucky Department of Education that assist your district in the transition process for students with disabilities.
9. Self Determination/Causal Agency Theory view people as active contributors to, or agents of, their behavior. They have high aspirations, and persevere in the face of obstacles. How does your district foster self-determination in students with disabilities to actively participate in their post school planning activities?
10. From your perspective, what are the most important steps a school district must take to increase student participation in the youth one year out survey?

To accommodate unexpected participant responses, I followed up with questions when clarification was needed. Additionally, unscripted follow up questions allowed the freedom to pursue unexpected or especially insightful conversational opportunities related to the areas of transition for students with disabilities. This combination of

scripted and unscripted questions allowed participants the opportunity to give richer, more insightful responses.

Response data was disaggregated to provide a full, rich description of practices relayed by the stakeholders. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The process I will use to analyze interviews is thematic analysis. This is a process that is common in looking at qualitative data. It involves a series of six steps which are familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and lastly writing up those observed (*How to Do Thematic Analysis | A Step-by-Step Guide*, 2019). Themes that emerged were noted while outlier responses and interactions were recorded via email and integrated as needed. These themes addressed commonalities and differences in approaches and expectations for increasing student response rates toward the YOYO survey, YOYO survey data use in guiding transition policy, and collaboration forming productive transition programs that work for ALL students with disabilities and their families. The results are able to help other district transition policy makers create positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities. This data will be involved in determining, teaching, and communicating postsecondary success for students with disabilities. These policy makers included directors of special education, teacher leaders involved with transition in the area of special education, and statewide cooperatives specializing in data desegregation.

The results of the districts' focus questions led to the review of transition policy in the Madison County School district concerning;

- The assignment of a point person to collaborate the findings of the YOYO data
- Evaluation of district EBP
- Exploring technology and protocol to obtain up to date contact information of families
- Enlist networks between school districts in how they use the YOYO data
- Developing an action plan as to how the school district plans to reach the recommended 65% student response rate of exiting students with disabilities

The assigned point person or team with intimate contact with the YOYO survey will be involved to guide and decipher meaningful student data, how it is interpreted and distributed to administration and passed on to the classroom teacher. The focus group questions showed results of how an EBP of self-determination led to an improved rate of student participation in post school YOYO surveys. While also increasing data quality in the YOYO survey data provided to the school to help students with disabilities. Response data was disaggregated to provide a full, rich description of the practices of participants. Due to the lack of state and national standards, written content relating to transition was highly individualized. Participant interviews provided the bulk of the data collected in this study. Similarities and inconsistencies with participant responses regarding their experiences regarding transition policy were recorded. Overall, the inclusion of data gleaned from varying levels of stakeholder-produced material increased the validity of the research by multiple sources of information to assess the accuracy of the collected data.

Risks, Benefits, and Trustworthiness

All participants signed consent forms and personal information was kept anonymous through the use of undistinguishable team assignments and the redaction of any distinguishing information on survey answers. Professional risk was minimal, as participants were not identifiable, and the subject matter explored in the interviews was not of a controversial nature. All precautions were taken to minimize health and safety risks, including the option to use virtual meetings if necessary. Conditions did not allow for in-person interviews, but efforts would have been made to ensure participants' safety in interview settings. As the focus of the research was limited to district perceptions and actions, no identifying information was deliberately collected in the study. Team designations were used in transcripts regarding any references to individuals representing districts in survey interviews.

A benefit to participants was the opportunity to collaborate and learn from other colleagues in transition roles in special education. I provided email checks that were conducted throughout each survey interview to assure accuracy. Following the initial email survey interviews, contact was made to check the accuracy of responses by a couple of participants, both ADMIN 2's. This follow-up communication occurred via email and was used to clarify some ambiguous phrasing and questions that were left blank to further clarify an answer in a response. All participants were contacted via email, post-interview, to assess their comfort and confidence in their responses, and to give them an opportunity to discuss concerns or questions. Participants were also encouraged to contact me and provide additional commentary or clarification if they felt it was warranted, although none did.

Trustworthiness was established through my knowledge of the procedures and expectations of transitional post school outcomes for students with disabilities, through implementation of processes to encourage truthful participant responses, and through the use of a positive based appreciative inquiry method survey structure. As an experienced special education teacher, I possess a deep understanding of the transition needs in education and was able to perceive, seek further explanation, and analyze intricacies and nuances of participants' narratives and interactions. Having a shared experience with participants in the area of special education increased understanding and provided insight, helping to build *intersubjective validity* (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, participation was voluntary and anonymous, which created an environment where participants were motivated to speak and share openly, and without reservation, as they were not subjected to administrative or peer scrutiny. These conditions allowed participants the opportunity to feel that they were not merely subjects, but active collaborators in the research. The implementation of these procedures protected participants and provided a sense of security, which in turn created the best possible setting in which to collect honest, relevant data.

Limiting Factors and Benefits Related to Email

Emailed surveys were necessary to protect participants and myself, but this protocol required me to adapt my interview procedures to establish consistency and build reliability. For all survey interviews, I incorporated the Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) logo pattern over a neutral gray background. This eliminated any distracting elements on the screen and served as a reminder of my institutional affiliation. It is also worth noting that conducting interviews via email presented me

with a unique advantage regarding personal timelines. This flexible approach allowed participants to answer the questions at their convenience and think about scenarios or answers that best fit the question. Conversely, participants also had to be reminded not to forget to send back the survey in a timely manner, which may have contributed to less authentic reactions by interviewees.

While email surveys provided an indispensable alternative to in-person interviews, it is necessary to note that significant, though rare, challenges arose. On occasion, the files chosen were inconsistent, pdf as opposed to word, with the latter allowing responses to be added in the document. This required me to resend questions and to ask participants to repeat their responses. Utilizing email provided written answers that were easily reviewable, and they allowed me to follow up with any answers I was unsure or needed further explanation about. However, my personality and ability to relate to individuals with in person meetings was limited and was an inferior substitute for live interaction. Even with Zoom and telephone interviewing as an option to answering the survey questions all participants chose to answer via email. Even though my experiences with participants were overwhelmingly positive and produced useful data, it is possible that some information could've been more ascertainable with in-person interaction but was lost due to Covid-19 protocol.

Participants: Demographics and Setting

Teachers and administrators working in school districts employed in special education positions located in the Central Bluegrass Region of Kentucky served as participants in this study (Table 1). Team designations were used in all cases regarding the discussion and analysis of findings. Groupings were broken down into four teams;

ADMIN 1, FRONTLINE 1, ADMIN 2, FRONTLINE 2. The teams were distinguished from each other having percentage rates above (team 1's) or below (team 2's) 65% student participation rates on the YOYO survey data. Teams were made up of directors of special education (ADMIN) from districts and frontline personnel, which includes special education teachers (FRONTLINE) and/or employment specialists (FRONTLINE), and interacts directly with the students in the classroom. The total represented composition of both teams in this cohort, 47% Admin , 53% Frontline, was reflective of the transitional decision stakeholders at the high school level in the U.S. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). ADMIN 1 and FRONTLINE 1 Study participants represented 41% of the nine districts that responded to the survey request over 65% student participation YOYO response data in a three year average, with four of the nine respondents in Team 1 being ADMIN's. In Team 2, making up the other 59% of the seventeen districts participating in this study in student response rates on the YOYO. The ADMIN 2's represented four of the eight respondents. Purposeful sampling was employed to build a participant group with pertinent experience in the practice of transitional strategies for students with disabilities.

Table 1 Participant Representation and Interview Information

Participant Teams	YOYO% 3 YR average for district for the 2018- 2020 Sch Yr.	Survey returned
ADMIN 1	>65%	4
Frontline 1	>65%	5
Admin 2	<65%	4
Frontline 2	<65%	4
Total Respondents		17

To ensure each survey participant possessed a depth of experience working with students with disabilities and transitional strategies, only Directors of special education and personnel assigned to interpret or administer transition strategies with three or more years of relevant experience were asked to participate in the interview process. All participants had taught students with disabilities, which included transition aged students starting at 14 years of age and up, and all diagnosed levels of disabilities. Due to the wide range of student disabilities in the area of special education and transition, interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators of multiple disciplines, including, but not limited to, learning behavior disorders, functional mental disorders, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, and emotional behavior disabilities. Examining the transition procedures within each level of the profession proved valuable, despite the differences in aspects of participants' background and disability teaching classification.

Researcher Perspectives and Biases Regarding Transition Strategies and Special Education

As a special education teacher, I have always valued life skill development and access to knowledge of resources that aid in further career development for students with disabilities and their families. At the secondary level, there is an emphasis on post transition needs for students, but as an employment specialist for my district I am more concerned in the post school skill development and career choices of my students. As the district employment specialist for students with moderate to severe disabilities, my role is to provide post school career experiences, skills training, and access to resources

before their exiting year. I do this by interviewing my students with career interest surveys, providing hands-on experiences in different career fields. I also help the students obtain certifications offered through their career field choice, develop vocational, social and self-advocacy skills by modeling and role playing behaviors that lead to investigation and reflection. My goal for each student I teach is for them to have skills and resource tools necessary to be a productive and active member in the community in which they live. In addition, I want other school districts to be as active and engaged in creating post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Possessing a great deal of knowledge about a subject can be a liability (Ellett, 2011), and I endeavored to be open to new perceptions and experiences as described by participants. I realized that I needed to be cognizant of the biases toward transition practice and procedures that I brought to the research and how those were beneficial or detrimental to interactions with participants.

Before presenting the survey for the interview process with participants, I reflected on my own procedures and biases regarding transition policy and procedures for students with disabilities. I have taught special education for the last eighteen years with the last 5 in the area focusing on post school transition for students with moderate to severe disabilities. During this time, I have amassed many experiences, both positive and negative, successes and failures. This understanding of the overall processes and procedures when it comes to transition strategies has caused me to develop specific beliefs about how transition policy should be implemented.

Transition strategies and preparing students with disabilities for post school life, even at the beginning of my career, has always been a constant practice in the way I

approached the end product for students with disabilities. I am constantly interacting with students and their families, often in an informal, conversational manner. I often ask students questions about their goals, career interests, and support, in an effort to encourage self-advocacy and control of their own path and positive life outcome. Although, I have strong preferences regarding policies and procedures used in successful transition by my district, I pride myself in my openness to a range of techniques and procedures.

As an employment specialist, and a special education teacher, I am invested in what the future looks like for my students. Transition to post school life and how prepared my students are is impacted by each of these roles, and for this reason I am deeply invested in its application. In my role, teaching self-determination, self-advocacy and exposure to resources for students is an essential practice, and during the school year I facilitate numerous techniques and experiences with students. Additionally, I endeavor to use as many transition strategies as I can to better prepare my students and families for a post school life as I can. This allows me to reflect on my teaching practice and clearly assess my own procedures regarding transition successes and failures in the process. Conversely, when preparing students to transition, I seek out feedback from trusted friends and colleagues. These biases framed my interest and approach to this research. However, my years of experience in the field, my study of the literature and theory regarding feedback in various settings, and my personal experience with the implementation of transition strategies provided me with a perspective and a knowledge base that were well suited to investigate the use of district transition policies and

procedures in determining strategies to best assist and prepare students with disabilities for post school outcomes.

Data Analysis

Upon completion, survey interviews were reviewed to create an accurate sense of the participant and their responses (Smith et al., 2009). To begin the evaluation of transition strategies as used by districts, appreciative inquiry questioning of the focus group was based around the research questions of this study:

- What transition policies are currently in use for districts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP) to transition aged (14 years old to 21 years old) students with disabilities?
- Are districts using the KY Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey to guide policy for successful post school outcome student participation?
- Are districts with improved YOYO survey participation percentages implementing Self-determination, an evidenced-based practice (EBP), to improve participation rates among exiting students with disabilities?

Grouping participant responses in these initial categories allowed for further refinement of categorical themes in subsequent iterations. Survey questions were divided into three separate categories to further define themes. These categories are Transition, Youth one Year Out (YOYO), and Evidence Based Practice (EBP). Overarching themes and patterns that developed were listed and compared to each other using a thematic analysis approach. Ultimately, through the 4 D cycle themes emerged that related to the research questions.

Throughout numerous readings of the interview transcripts, themes relating to transition strategies were identified, examined, and categorized. As themes became established, a clear illustration was noted between groupings of participating districts and their members. Understanding my own biases prior caused me to be more aware of preconceptions, and assisted in open mindedness to focus on the participants' learned experience.

Methodology Limitations

There are some unavoidable limitations to this study, however, implementation of proper methodological practices was instituted, they are as follows:

- Direct questioning of participants was not possible due to health risks. Because of this it was necessary to rely on, and wholly trust, participant interpretations of survey questions
- Transcriptions of email surveys indicated that some participants didn't fully answer the questions asked and did not elaborate fully when a follow up email was distributed. Participant checking was used to mitigate any confusion, and I utilized follow-up questions to investigate and clarify answers and participants' understanding
- Because of the conversational nature of interviews, combined with shared professional experiences and understandings of transition strategy procedures, in person interviews could've led to more in depth answers. Opportunities for me to relate to participants and make them feel at ease could've made them open up and share about district policy and procedures easier. I feel I could've guided

conversations to set a personable tone and arrive at a deeper understanding of the questions and what transition strategies and procedures I was looking for

Chapter 4 Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine current district transition policies and practices for students with disabilities that are exiting to post school life. The research looked at various transition strategies centered around districts using the Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey. The research examined nine different Central Kentucky school districts, surveying seventeen personnel involved in the distribution and implementation of transition policies and procedures as they relate to students with disabilities. The reason I want to pursue this research was based on past results of the YOYO survey for the Madison County school district. The research in this study discusses several ways districts can evaluate their transition strategies to increase the positive post school outcomes of exiting students enrolled in special education. As mentioned previously, with an improvement in aligned transition strategies, communication, and evidence based practices by a district, student response numbers completing the YOYO survey the confidence and reliability of transition data will increase. Accurate data is reliable, provides insight, and is an effective way to make the right decisions. When educators use data to drive their decisions and plans, they are able to respond to problems more effectively, construct new teaching methods, and advance skill sets faster. Current studies indicate that teachers in schools with data-focused programs think using data improves instruction significantly (Holley, n.d.). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 established the requirement that students with disabilities exiting from high school need to be adequately prepared for post-school education, employment, and independent living. Schools must be in a position to respond to what's going on around them. According to

studies from Test et al., 2009, Wehman et al., 2015, students with disabilities experience detrimental post school outcomes and social consequences due to ineffective transition policies that exclude career awareness training, self-determination, employment experiences during high school and parent support among others. These deficiencies have led to more than 10% of individuals with disabilities being unemployed, a rate over double that of individuals who do not have disabilities (*Job Market Sluggish For Those With Disabilities*, 2015). It's proven that investing in transition policy for students with disabilities including vocational education classes, participating in paid job experiences, and receiving transition programming led to better student postsecondary outcomes (Test et al., 2009). The results of numerous past youth one year out surveys, show that students with disabilities are not graduating into competitive integrated employment or post-secondary education with the same preparation, plan, or skills necessary compared to their non-special education peers. I designed this study to explore administrators and frontline personnel's views of what transition strategies they find effective and strategies that are currently being used and implemented by their respective districts. I explored if the policies are communicated to frontline personnel on a consistent basis. I chose to use interviews from these stakeholders to compare the themes of what administrators and frontline focus groups in districts above and below the UKHDI recommended 65% student participation rate over a three year period was in answering the YOYO survey. This triangulation of data from these four teams helped to compare what transition strategies that the represented school districts are doing that lead to more positive post school outcomes and thus successful transition policies and procedures for all districts. Positive visions of successful post school transitions were

shared, in higher education, training and career related application. Along with, what policies and procedures were actively applied and successful and what evidence based practices, if any, were used in that success. I addressed my general research questions to fill the gap in research on successfully helping school districts implement transition strategies, to improve post school outcomes among students with disabilities.

This chapter presents participants’ responses regarding their use of transition strategies in the district that they represent. To provide context to responses, the participants will be identified using their pseudonym and grouping number at the beginning of the chapter. A brief description of the timeline and survey distribution process will be detailed as well at the beginning of the chapter. Participant answers to the survey questions will be categorized into three main categories; Transition, Youth One Year Out (YOYO), and Evidence Based Practice (EBP). See Table 2.

Table 2 Focus Group Survey Categories

Categories	Question Numbers
Transition	1 , 6 , 8
Youth One Year Out (YOYO)	2 , 4 , 7 , 10
Evidence Based Practice	3 , 5, 9

The ten survey questions, along with both positive core intro questions, will be following the 4 D cycle of appreciative inquiry; discover, design, dream, and destiny. To review, each step in the 4D cycle will be patterned like the steps mentioned;

- Collected data from interviews: this is a discovery process to learn about the best of what is. The discovery process shifts the balance of attention to what is working
- Determine common themes: the themes or topics are stated affirmatively and should involve areas of inquiry that are important
- The dream phase encourages the participants to think about what could be and think outside of traditional boundaries of what has been done in the past
- The design phase. Participants focus on creating action around the possibilities
- Support analysis: forward thinking about what resources are in place and which ones need to be developed
- Develop an action agenda: Commitments are established
- Implement the action agenda: focus on action planning and on personal commitments to change. (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001, pp. 130- 131)

Each survey question was matched with its cycle in AI and the respondents' answers were categorized accordingly. ADMIN 1 (administration) and FRONTLINE 1 (staff directly working students) team members representing districts with greater than 65% student participation rates over a three year period on YOYO surveys presenting responses appearing first. Meanwhile, the teams of ADMIN 2 and FRONTLINE 2 representing less than 65% averages over the same time period of student response rates will follow. Interviewees detailed positive transition stories they personally witnessed of post-secondary successes in their districts, the listing of tools and principles that guide their use of evidence based practices, and the purpose and focus in the district use of the YOYO survey to guide transition policy. Findings derived from administrators

and frontline participant reflections regarding transition strategies provided context for the chapter's presentation and analysis of general themes. These themes are defined by the process of the 4-D Cycle of appreciative inquiry for this cohort and how post school outcomes for students with disabilities are shaped.

On Transition Planning and Digital Communication in a Pandemic

What a time to be involved in special education. With technology becoming so widely prevalent and evolving in its use, teaching transition strategies will change and experiences for students will transform as well.

– Admin Team 1

When interviews were conducted, during the summer of 2021, most participants were finishing up directing personnel and teaching students emerging from statewide school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to health restrictions, participants experienced managing departments remotely and teaching students in-person and online, which influenced responses. The AI Summit meeting had to be modified to accommodate the group and surveys were disbursed to collect the data to be reviewed for emerging themes that will be collected and presented. Consent forms were emailed in the Spring 2021 semester using the Directors of Special Education state listserv and the Southeast SouthCentral Cooperative transition contact list. A survey was sent to everyone that sent back a signed consent form. Surveys were collected over the next month. The shared results were then grouped, and emerging themes have been gathered and analyzed.

In correspondence with participants, transition experiences were based mostly on past experience with students but were interwoven with how participants were

currently implementing new transition techniques and strategies to best serve students in the virtual environment. The vocabulary of the participant's experience reflects situations based on some virtual settings and thus influenced responses to address these new realities. The virtual transition strategies and references used by participant narratives related to some online, distance, or virtual learning conducted in the fall and spring of the 2020- 2021 school year.

Positive Core: Positive Perceptions of Transition to Post School Outcomes for students with disabilities

First Hand Experiences

“It's a great feeling personally when a student you've been working with for four years to achieve more than what they thought possible finally blossoms into the person you saw at the beginning of their freshman year!”

-FRONTLINE Team 1

In special education, successful post school transition of a student with disabilities will leave quite the impression on all stakeholders involved with that process. As stated earlier from *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook : For Leaders of Change*, inviting people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements can identify a “positive core.” From this established positive core, the energy is linked directly to any change agenda. This link creates energy and excitement and a desire to move toward a shared dream. Thus, each successful post school outcome for a student is special and means a lot to the stakeholders involved in seeing the process through. When the process results in a desired outcome everyone

feels an exuberance of success. It is well documented that students with disabilities often experience limited access to and success within postsecondary education programs (Stodden et al., 2001) while at the same time, evidence continues to show high unemployment among young adults with disabilities (Wehman, 2015). It's not surprising that the majority of the participants representing all four administration and frontline teams, could recall that one special memory describing a positive instance of transition, be it to a career and/or higher education training with a student. Interviewees' responses were remarkably consistent after being asked to recall a specific memorable situation with which a student with disabilities made a successful transition to post school life based on resources the school provided. Positive core themes from each team included relationship building, community involvement, family investment, transition exploring over multiple years in school, hands-on learning, career interest, and follow up. Examples of the responses follow:

ADMIN Team 1 >65% Positive Core Experiences

- “A student in our district who was in our MSD program was involved for years in preparation for work for a local university athletic department. This student in high school, began visiting the school with his teacher to learn navigation through the athletic areas as well as how to get to and from the school. Initially travel was by school bus and with direct instruction moved to public transportation with intense support and supervision, to independently using private transportation services for the disabled. The student began by helping with folding the clean towels for the football and basketball teams and placing them in the correct spots in the locker rooms. His work skills and his social

skills increased tremendously, and the student began to also match the correct jerseys to the correct lockers and helped with other materials in preparing for practices and home games. The student became a true member of the staff and team and has continued his work after exiting high school.”

- “We had a young lady that worked really hard when she was in high school. She had the opportunity to explore a career interest with her class using community based instruction (CBI) training at a local motel. She developed a relationship with the staff, gained hands-on experience and was offered a position to work there after she graduated.”
- “We served a student that had been diagnosed with Autism. They participated in our cooperative program and was able to participate and learn valuable skills working at Kroger part time. The former student just graduated college this past school year and is now the Assistant Manager at Kroger.”
- “Our Special Education Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities spend Junior and Senior Year working out in the community. Our special education teacher and aides assist students in learning a skill or trade that interests them. Several years ago, we placed a student at the University Fitness and Wellness center to learn how to take care of the equipment, greet students coming into the gym, folding towels, and various other tasks. After graduation, this student was asked to stay on as an employee and continue. As far as I know, the student is still employed by the University.”
- “We had a student with Autism who was educated in our school until the age of 21. He was a part of the CWTP and had an employment transition plan. The student was very interested in history and fascinated with funerals. Throughout

his comprehensive vocational assessment and job exploration, our staff member was able to isolate specific jobs that would be of great interest to the student. The staff member made a connection with a local funeral home director who was willing to take our student under his wing for a job work program through the school. This job placement worked so well for our student that he was able to retain the job position following his exit from high school and still works in this facility to date. “

FRONTLINE Team 1 >65%Positive Core Experiences

- “Last school year I had a student that was set on becoming a vet. We volunteered and shadowed at a local clinic. She was so excited going into it but realized that the resources and colleges that offered the proper training was not something that she wanted. So, we explored other options and other careers. She had a passion for beauty, makeup and hair so we explored cosmetology. It was not a good fit, so we explored real estate, but she did not like that either. We then toured a nursing home and explored the variety of career opportunities within the facility. She talked to the staffing department and found out that they had on the job training for CNA, a study program and paid for licensing. She explored the career the rest of the year, updated her resume and applied the day after graduation. She was hired on the spot working 3rd shift and making more than I do per hour. She studied and took the license test and passed. She is now a Certified Nursing Assistant.”
- “One of my students was positive they wanted to attend a local university. We visited the campus and the Center For Student Accessibility as a class their

junior year. During the students senior year, I once again took my students for a college visit however this time we set an appointment up with the Center For Student Accessibility to start discussing the transition process. They worked very closely with this student and he started classes in the Fall.”

- “I worked with a young man in the HSC (Highly Skilled Classroom). It was a program that was used to place students back into regular education as their behaviors improved. This young man was highly intelligent, but his behaviors impeded any learning that could possibly take place within the regular education program. We worked daily on showing him love, and his potential. The administration at the school did not want them in their school and each of them knew they were not wanted. My husband and I went to everything those guys did after school. This particular young man was extremely talented in singing. We were able to get him into the Lexington School for the Arts program singing. He stayed at our school but was not able to participate in the musicals. Recently, I received a phone call from his momma. She said, "You were the one that never gave up on our boy!" He is graduating from HS this year and has received a full scholarship at the University. SINGING HIS LITTLE HEART OUT! I was invited to his last singing program at the high school, and I sat there and bawled like a baby! I still reach out to them on social media. All three graduated from HS this year. ONE TOUGH YEAR! But one of my favorites.”

ADMIN Team 2 <65%Positive Core Experiences

- “The most recent memorable moment was a male student in our district. He was working 40 hours at a factory while completing his SR (Senior Year) year

virtually. He would come into the district on Fridays for our teacher help day. He graduated with a 3.9. The best, but sad part to his story was that he was on his own since he was a sophomore in high school.”

- “The student we had graduated and transitioned to Job CORP. The student was able to participate and complete this due to the introduction of CORP, application process, and follow-through of the employment specialist.”

Frontline Team 2 <65%Positive Core Experiences

- “One student in particular that I focused much of my time on has surpassed what I expected of him post school. During school, I worked with him on so MANY different obstacles that he faced. He lacked determination, self-confidence, family support, social skills, etc. I knew that he would have to rely on himself if he wanted to be successful. When we ended school last year, due to COVID, I felt that I had not prepared him for the next stage. However, this year when it came time to do the YOYO report, I was delighted to learn that he had indeed taken what I had taught him and put those skills in use. He now works full time at a decent paying job, he now drives, saved money and bought himself a car. He is currently still living at home, but hopes to move in the near future. He for sure has been my success story!”

With this initial question, I used it to determine a positive core and set the stage to engage positive attitudes toward post school transition. These memories elicited feelings of what worked in the district for former students with disabilities and post school success. The aim created a base of positive feelings to build on more success going forward with students and transition within the district. For the most part, the

question did spawn positive feelings and memories, but in the admin 2 and frontline 2 teams the questions gave off different tones. Several of the responses were short, lacked detail and didn't mention key moments in relationship building, family support or the support services that led to the students success. One respondent, an Admin 2, left the question blank and even with repeated follow ups, no explanation was given. More troubling responses came from frontline 2 members. The respondent stated that they "Have yet to be a part of or know the details of a student's success post high school". While another veteran frontline 2 team member states "We have had very few students who have sustained what they transitioned with from H.S. We have had fewer than 5 that have maintained employment beyond a year from exiting in the 12 years of teaching". While all but one participant described their memories of post school transition with students, the majority recalled positive outcomes. While only a couple Frontline 2 team members failed to mention any positive experience with the process.

Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Resource Tools, Grade Year to Start, and Support from KDE Regarding Transition

"Communication and mining for resources to better equip students and their families is our number one priority to increase their post school success."

-ADMIN Team 1

The research design asked three specific questions concerning transition for students with disabilities. The collection revealed transition tools utilized by each district, an opinion of what grade level that transition strategies for students with disabilities should take place, and lastly what positive supports, if any, are supplied by the Kentucky Department of Education. The first emergent theme observed was a

positive recall of multiple transition tools used in the districts. The use of resource tools identified, and organizations mentioned at ADMIN and FRONTLINE levels were consistently mentioned by all TEAM 1 and TEAM 2 participant responses to the list of tools used by the district. The involvement of a variety of highlighted methods of transition tools includes individual learning plans, family involvement, vocational rehabilitation and the regional cooperatives. The tools mentioned were student centered, involved multiple agencies and focused on career and skill training. The involvement of an Employment Specialist and mention of a Career Work Transition Program stood out as investments by the district.

Examples of the data collected from the focus group participants regarding the transition tools include:

ADMIN 1 >65% Transition tools

- “We work closely with vocational rehabilitation services and at the University and invite them to our ARC meetings when appropriate.”
- “Employee Specialist program (UK) and its resources. SESC has also helped with transition fairs, etc.”
- “CBWT coach, Voc. Rehab.”
- “Career interest surveys, workplace readiness surveys, parent survey, student survey, self-advocacy checklist, self-determination checklist, ILP, learning styles inventory. For students in the CWTP employment transition program, a comprehensive vocational assessment is conducted.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Transition Tools

- “Student survey, parent survey, career inventory, self-advocacy checklist, ILP Learning Styles Inventory, and the RIASEC test.”
- “Co- OP, partners for education, CWTP, Career Fair, MSD transition program”
- “I believe an ILP is completed for students. I’m not sure of any other tools that are used. Informal interviews and surveys are completed with students and their families, when pertinent.”

ADMIN 2 <65% Transition Tools

- “Employment specialists, work directly with students and high school teachers to provide meaningful post-secondary/job opportunities, Voc Rehab”
- “We use our employment specialist to make connections with community partnerships, CKEC, and Voc Rehab. We use interest surveys, professional dress classes, a walkthrough of the application, social interactions lessons, and much more.”
- “Our students attend transition fairs, we take students on field trips to companies, we meet with student on a regular basis to look at post-secondary and how we can assist them. It is a huge benefit to working in a small district and getting to know the families personally.”
- “The district used interest inventories and specific vocational training, work study, and community education that matched the student’s interests to his or her weekly work/transition planning. The district also worked closely with family members to ensure they were part of the student’s planning team and understood the purposes of transition planning for work and or post-secondary education opportunities. The district also had positions designated to facilitate relationships with businesses and agencies locally to match students with corporations and businesses that became good partners with the district and the students. A distributor and a local University are examples of two major employers in the area who worked closely with us for job training during high school and paid positions upon graduation and or aging out of the district’s programs.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Transition Tools

- “Currently we use the ARC to help determine what that transition will look like. In most cases it is recommended that they work with the Employment Specialist. For our most severe we partner with Build Inclusion.”
- “ILP surveys, interest inventories, parental discussions, OVR, employment work opportunities in the community.”
- “Multi-year course of study, providing assistance through case managers and counseling office for research of careers and post-secondary education opportunities – including assistance with funds, job shadowing activities, co-op/job placements, offering partnering opportunity with voc rehab”
- “We currently use the Unique Transition Program for our grades 9-11 students to ensure the fundamental skills for employment are addressed better preparing

our students for the transition years., 12-14. This is where we are developing our intensive, community based program.”

- “Referral to OVR, ACT accommodations for college bound students.”

Grade Year Most Important to Prepare Students with Disabilities for Transition

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 mandates that transition is to start by age 16 on a student's IEP. It is not surprising that almost every team mentioned High School as a time to start, particularly the ninth grade, introducing transition to post school activities. Interesting to note that ADMIN 1, ADMIN 2 and FRONTLINE 2 team members mentioned to start in elementary school with one ADMIN 2 even suggesting Preschool age. In fact, the ADMIN 1 stated

“Children need to be exploring areas of interest to them, learning how to collaborate with others, working as a team, seeing their needs/strengths and advocating for them and working to develop skills they find interesting/they are good at. Post-secondary planning starts early with the foundational skills.”

They all mentioned the need to start building skills such as communication, collaboration, independent living and workplace readiness among others as early as possible.

ADMIN 1 >65% Grade year is most important to prepare Students with Disabilities for transition.

- “ I believe post-secondary planning begins as early as 4th grade, even earlier if you are talking about skills children need to learn to be successful in life such as collaboration, communication, etc. At 4th grade, children need to be exploring areas of interest to them, learning how to collaborate with others, working as a team, seeing their needs/strengths and advocating for them and working to develop skills they find interesting/they are good at. Post-secondary planning starts early with the foundational skills. In terms of career exploration and workplace readiness skills, particular focus on these areas need to begin no later

than 6th grade in a very focused way. In my district, we are not here this year in a systematic way. We have pockets of focus in our elementary and middle schools, but we are working to strategically take post-secondary work and planning down to the lower grades. Before we could do that, we had to solidify and strengthen our post-secondary programming in high school. It will have a trickle-down effect over the next few years.”

- “We typically begin planning with our students with more moderate to severe needs at the end of their sophomore year so that they are ready at the beginning of their junior year to begin transition planning and job/work opportunities. Yes, my opinion mirror’s the district focus on when to begin transition activities. Beginning Junior year in the student’s academic career gives the students and teachers two good years at work experience before they exit high school. However, we often get longer to train and get work ready if our severe needs students are staying on into high school until they are 21.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Grade year is most important to prepare Students with Disabilities for transition.

- “I think Sophomore year at the latest for the initial exploration of career/job options. And no, we typically don’t begin until Junior or Senior year.”
- High School
- High School
- “Hit the ground running their freshmen year. That first year should be focused on the WHAT. **What** does this young individual want to do? **What** are their strengths and weaknesses? Independent living skills

Sophomore year I started that work on in-class training. Do in school training if your school has the facilities if not try to assemble some type of mock training room. Independent living skills

Juniors start out of school training, focus on the job training as well as independent living skills

Senior independent training. Seeing if they can work with only limited support makes that year the goal to work towards total independence. Getting to and from work, Food, Money, banking”

ADMIN 2 <65% Grade year is most important to prepare Students with Disabilities for transition.

- “I believe the self-advocacy skills should be taught as appropriate beginning in preschool. The discussions about work or post-secondary education should begin in 5th and 6th grade, planting the seeds for being independent and

thinking about what they want to do when they grow up. The middle school years should include career days and exploration at an age appropriate level and then high school should include future planning, career exploration, specific community work exploration and structured opportunities from 9th grade on. Social skills training that is specific to work and post-secondary settings is critical for students to develop confidence and a “toolbox” of options and this takes time to teach, model, reinforce, and generalize or apply across settings and situations. The district would follow the state and federal guidelines for formal transition. Many teachers would incorporate aspects especially in social skills and self-advocacy at lower grade levels, but this was not a district directive or mandate at the time.”

- “I think middle school 7th -8th grade, looking at interest inventories and surveys. Yes, our district begins a focus in 8th grade on post-secondary.”
- “ The earlier the better. Would love to see a great emphasis beginning in 8th grade to prepare students for their future endeavors.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Grade year is most important to prepare Students with Disabilities for transition.

- “Our district starts at age 14. I think that is developmentally appropriate for most students. Students with disabilities are often behind developmentally so that should ensure that age 14 is soon enough.”
- “I believe this needs to start at the elementary level. As early as possible. The families do not seem to have an understanding of what the end result is, and many times drop the ball when students exit. Initiating this language and overarching goal of meaningful employment at their highest level of independence is critical to the success of any transition program. I feel our district sees this as a grade 8 and higher initiative. Unfortunately, most families seem to have checked out and gone through the motions at this point. We talk about this every ARC and send information over and over to still have them not prepared for the day their student leaves the educational system.”
- “Transition planning should begin at the intake meeting if not a 1-2 years after and discussed at every ARC meeting thereafter. I can’t speak to what is being discussed at intake meetings in my district, but I have colleagues in other districts that say transition planning is saved for 7th grade ARC meetings and really implemented in high school.”
- “In my option 6th grade. Transitional services start at age 14 in my district and are determined as needed based on each individual student.”
- “I feel that coming into high school students should start becoming aware of what their transition will look like. However, for me, I think the end of the junior year is the most critical. If I can meet with a student during their junior year and develop that plan of transition. I can focus the entire senior year on preparing them for post school. Currently, I have found that I often am not

getting student referrals until the middle of their senior year, and this is a disservice to them.”

Positive Strategies Provided Through KDE

Both ADMIN 1 and ADMIN 2 team members mentioned positive strategies provided by KDE with post-secondary training and support provided through the cooperatives. One ADMIN 1 member drew more of a negative feeling when it came to KDE. They felt the requirements and expectant compliance is often a moving target which puts districts at a disadvantage and adds burdens to ensure compliance.

FRONTLINE 1 and FRONTLINE 2 had different perspectives. Multiple Frontline 1 and FRONTLINE 2 members repeated that they “had no idea”, were “unsure” and one from each seemed disgruntled and stated that KDE was there to just provide extra paperwork, while the other said that KDE seemed separate from the realities of what they are expecting schools to provide to the students. Concerning KDE’s guidance, one FRONTLINE 2 member acknowledged there was plenty and gave examples of multiple modules, support from Cooperatives and professional development opportunities but mentioned a “laundry list” of requirements for students but no guidance on how to accomplish those things. Positives were found with the resources found on the website of the Kentucky Department of Education with a FRONTLINE 2 member acknowledging the resources are there but mentioned their district might not be using all the resources to its full potential after visiting the site to see firsthand.

ADMIN 1 >65% Positive Strategies Provided Through KDE

- “Post-secondary transition training, support, record reviews provided by co-ops, documents that outline the requirements that are needed to be in compliance with this piece of the regulation, the compliance record review document which

helps us to monitor our compliance routinely. One struggle is the changing of requirements that often occurs, in particular, the periodic changing of the expectation of when/how consent to invite outside agencies is to be done. The timeline for this requirement keeps changing and the training/communication of this requirement does not presently match the compliance record review document (20-21). These types of struggles make it difficult for districts to ensure compliance.”

- “KDE provides all districts with resources on their website about the transition process for students with disabilities. Also, our COOP provides training on transition services and they gain all the information from KDE.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Positive Strategies Provided Through KDE

- “I have No Idea”
- “I am not sure”
- “Their help usually involves more paperwork for teachers that have enough paperwork to cover the entire state with! The support they could do....come in and bring things to the districts to help with transition (such as....examples of restaurant programs along with materials to set up the restaurant, examples of programs for clothing with materials, how to set up transition activities!)”

ADMIN 2 <65% Positive Strategies Provided Through KDE

- “KDE would provide guidance on state and federal changes and or recommendations. Occasionally, through the coops you would hear of what other districts were doing that had been innovative and successful with their students that you could modify or adjust to fit your own district’s needs.”
- “KDE is beginning to focus more on the fact that not all students are college bound.”
- “The regional coop has supported the program through partnerships with and conferences for students to expose them to opportunities.”
- “Services and supports including HDI, Coop, CWTP, Pre-ets, are helpful but seem to be dwindling or have more restrictions.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Positive Strategies Provided Through KDE

- “This is not something that is shared with me in my position, so I do not have the ability to provide information.”
- “They encourage support from outside agencies and our district has a relationship with the SESC Co-op and OVR.”

- “KDE has multiple modules, professional development opportunities, etc. but there currently isn’t a program geared toward this in the district”
- “I feel like they are disconnected from the realities of what we are trying to provide our students for real, measurable outcomes. They give you a laundry list of what your student should exit with but no guidance on the how's, no tools of any significance to produce results. The teachers are stretched way too thin in providing all that the State requires and getting what is really needed for our students is lost in the politics of education.”
- “I’m not sure. I assume that much of our normal transition planning is recommended by KDE but in working on this survey I looked up transition services on the KDE site. I do not think we utilize the resources listed there to the fullest extent.”

Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey

“The YOYO report can show what programs we have in place are working. It’s hard to make “BIG” changes from the data, but it does allow us to tweak what we are doing already.”

-ADMIN 1

This collection of questions is concerning the youth one year out survey. The questioning provides information on the importance of a high rate of student participation in the survey. How the district uses the information obtained from the survey. Plus, Steps the participants feel is the most important to improving the student participation rates on the survey.

Importance of a High Rate of Students Participation in YOYO Survey

With words like “Critical” “Important” “Power to Improve” individuals from every team mentioned knew the importance of having a high student participation rate. ADMIN 1 and ADMIN 2 members knew it assessed the current state of the program and changes could be made based on responses gathered. FRONTLINE 1 and FRONTLINE 2 members mentioned how it was important to track and monitor student progress and outcomes based on transition programming. A FRONTLINE 2 member

also stated that it gave accurate transition data to help current and future students. Only one FRONTLINE 1 member mentioned they didn't deal with the YOYO survey.

ADMIN 1 >65% YOYO Former Student Participation Importance

- “Not only is it a federal and state requirement, but districts can use the data to examine district reports to identify ways to improve outcomes, provide access to resources to former students and to hear firsthand stories about your former students and use that knowledge to help others.”
- “It gives us a baseline set of data which helps us improve our transition goals.”
- “It's important because we are assessing student post-secondary outcomes and the success of our transition programming. The knowledge of where our students end up, what supports they utilize and their perception of the supports that were provided to them, give us the power to know if what we are doing is and is not working and how to better our programming for the ultimate benefit of students.”
- “So that we are assessing student post-secondary outcomes and the success of our transition programming. The knowledge of where our students end up, what supports they utilize and their perception of the supports that were provided to them, give us the power to know if what we are doing is and is not working and how to better our programming for the ultimate benefit of students.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% YOYO Former Student Participation Importance

- “ It is an important way to monitor/track student success(es) (or failures) after graduation so that we can better plan with current students getting ready to transition out of high school.”
- “To evaluate how many students have had a successful transition and what we could do differently to support future students.”
- “Knowing if what you are doing is actually working is so important. Once they leave if the survey were not completed no one would know what became of the students. Are they home doing nothing? or did our transition program help?”
- “I do not deal with the YOYO.”

ADMIN 2 <65% YOYO Former Student Participation Importance

- “It is critical for a district to know how our students are doing post-graduation

to ensure we can modify our programming to better facilitate student independence and gainful employment for our graduates. Our job is to prepare students for “life after high school” and give them the strongest foundation possible to experience success and live as independently as possible.”

- “It is another way to ensure we give our students the tools and resources needed to make it in the real world.”
- “To address to what extent the student has found gainful employment opportunities or sought a higher level of education.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% YOYO Former Student Participation Importance

- “So, we can know how many students have made a successful transition.”
- “It is a way to measure whether our program is being successful and identify where deficits may lie.”
- “It’s important to have an efficient follow up process so that districts can either replicate programming that was successful for students or solve what happened to prevent negative post transition outcomes”
- “To provide accurate transition data to identify needs for current or future students.”
- “We want to know if our tools that we are providing are working or not. The more participants we have the better our statistics will be. This allows us to focus on areas that we may need to focus more attention on.”

Has the District Used the YOYO Data to Shape Policy

The ADMIN 1 team was the only one that mentioned the use of the YOYO survey data to shape policy concerning transition. One member said they have adjusted assessment tools, began focusing on more self-advocacy and increased community based resource knowledge based on it. Another ADMIN 1 said they understand the limitations of the survey but said students interested in the same career paths as former students can review to modify what worked and what didn’t. Only one ADMIN 2 member stated that their district uses the YOYO survey data. They said it was important to gain knowledge “as a follow-up for our previous students and as a way to measure our on-going abilities to establish and maintain working relationships with valued

employers in the local area”. The other ADMIN 2 members said their district does not use the data to shape policy.

FRONTLINE 1 team members stated they were “not sure” or “had no idea” what the district did with the information to the YOYO survey. One FRONTLINE 2 member said the survey was helpful but that the district just started looking at the data and nothing can be discerned right now as helping policy. Another FRONTLINE 2 mentioned the importance of the data to further a collaboration with several outside agencies to help with the transition needs of their students.

ADMIN 1 >65% Has the District Used the YOYO Data to Shape Policy

- “Yes, we have used the YOYO data to shape our transition work. Based on YOYO data in the past, we have adjusted the assessment tools we used, began focusing more explicitly on self-advocacy, began ensuring students were aware of community based resources prior to graduation, etc. “
- “Yes, we have looked back at YOYO data especially when we have a student who is interested in going down the same path for job placement as a former student may have done. We use that data to see what worked and what didn’t. Yes, there are limitations to the survey as we are not always able to see the reasons why a specific path worked or did not.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Has the District Used the YOYO Data to Shape Policy

- “Not Sure”
- “No”
- “I am not sure”
- “I have no idea”

ADMIN 2 <65% Has the District Used the YOYO Data to Shape Policy

- The district used the YOYO data as a follow-up for our previous students and as a way to measure our on-going abilities to establish and maintain working relationships with valued employers in the local area and to see what additional skills may need to be taught or identify barriers or breakdowns for our graduates.”
- “No, the district does not use the data at all for policy”

- “No, students do not respond to the YOYO follow-up.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Has the District Used the YOYO Data to Shape Policy

- “I’m actually not sure.”
- “I imagine so but am not at a level”
- “The survey is helpful to obtain information for students transitioning; however, we just started using the survey, so I have yet to witness it’s outcomes for our students.”
- “Our district has continued contact with CWTP which partners with OVR and the Human Development Institute at UK due to our YOYO results providing evidence that we need additional support and resources.”
- “I am not sure what our district does with the survey results. I am the one conducting the survey, but that is my only role.”

Procedures for YOYO Student Response and district review

This question sought to find the procedures utilized by the district to maintain or improve the 65% student participation rates among former students and the reviewal process per year using the YOYO survey. Outlined throughout, ADMIN 1 responses were that the districts readily reviewed their procedures and had a point person that reached out to each family. In one case it was the director of special education that reached out and in another it was the case manager for the student. The procedure was detailed, and the process was intentional to let the student know what the process in completing the YOYO survey would be. The success to reach former students was attributed, in some cases, to the smaller size of the community.

ADMIN 2 team member answers include positive procedures for communicating with students and families. The members mentioned the use of updated mail listings and phone numbers obtained in the ARC meetings to improve student participation on the YOYO survey. While also stating the benefit of a small community size, and a single person to make contact with students and review data of YOYO

survey to staff. If difficulty is found to reach a former student home visits are then initiated. This team did have one team member mention that, as a district, they do not review the procedures concerning the procedures or its implementation of the YOYO survey.

In FRONTLINE 1 responses, the procedure process wasn't consistent to that of the ADMIN 1's. Even though one member did say the success rate of participation was due to the small size of the community, they also relayed that positive relationships with the students could be another factor. Two FRONTLINE 1 team members did state that they had no idea what the procedures were for the YOYO survey. Interesting notes found from the FRONTLINE 2 team members concerning YOYO survey procedures was that they all completely lacked knowledge concerning them. They were unaware of the procedures the district used and stated they haven't had those details available to them. One FRONTLINE 2 member did mention that they didn't have knowledge of what the district does procedure wise with the YOYO survey but worked hard on concentrating on their caseload to explain the importance of the YOYO survey and the students participation in it. The team member even took it upon themselves to personally contact the graduated student to provide familiarity and comfort to answer the YOYO survey questions.

ADMIN 1 >65% Procedures for 65% student response and yearly review by district

- “The Director of Special Education personally contacts each student or family in order to obtain at least 65% student participation. Last school year we had 100% student participation. Yes, I review the YOYO data to determine any changes that would need to be made in order to improve the process.”
- “Letters, phone calls, emails. Not reviewed on a yearly basis until this year.”

- “We have always had a success rate in the 90% 's. We are a small community, and it is easy to track down our former students.”
- “We are a small district, so this tends to be easier for us than others. We have instituted a few specific activities that make us able to typically gain a 100% response rate. We have very few incidents of less than 100%. The methods we use include the following: The case manager of the student at the time of exiting is the person who conducts the interview (this was the first strategy we implemented and it made all the difference for us in terms of survey completion and students opening up to provide the answers to the questions being asked), the case manager has a conversation with the student just prior to exiting about the survey and when it will happen, and the case manager obtains personal contact information for the child prior to exiting (cell phone number, social media names, etc.). Due to our high participation rate, we have not had to review our policy formally in some time. Since we are small and our survey numbers are usually no more than 20 students, I am able to monitor this rate and accuracy of data collected on an annual basis. We make minor adjustments as needed but these methods have proven to be very successful for our district in obtaining this data.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Procedures for 65% student response and yearly review by district

- “We typically have a 100% response rate. Not sure if it is because we are a small school or because we have a positive relationship with most of our students who graduate. We discuss with the student the senior year before they leave what we will be calling for the following year. I make sure I have parents and students' cell phone numbers before they leave. As a special education department, we discuss the results of the survey each year.”
- “I am not sure as this is not something that I am familiar with.”
- “ I have no idea.”
- “Currently on each student's IEP a transition goal and plan is written. That is about it...once it is written it is filed. Never to be looked at again until the next meeting. The paperwork for the state and what actually needs to be done are two different things.”

Admin 2 <65% Procedures for 65% student response and yearly review by district

- “Letters, updated information on IEP, voc rehabilitation involvement and - SESC. The transition procedures for YOYO are not reviewed each year and very little emphasis is placed on the data it provides.”
- “It is reviewed by our special education department team. The team reviews the process for contact and determines best ways to contact students. We now have a process to gather student contact information prior to the end of their senior year to ensure we have student information and not parents. With students having cell phones, this is more readily available now.”
- “Since we are a small district, I call students and also do home visits if I cannot reach them by phone. I am the individual who reviews the YOYO and shares it with the staff.”
- “The district has students fill out forms with phone numbers, emails, addresses etc. prior to graduation to help with tracking students down the following year. Letters are mailed to students throughout the year as well as phone calls by job coaches checking on them and their progress and or status.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Procedures for 65% student response and yearly review by district

- “I am not sure what the district necessarily uses, but I know what I do. The majority of students with IEP’s work directly with me. If they are on my caseload, I explain to them prior to graduation that I will be in contact with them in the spring. I will ask for their personal cell phone number and personal email if they have one. I have found that direct contact with the student gives me better results than using the contact information on the YOYO report. Most of my students feel comfortable talking to me, and are happy for me to follow up with them.”
- “I am not sure what our district recommends because no guidelines are set. We just try to keep updated records of contact information on our IEPS.”
- “I’m not sure.”
- “I am not privy to that information.”
- “I am unaware of the answer to this question and the district's process for completing the YOYO survey.”

What are the Most Important Steps a School District Must Take to Improve Student Response Rates on the YOYO Survey?

ADMIN 1 team members mention consistent communication and relationship building. Contact has to be made prior to the student exiting so they are familiar with the connection. The process of the YOYO survey needs to be relayed to the student and family. Plus, accurate contact information needs to be kept on the student prior to exiting. The team member said when this took place a higher response rate was obtained.

ADMIN 2 mentioned that procedures need to be made known, celebrated by the school and high expectations set on graduation achievements of the students. The member said this process should start in middle school and the students should know what to expect before graduation. Other team members mentioned the involvement of digital contacting through a “texting system” or a family night where all the information detailing the steps and importance of post school information can be shared.

FRONTLINE 1 and FRONTLINE 2 members mentioned the constant contact and relationship building prior to the student exiting the school system. The assigning of school personnel to follow that student prior to graduation and “check in”. Building a relationship was a consistent mention across the team members. Make it a system that is useful so that the students and families want to report the information back. One FRONTLINE 2 member wanted to make it an incentive system where the alumni that respond are put into a reward system of some kind.

ADMIN 1 >65% Important Steps to Improve student participation on YOYO

- “Connection and communication – you have to build a relationship with students and communicate what will be happening now and in the future. When we have ensured that students are called by the people, they have a relationship with, we have not only had a higher response rate, but we have obtained more accurate data.”
- “It would be important for schools to maintain contact prior to the one year out. It is often difficult to find students when there has been no prior contact.”
- “Consistent communication.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Important Steps to Improve student participation on YOYO

- “ Make sure to stay in touch with/engage with youth over the course of the year after students graduate. Make sure to keep all contact information up to date. Offer incentives or reasons for students to stay in touch with their alma mater.”
- “Build positive relationship with students (help them to be aware the survey is not a reflection of them, but it is more of what can the school provide for them/specific contacts for support after they have graduated.) Develop a class that supports transition such as career awareness and use the one year out survey as a measure of the class's success.”
- “Building that relationship with the student while in school.
Making sure the student is successful in the job they chose to focus on while in school.
Assigning one teacher to follow certain students throughout their HS career. One teacher may have 10-12 students to mentor freshman-senior programs. That person does nothing but meet with them periodically and check-in how are things going? Maybe during club time. This should be someone other than their actual teacher. Could be assistant, another teacher from another room...
If they have a mentor, they will feel more comfortable answering a phone call from that person once they leave school. The relationship and bond have already been made.”
- “Contact and communication. Build relationships.”

ADMIN 2 <65% Important Steps to Improve student participation on YOYO

- “The importance of all transition activities needs to be discussed and instilled beginning in middle school, so they know what to expect and what it is so

important. We must convey that we have high expectations for their successes after graduation and we want to celebrate their success. With their permission it might be nice to have students recognized at a Board Meeting and receive a certificate from the Board 1 year out so the district can celebrate their achievements and use this as encouragement to others.”

- “Personally, I would like to see a group activity night of special education staff, counselors and administrators meeting with the student for "show and tell" and celebration night.”
- “Make it a texting survey system. Teach the students about the purpose and give a timeline of contact.”
- “Preparing them from 9th grade on, setting the purpose, and keeping updated records.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% Important Steps to Improve student participation on YOYO

- “The most important thing would be to truly help them make a successful transition then they will have something they would want to report on. The school could then be sure they have the students’ contact information as they progress through their senior year and then promote the survey a year later using those contacts and utilize small incentives like chances to win prizes.”
- “Invest in what the students need to be successful. Our student success could be impacted by consistent investment of services and identified resources. And most importantly a unified message and approach from K-14 to families that our goal in education is to prepare their student for meaningful employment beyond high school and not alter our program every time a parent complains.”
- “Start transitional services earlier than senior year. Develop a process to facilitate more follow through with OVR.”
- “Get to know your students! If they feel comfortable with you and you played a positive role in their transition, they will want to talk to you. They will want to share their accomplishments with you and be excited about it. I think it is important that the person making the one year contact be a person that knows the student and the student knows them.”

Focus Group Emergent Theme Concerning Evidence Based Practice (EBP)

“We are living in a society where it is not encouraged for you to have a goal or plan for life as an adult. We are not instilling the importance of being successful and independent. That doesn’t mean you have to have a degree. But you need to play a role of some sort.”

-FRONTLINE 2

What Evidence Based Practices (EBP) does your district use the most?

This set of questions will ask team members concerning Evidenced Based Practices (EBP) used by the district. I will ask the participants what kind of EBP is currently used the most. Also, if self-determination curriculum should be taught in the classroom and how are students with disabilities being involved in the planning process of their transition process?

ADMIN 1 members consistently mentioned EBP's that focused on student skill building. They involved work readiness, community awareness and activities that builds self-dependent and advocacy activities. Along the same lines, a couple FRONTLINE 1 members mentioned programs that built on self-advocacy and independence skills. While two members had "no idea".

ADMIN 2 and FRONTLINE 2 had one member each admit that their district does not have any specific EBP's that they use. Other mentioned practices that focused on self-advocacy, future and family planning. What to expect at work and a "WHY TRY" curriculum was mentioned. Another FRONTLINE 2 mentioned that they were excluded from this process.

ADMIN 1 > 65% EBP used by the district for exiting students with disabilities

- "Student voice, assessment of interests, work readiness skills, work factor preferences, learning styles assessment."
- "Behavioral assessment information, aptitude tests, interest and work values inventories, intelligence tests and achievement tests, personality or preference tests, as well as career maturity or readiness tests."

- “Community Based Instruction to teach self-determination, video modeling and simulation was used this year due to COVID.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% EBP used by the district for exiting students with disabilities

- “Provide work experiences for students not planning on attending college. Engage/Involve relevant community resources/personnel. Support parents in their decision making.”
- “Simulations, time-delay, backward chaining”
- “Not sure”
- “Not Sure”

ADMIN 2 <65% EBP used by the district for exiting students with disabilities

- “We used many different tools and they focused on teaching self-advocacy, specific social skills for communication, conflict resolution, asking for help, accepting redirection and or criticism, etc. The district also worked with families and the students on Futures Planning prior to each ARC and during academic instruction.”
- “We do not have one.”
- “We use direct and explicit instruction in social skills and expectations of job responsibilities.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% EBP used by the district for exiting students with disabilities

- “Multi-year course of study, voc rehab”
- “This is really student driven. We hope to have the program to a point where the individual can mostly use task analysis and video modeling to address generalization of skills. Students, through guided practice, will be able to use self-determination skills to identify areas of need for themselves.”
- “Other than the ILP process I am not sure there are any.”
- “In my class I use the Why Try Curriculum which is an EBP.”
- “I am not included in this process.”

Should Self Determination be Taught in School and to What Extent?

This was a very popular question and elicited a lot of positive resounding yes responses. Actually, every team member from all four teams said that self-determination should indeed be taught in classrooms. Everything from setting goals,

making plans, asking for help, and direct instruction are suggested. An ADMIN 1 states that SD involves a combination of attitudes and abilities that students need to be directly taught. Another interesting statement made by an ADMIN 1 member was that the increase of the student's self-determination could increase confidence with decision making the student more involved in their future plans. ADMIN 2 mentioned important skills that students would benefit from having self-determination taught to them in school. They stated SD is vital for students to learn how to speak up for themselves and be heard, increase confidence, employability, and self-advocacy.

ADMIN 1 >65% Should Self Determination be taught in school and to what extent

- “Yes, students need to know how to advocate for themselves and they need to know how to persevere when work is difficult. They need to know how to set goals, make plans, ask for help, advocate for their needs/supports, etc. This is a very important skill that children need to come into the world with and often it needs to be directly taught.”
- “Yes, self-determination should be taught in the classroom for future planning of students with a disability who are exiting high school. Self-determination involves the combination of attitudes and abilities that will lead children or individuals to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach these goals. We must teach our students how to be in charge, make his or her own choices, learn to solve problems effectively, take control and responsibility for his or her life, learn to experience and cope with the consequences of making decisions on his or her own. Having a self-determination curriculum as well as self-determination assessments which are beneficial for our students.”
- “YES..YES..YES. That needs to start freshman year.”
- “Yes, students taught to be more of an advocate take some responsibility from the parents to make all the decisions.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Should Self Determination be taught in school and to what extent

- “We currently don’t, but I do think it would be a good idea. Most of my students tend to be passive in their involvement in decision making about their immediate and long-term future plans.”
- “Yes it should be. If the students are to be successful in the future, they will need those skills in everyday life. We should have a resource class for students with IEP’s and self-determination skills should be the focus.”
- “Most definitely. Each student should be aware of their disability and what they need to be successful. They will not always have someone there to fight for those rights.”

ADMIN 2 <65% Should Self Determination be taught in school and to what extent

- “Students must learn self-advocacy skills so they can ensure their voices are heard and respected and to help them avoid being taken advantage of by friends, family as well as strangers.”
- “ABSOLUTELY! Too many students are focused on what others can do for them and we as a society have contributed to that notion. Students are not held accountable.”
- “Yes, students need to be taught skills for being resilient and having grit.”
- “Yes, it is vital for students, especially for those with disabilities, to receive instruction to increase their confidence, employability, and self-advocacy.”

Frontline 2 < 65% Should Self Determination be taught in school and to what extent

- “I think it should probably be included on at least a weekly or biweekly basis and directed mostly toward students who are in the resources setting.”
- “Yes, to as far a level as the individual can manage. Being able to identify their disability and convey that to an employer is at a minimum.”
- “Yes, it should be a core content area for students in high school but especially in transition years”
- “Yes, elective courses for those not on alternative assessment should focus on daily functional skills needed for optimal independence.”
- “I believe that each student with or without a disability should have a required course on self-determination.”

How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?

One ADMIN 1 mentioned this very question was a focused indicator as a part of the district transition assessment. They have added mentor programs to goal set and plan future activities. The mentor also helps to teach dealing with failure/frustration/struggles and working through life situations. The members mention connecting parents to offices of disability at the university level to work on job placement and skill attainment and the further development of this type of curriculum to benefit the students.

ADMIN 2 mentions that students participate in their ARC meetings, saying that many develop PowerPoint presentations for their ARCs specific to their plans and desires for transition and plans for graduation, work, post-secondary education. They also said starting in the sixth and seventh grade they create interest inventories and begin to hold the students more responsible for their transition outcomes. The special education staff continues to meet with students to go over information needed to foster the interest going on into high school. Then the information is brought into ARC meetings and the interests are covered and discussed in detail.

FRONTLINE 1 and FRONTLINE 2 each had members say they were unaware of what their district did to foster self-determination. But several mentioned students are involved in the annual meetings. With several students participating in the Community Work Transition Program where they work on goal setting and completing corresponding activities. One FRONTLINE 2 mentions an activity they do that has the

student answer the question, “What do you want to do after high school?” Then the teacher outlines the skills needed and the obstacles they may face in reaching that goal. If the students struggle to give an answer, guidance is provided. The object is to have the student make choices. The information is communicated with the parent so that everyone can all be on the same page.

ADMIN 1 >65%How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?

- “We are working on this. We have a focused indicator on this item that is a part of our transition assessments, we have established a mentoring program which also requires students to goal set and plan activities to meet their goals, the mentoring assists students with dealing with failure/frustration/struggles and working through these items, career pathways are being established that go beyond our school walls to offer students opportunities to provide their say in the post-secondary experiences and planning”
- “Our district connects parents with the office of disabilities on a university campus as well as local businesses who participate with us in hiring students with special needs. Our district will need to look further into a self-determination curriculum as I believe that would be beneficial to our students.”
- “Interest inventories”

FRONTLINE 1 >65%How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?

- “Quartey contact throughout the year”
- “We are a “Leader in Me’ school, so our student body has a say in educational opportunities.”
- “Informal surveys and interviews are initiated and completed by individual teachers. These teachers may also elicit information from parents, if needed (e.g., for non-verbal or low-verbal students).”
- “Not aware of any”
- “Each student is asked to attend the annual meetings, but they do not really understand the process. Again, teachers are checking boxes for KDE and districts. While trying to do what really needs to be done for the students.”

ADMIN 2 <65% How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?

- “Students take interest surveys, participate in their ARC meetings, many develop PowerPoint presentations for their ARCs specific to their plans and desires for transition and plans for graduation, work, post-secondary education etc. Students are encouraged to be actively engaged in their ARCs and program planning.”
- “We begin with interest inventories (MISS DETAILED ILPs) 6th and 7th grade. We then begin to hold the students more responsible for their outcomes. The spec. ed staff meets with students to go over information needed to foster the interest. Then in ARC meetings the interests are covered and discussed in detail.”
- “We engage our students in opportunities that expose them to various job opportunities as well as continued education opportunities.”

FRONTLINE 2 <65% How does your district foster self determination to participate in their post school planning?

- “Students are invited to participate in their IEP development starting at age 14. I think there is also some resilience training that takes place as a part of the youth service center.”
- “They require our students to attend their ARC meetings as directed by law.”
- “I am unaware of activities of students on alternate assessments. However, for those students on a general education curriculum other than setting a post-secondary goal as a part of their IEP there are not many activities to foster self-determination. A few students participate in the CWTP where they work on some goal setting and complete corresponding activities.”
- “I can’t speak for our district, only my program. One of the first questions I ask my students is “What do you want to do after high school”? I then outline the skills needed and the obstacles they may face in reaching that goal. If they can’t give me an answer, I try to guide them through. I want them to make the choices. I typically communicate this with the parent so that we can all be on the same page.”

DESTINY: Describe your vision and the progress you envision for your district's future transition programming. What do you imagine the most exceptional program to look like? What's your role/contribution toward this goal?

"Nothing in education is perfect, but we all have to be able to envision what a perfect transition program would look like. Meeting the needs of ALL our students is the ultimate goal. We just need to draw the map to get there, together."

-ADMIN 1

This question was presented at the beginning of the survey and it added a reinforcement to the positive core set toward transition. I wanted to present it toward the end of my findings to cast the vision each one of these participants had for transition and the future of students in their district. Each team member had a very student centered approach. Each team member mentioned goal setting and finding a career path early in their grade level, setting and managing an action plan to accomplish those goals. An ADMIN 1 member mentioned their school district is in the process of developing programs to support all students with regards to career planning and pathways. They want to keep their employment transition program in place with the hope to be able to expand the pre-ets program to include more students. Another envisions partnering with area businesses in order to expand opportunities. While also partnering with students and parents in order to ensure that students are placed in areas of interest as well as skill level. An ADMIN 2 responded their vision would be to allow every student the opportunity to learn skills and find employment that would lead to maximizing their level of independence and give them the opportunity to be contributors to society and valued members to their communities and families. While another looks to create programs not centered around traditional classes that allow

students to struggle and gain skills, they will not have use for later in life. FRONTLINE 1 team members along the same line want to create a working goal. One that they want to achieve, and the family of the student believes in and supports. Being positive that this is what they truly want to do when they leave school. FRONTLINE 2 members continue the vision by involving community members in the direct instruction and employment of their students. They want to involve family and give the student as many supports in life as possible. The member states that by having a complete, targeted, and individualized plan that the students, community businesses and families have committed to, that these service providers will be more inclined to work with an already functioning plan.

ADMIN 1 >65% VISION

- “I envision that our transition programming would meet the needs of all children in our district, with and without disabilities. Even students without disabilities require assistance with finding their path, determining their goal and setting the right course to reach their goal into action. An exceptional program would have the ability to give all students support with transition exploration and planning. With regards to the students with disabilities population, I envision that students with any form of disability would begin pre-ets work in middle school, no later than their 8th grade year. This year would be full of career exploration as well as career pathway exploration. As students roll into 9th grade, they would continue with planned pre-ets programming as well as have a defined career pathway with mentoring along the way to ensure this pathway is working for them. Students with moderate-severe disabilities will need to be targeted for more

intensive career exploration, planning, placement and training. I believe our employment transition program is a wonderful program that can produce amazing outcomes for students; however, it is not always chosen as a program option due to its intensity. I believe this program is greatly needed for many students with more severe disabilities in particular. Our school district is in the process of developing programs to support all students with regards to career planning and pathways, opening amazing opportunities for all children. We will continue to keep our employment transition program in place as well. I hope that we will be able to expand our pre-ets program to include more children and be more specifically designed for children. The key to all of these programs is that they interconnect and work together to support the transition programming needs of all children.“

- “ As we look to next school year, I know that we will have 2 students who will need to begin their work experience out in the community. I envision partnering with area businesses in order to determine availability. I also envision partnering with students and parents in order to ensure that students are placed in areas of interest as well as skill. The most exceptional programming would be to enable our students to perform their jobs as independently as possible. I know that support will need to be in place to ensure that each student is successful, however, I would also like to make sure that we are able to pull back on support to allow students to reach their full potential. This would probably not look very different from what we currently do as this has always been our program. My role in this would be to work with area businesses, parents,

teachers, students, as well as job placement coordinators to ensure a successful transition after high school.”

FRONTLINE 1 >65% Vision

- “I envision each exceptional student to have a working goal. Not one that is just on paper to check off for the state to have. One that they want to achieve. Stating this is what I truly want to do when I leave school. Whatever that goal may be, start on jobs their sophomore year working toward achieving that goal. It may take some digging for the educators. Such as.... inviting the family in or going to their house to see if this goal is something they think may be attainable. Because if the family is not willing to support the goal, the school may have to change their support. (maybe help students with transportation, independent living,). Not going against the wishes of the family, but if they are not able to support the young man or woman's dream, it is our responsibility in setting them up for success. Once the goal has been established and all is on board. The work should start daily during school.”

ADMIN 2 <65% Vision

- “My vision as a director was to provide the resources and support that would allow every student the opportunity to learn skills and find employment that would lead to maximizing their level of independence and give them the opportunity to be contributors to society and valued members to their communities and families. I believed every student to the best of their abilities needed to develop strong advocacy skills to express their wants, needs, opinions, and desires.”

- “I look to the future to focus on getting students through programs, not "traditional" classes. Students have to struggle to get through Alg 2 or other rigorous classes that they will not use. I am a part of our district discussions and decisions about classes and programs. Very fortunate to have a superintendent who values ALL opinions.”

FRONTLINE 2<65% Vision

- “I am still working on making this program what I envision it to be. I have had this role for 3.5 years and basically built it from scratch. My biggest challenge is getting my community involved with my students. I have started to reach out to the Chamber of Commerce, and they share the importance of my program with the board. Currently I only have a handful of employers that will allow me to bring my students out. My goal is to have a large selection of businesses willing to allow them to learn about their work. It will be given that each school year, I will have at least one student placed there. I would like paperwork to begin before they enter high school. I spend much of my time tracking down paperwork. I need the process to be more streamlined so that each business, parent, teacher and most importantly the student has a better understanding of what transition looks like.”
- “Our approach has to be a multi prong approach, as the school is only one of a three legged approach. The other two are community and family support. We have developed a direct line to our community partners to better understand what their specific needs are and use those needs to develop our transition program in four identified areas of employment for our students.

We are targeting what our community currently offers our students in the area of employment and have generalized those opportunities to four generalized areas of development. We are developing those skills with real time opportunities within the school environment, honing student's skills, preparing them to generalize those skills with community opportunities that will target student interests. We work closely with placing students in positions that will be easily maintained by the families upon transition. This is a new approach to transition due to the fact that our community service providers have failed to come alongside our students and continue to service what had been put in place. By having a complete, targeted, and individualized plan that the students, community businesses and families have committed to, our hope is that these service providers will be more inclined to work with an already functioning plan.”

Summary of Findings

Positive Core and Transition

Participants’ responses indicated that multiple transition strategies were regularly implemented in the districts participating in this study. A variety of programs, curriculum and agencies were being introduced to students with disabilities on a yearly basis according to interviewees. Multiple stories of former students and their post school success was shared by participants and that set the positive core for this AI research study. The three questions grouped in the transition category that were presented to participants asked about transition tools, grade year they thought would be most beneficial for transition preparation for students and strategies and support

provided by the Kentucky Department of Education. The dialogue produced from the team members showed plenty of resources and diversity of transition tools being used by the district. As far as grade year when transition should be introduced there was a wide range of views presented by teams. The majority of opinions centered around high school especially by the FRONTLINE 1 members, but I was surprised by the mention of preschool and elementary by more than a few participants. When the support and services provided by KDE was presented to the team members it drew quite a few responses. Answers ranged from helpful, with the variety of programs and service opportunities to strengthen professional development and initiatives by the state. To answers that seemed angry or agitated, either about the amount of extra work expected from KDE or their expectations falling well beyond reality of what can be accomplished for students. Finally, respondents did offer ideas and techniques that answered the research question geared toward transition, and supplied understanding that transition focus is taking place and being addressed by all the districts that responded to my survey.

Youth One Year Out (YOYO) Survey

Does the use of the YOYO survey guide the district's transition policy concerning curriculum and other programs concerning students with disabilities as they prepare for post school outcomes? The series of four questions, all of which, gives insight into the district use of the YOYO data. Each Team member was asked the importance of a High student participation rate in the follow up YOYO survey. Also, Has the district utilized the data from the YOYO to shape policy and how? Lastly, what procedures go into helping the district maintain or improve the recommended 65%

student participation rate and what do they think the most important steps are to improving that rate going forward. All interviewees spoke of the necessity of having high participation rates in order to improve data accuracy to give reliability in current transition policy. They spoke about the ways the district uses, or doesn't use in some cases, the YOYO data to shape policy. The teams spoke about the process of contacting former students and ways to maintain or increase the participation rate. They spoke of building relationships with students before the exit school, and making sure current contact info was collected during the ARC meeting. Make sure the student and family are aware of the expectation, process, and importance of the survey and why they need to participate. The teams finished by speaking about what steps they would like to see their district take to encourage student participation on the Youth One Year out survey. They mentioned introducing the process to the students early in high school. Make sure the process is known by all involved, from the student to the family. Assign mentors to build relationships and make sure to meet regularly to answer any questions and review the process.

Evidence Based Practices

Team members were asked to state what EBP were currently being used in their district to help with transition of students with disabilities. Participants mentioned self-determination (SD) in quite a few instances, among other EVP's, but SD led to the next two questions in the series. The interviewees were asked if self-determination should be taught and the grade it should be introduced. They focused on the need for self-determination, but many disagreed on what year this should begin. Participants stated that the teaching of SD was vital to prepare students for post school life. Lastly, they

were asked how their district was promoting Self Determination and actively involving their students in post school planning activities. Many suggestions were given from leading meetings to hands on work experience.

Team Member Vision

During interviews, participants were asked to describe the vision and progress of their district's transition program in the future. Many interviewees talked about a student centered approach. The involvement of the students family and finding a supportive community to introduce and job place before the student exits. Much talk was given to the addition of multi agencies and programs that challenge the student while preparing them for the future. Additionally, participants discovered ways that they personally could be part of building a perfect transition program for ALL students. To add validity participants were divided into four teams. The teams were then categorized into team one or team two, depending on the district three year average of student participation rate on the YOYO survey. The answers to the survey questions will be coded and will be key in providing a source for comparison, and will be analyzed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this appreciative inquiry qualitative study was to identify how Kentucky school districts shape their transition policy and procedures for students with disabilities exiting to improve post school outcomes. This chapter includes an interpretation of key findings related to the literature related to and surrounding transition strategies and its methods and implementation between districts above or below the UKHDI recommended 65% student participation rate on the YOYO survey. Also included is an examination of the evidence based practices, particularly self-determination, the theoretical and practical implications for transition strategies to improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

This chapter will address the following research questions:

1. What transition policies are currently in use for districts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP) to transition aged (14 years old to 21 years old) students with disabilities?
2. Are districts using the KY Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey to guide policy for successful post school outcome student participation?
3. Are districts with improved YOYO survey participation percentages implementing Self-determination, an evidenced-based practice (EBP), to improve participation rates among exiting students with disabilities?

Through the use of semi-structured, in-depth survey interviews, I examined the knowledge and use of transition policies and practices of seventeen special education administrators and special education teachers. Participants represented nine different

school districts from the Central Kentucky Region. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to increase the probability that their experiences would inform this study. Participants were then interviewed online via email digital communication, and all interviews were saved and transcribed.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study examined the experiences and knowledge of administrators, special education teachers and transition staff regarding the policy and procedures concerning transition strategies around their respective school districts. The study compared districts, above and below the 65% in a three year average of student participation rate on the YOYO survey, to see if discrepancies exist between administration and frontline staff. All participants involved in this research were part of the transition practice and procedures and utilized it in their districts. Additionally, all participants found the process of transition to be positive and beneficial to increase the likelihood of post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Interviewees' recollections toward their experiences with the policies, guiding procedures, and perceived student outcomes related to transition and post school life formed the context for analyzing the responses given by each.

Transition

Transition Tools

Despite a rich selection of resources and external organizations to assist with transition strategies at the federal and state level there are no set guidelines for school districts on how and what to use in the area of transition resources. The first research question looked at transition in general for students with disabilities in school districts

by asking, What transition policies are currently in use for districts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP) to transition aged (14 years old to 21 years old) students with disabilities? The questions in the focus group survey gathered what tools and resources are being implemented for transition, what grade level participants thought would be best to begin the transition process and what support, if any, they received from the Kentucky Department of Education. It was not surprising that all four teams gave plenty of examples for transition tools and support to help students since it is a state and federal mandate starting at the age of 14 years old for students with an IEP in public school. ADMIN and FRONTLINE team members discussed several aspects of transition planning features in their districts, and many were similar as being utilized for students' lives after exiting. Some of those tools mentioned mirrored studies by Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) and Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) showing the positive impact of post school outcomes by students with disabilities. The highlighted transition tools by each of the four teams in the study listed inclusion of community living skills and experiences, regular education offerings, connecting families with adult service agencies, participation in paid work experience in the community and career and college preparation and exploration activities.

Grade Level

When looking at results from the survey question concerning what grade level would be best to start transition planning there was a wide variety of answers. The majority of responses from ADMIN 1 and ADMIN 2 stated upper two grades of middle school while FRONTLINE 1 teams said "high school" would be best and does align with compliance of state and federal law starting at age 14 years old in the state of

Kentucky. Interesting though, the FRONTLINE 2 team Elementary and Preschool was suggested which does align with studies from Papay, C., Unger, D. D., Williams-Diehm, K., & Mitchell, V. in (2015) and the *TEACHING Exceptional Children Journal*. The study went on to say that developing self-determination and career awareness is a lifelong process that should begin in the primary grades. Building relationships with families and educating them about the transition planning process that will take place in the later grades are both important aspects of the elementary special education teacher's role.

Interviewees in the third focus group question in the transition category, showed different perceptions between ADMIN and FRONTLINE on teams 1 and 2. The question asked what strategies and support the Kentucky Education Department provided the district in the area of transition. Both ADMIN teams listed several benefits that KDE provided by regional cooperatives such as, providing compliance help with record reviews, student conferences, and other resource direction on the KDE web page. In contrast, the FRONTLINE teams both mention negatives concerning KDE. There was uncertainty among the teams about what KDE provided to their districts. They viewed the organization as a hindrance and a way that includes more work when they are involved. These responses stand in stark contrast to studies by McMahan & Baer, 2001, which found contact with agencies, and other professionals involved in the transition planning process best practice occurring in a specific school district. There was a real sense of uncertainty and confusion between FRONTLINE 1 and FRONTLINE 2 teams on what the Kentucky Department of Education provides in support and connection to other agencies for their school district.

Youth One Year Out

The second research question addressed if districts were using the KY Youth One Year Out (YOYO) survey data to guide policy for successful post school outcome student participation? The focus group survey categorized four questions:

- *Importance of a high student participation rate on the YOYO survey.* All four teams gave similar specific reasons why a high student participation rate was a benefit when receiving yearly YOYO data. The teams agreed that high student participation sets a baseline for their programs and lets them see what transition practices are working and which ones might need realignment aligning with Christopher Roberts and Data Entry Outsourced, a global innovator in data entry (2019). The teams also said it was a way to assess how the district was doing and remain student centered to see how former students are doing post school.
- *Does your district utilize the YOYO data to shape transition policy?* There were some discrepancies between teams. In the districts representing the above 65% student participation rate ADMIN 1 stated that their district does use the YOYO data to shape their transition policy while FRONTLINE 1 admitted to very little communication from administration and that they were uncertain about if they did. The under 65% student response rate teams, ADMIN 2 stated their district did not use the data while FRONTLINE 2 was uncertain with no communication if they did. Even though the teams listed the benefits of high student participation rates and the benefits of helping assess the transition programs, ADMIN 2 did not use the YOYO data in their district nor communicate it to the FRONTLINE 2 personnel.

- *List district procedures to obtain the 65% student participation rate.* The team 1's of ADMIN and FRONTLINE list relationship building with the students and their families prior to exiting as a benefit in helping maintain contact, which compares with research from other studies Powell, N. W., & Marshall, A. (2011) and Marshall A, Powell N, Pierce D, Nolan R, Fehringer E. (2012) showing how building relationships produce positive results in behavior and communication. Another important concept mentioned by ADMIN 1 and FRONTLINE 1 teams is explaining the process to the students and their families to understand the process of how the YOYO survey will be conducted and why it's important to process. The ADMIN 1 and FRONTLINE 1 teams with student response averages above 65% have chosen to focus on and promote the usefulness of the YOYO data and obtaining significant numbers to validate their results to guide their policies. This compares to a study by Wehmyer (2015), stating that only when administrators bring initiatives to the forefront does it become priority and important for completion. Not surprising, ADMIN 2 and FRONTLINE 2 do not prioritize the collection of student data and have minimal ways to contact former students, only starting the process after the student has exited the program.
- *What are some steps to take to increase student participation on the YOYO survey?* Even though ADMIN 2 and FRONTLINE 2 didn't use the data to shape policy or prioritize the process to obtain accurate contact information from former students. It was refreshing to see from their answers on this question that they understand how to improve their student participation. All four teams listed making sure the students and families understand the process and importance of

the YOYO survey. Increase expectations of post school achievements and the participation and importance of completing the YOYO survey by the student, consistent procedures and steps in what the process will be leading up to the survey, update contact information often with the assigned contact person. Finally, build relationships by providing mentors or assigning a staff member to check in periodically with the student and make the process meaningful for the student for their future. Research from (Deci & Ryan, 2008) shows that external motivation and rewards people tend to adopt extrinsic goals that will lead to external indicators of worth. Building relationships also coincides with Brendtro et al., 2006 in fulfilling a self-worth need of belonging.

Evidence Based Practice

The third research question asked: *Are districts with improved YOYO survey participation percentages implementing Self-determination, an evidenced-based practice (EBP), to improve participation rates among exiting students with disabilities?*

The three questions on the focus group survey categorized as Evidence Based Practice sought information on if self-determination should be taught as a transition curriculum, what EBP were currently being taught in their district and finally how does their district foster self-determination in students to participate in planning their future?

All four teams agreed that self-determination is “vital” and “critical” in the development of goal setting, and to have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults which is similar to research on self-determination Denney & Daviso, (2012) and Di Maggio (2020). Self-determination was listed as an EBP by all four teams as an identified practice used in their transition policy. The

discrepancy appears when each team listed the ways their district involved self-determination into their students curriculum. While ADMIN 1 and FRONTLINE 1 teams mentioned multiple student centered programs that were previously reinforced from the literature review (Mcmahan & Baer, 2001)(Denney & Daviso, 2012). They listed goal setting, post school planning, interest surveys, active participants in the ARC meetings, parent involvement, community activities allowing student career exploration and peer mentoring. Participants in ADMIN 2 several of the same ways self-determination practices are being used in their district but FRONTLINE 2 team members were more uncertain of what the district does and could only mention that the students are invited to the ARC meetings. Since self-determination was listed as a practice utilized and observations couldn't be made about how or if it was implemented by each of the teams, it cannot be confirmed that teaching self-determination alone can lead to an increase in student participation of the YOYO survey. Literature reinforces that young adults with disabilities are likely to be influenced by multiple factors that interact in complex ways and studies do stand in contradiction of previous EBP findings showing a student's self-determination was not associated with post-high school employment (Wehman et al., 2015). Thus, adding to academic debate and the need to look into more research.

Recommendations

Transition

- ***Align the Transition Tools and Strategies and Collaborate with other Districts and Agencies***

School districts are expected to support the student's movement from education programs to post-school activities, including post-secondary, continuing and adult education opportunities, adult services, employment and community participation, and independent living. Participants in this study listed numerous transition tools that teachers in their district utilize to teach transition strategies. Since education programs must provide evaluation of, and instruction in, these activities that are based on the individual student's strengths, needs, interests and preferences (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). There would be an added benefit in aligning the transition tools used by each district, based on EBP, successful post school outcomes and supported YOYO survey data. Literature shows that school districts along with local vocational rehabilitation agencies need to demonstrate that they are using evidenced practices and empirically supported interventions to improve the effectiveness of school transition plans and vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices (Tansy, Bezyak, Chang, Leahy, and Lui, 2014). Participants did mention the inclusion of other agencies but the need to include them more often and earlier in the students career would be an added benefit. Collaboration and developing a common language in the area of transition that all can understand and interpret among districts needs to be a focus.

- **Professional Development and Training for ADMIN and FRONTLINE**

Not having the benefit of observing in person, due to Covid 19 restrictions, what districts and their transition teams were implementing first hand in person was difficult in making this recommendation. With participants on teams 1 and 2 mentioning a wide range of transition tools and strategies so similar to each other but each district having

drastically different outcomes as far as YOYO student participation rates indicated training is needed. Also, with the low number of post school outcomes for students with disabilities affecting everyone this recommendation should not be a surprise. In studies, educators often indicated that they lacked the specific training, methods, materials, and instructional strategies that can enhance instruction (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). Plus, with legislative budgets decreasing the funding amount of professional development provided to school districts extra attention should be paid to the training and professional development of their transition staff. Literature reinforces the enhanced transition service delivery, training and technical assistance and the need to expand beyond compliance and procedural issues to encompass teaming skills and competencies needed by transition professionals (McMahon & Baer, 2001).

- ***Committed and Visible Mission Statement from Transition Team***

Administrators need to be committed to improving transition post school outcomes for students with disabilities. This can only be accomplished by making sure everyone is on board with the mission that's set before them. The leadership styles among school administrators played a significant role in teachers' motivation and wellbeing (Eyal & Roth, 2010). Educators in leadership roles should model expectations and value it in their teachers as well as their students. Administrators should help teachers to find transition resources and enhance their skills for implementation. All stakeholders must be informed, and direct non wavering steps need to be established on what the procedures are going to be from early elementary all the way to exiting from the secondary. Implementation transition teams need to be established at every grade level and a vision clearly laid. Literature says that time and

resources are needed to do the work, and efforts are to be recognized, regarded, and publicly celebrated (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001, pp. 130- 131).

YOYO

- *Maximize all data*

As mentioned earlier in chapter 2, the YOYO was created as an effort to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, schools must report annually on the number of students who have been competitively employed or enrolled in postsecondary education one year after graduating from high school (IDEIA, 2004). The purpose of the YOYO survey is to determine the percent of students identified with disabilities who exited high school and were:

- 1) Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school;
- 2) Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school;
- 3) Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school” (KYPSO).

Participants mentioned the importance of what the YOYO data could be used for and how it could help the district shape the effectiveness of their transition programs for students. Since this is a federal requirement for school districts to complete each year and participants mentioned the added benefits it provides for transition programs, every district should maximize the outcome to help make the results meaningful and reliable. This can be completed by increasing the student participation rate every year for former students.

Emphasize the YOYO with Staff and Students

The ADMIN 1 districts made the YOYO a focus for their districts. They emphasize the importance of maintaining a high percentage rate and relay that importance of accurate data to their staff. The biggest predictor for student participation in completing the YOYO survey was the students prior experience with the process and familiarity with the person assigned to administer the test and what to expect. ADMIN 1 participants in the above 65% student participation rate admitted they used the YOYO data to shape their transition programs and assessed the success of each program based on former students' experience. ADMIN 1 and FRONTLINE 1 team members mentioned how consistent communication with family members, connecting often with students and assigning a mentoring contact person were all important steps to create accountability for students to participate. Educators need to increase their efforts to familiarize students and their families about the YOYO survey and the process involved as early in the students educational track as possible. Because research shows that introducing the skills earlier in the educational process is more effective than deferring them until high school (Martin et al., 2013). Allow mentors to be as proactive in connecting students with the services needed to support their goals. Successful transition into adult life requires collaboration between schools and families for the dream to work.

Evidence Based Practices

Make Students Active Participants

Evidence shows that schools and adult support provider organizations too often do not implement evidence-based practices to promote self-determination to improve integrated employment outcomes (Shogren et al., 2018). Participants on all four teams

mentioned the importance of teaching self-determination calling it critical and vital but studies indicate that special education teachers of students with disabilities but did not place significant emphasis in curricular planning, teaching practices, IEP development, or transition planning (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998). Successful transition is more complicated than just having a transition component in an IEP at the age of 16. It also includes continuity of special education services, coordination of interagency collaboration, and capacity of educators to teach students with disabilities using evidence-based transition practices (Chang, 2018). FRONTLINE 2 team members mentioned that the only time a student is actively engaged in decision making is their involvement in the ARC. Literature has shown that even though students and families were being invited to the IEP meeting in which transition was discussed (compliance), they were not leading the meetings. Student-led IEP meetings or person-centered planning (best practice) did not seem to be utilized often (McMahon & Baer, 2001).

Districts have to go beyond just a compliant IEP to create real opportunities of goal setting and positive student growth toward transition. Chapter 2 mentions how in *The Journal for Vocational Rehabilitation* (2011), researchers, Test and Grossi found that even having a compliant transitional Individual Education Plan, may or may not correlate to what is actually occurring in practice or the provisions of transitions services. Enabling people with disabilities to make choices and work toward goals will enable supports and services to be matched to wishes, interests, and capabilities. (Shogren, 2018). Active student engagement in the transition planning process is encouraged by IDEA 2004, and has been identified as a meaningful, evidence-based

way for students to develop their own self-determination (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). ADMIN and FRONTLINE Team members were asked to present their visions of what a successful transition program would look like for the future of their district. They listed several key elements that promoted active student participants in their future planning. Some of the highlighted mentions for transition from the teams include; student centered, programs that challenge students to take initiative, school wide investment from teachers, job placement, transition prep in early grades, parent involvement and collaboration with higher education and other resource agencies. These goals coincide with some of the following predictors of success in adulthood from the literature;

- goal-setting
- problem solving
- decision making
- choice making
- self-advocacy (Shogren et al., 2018)

Limitations

The findings of this study should be considered while noting some limitations. Anticipated limitations were associated with the appreciative inquiry approach, as the data collected in this research relied entirely on participants' perceptions of their use and knowledge of their districts transition strategies. In person interviews were not performed, and there was no verification of interviewees' transition strategy and procedures used with students. Furthermore, interactions with participants were limited to interviews conducted entirely via email.

As interviews were received, unforeseen limiting factors emerged. The coding of themes could be misinterpreted from their intended meaning. However, an increased sample size in administration and frontline participants might have resulted in additional insights regarding the use of transition strategies concerning students with disabilities. During the process of coding surveys, no questions about the level of training or professional development concerning the YOYO or Evidence Based practice received by participants were asked. This background information could have provided a clearer understanding of participant knowledge and use of these transition practices, and could have informed this study, as well as future research on this topic. Finally, all participants were currently working in the Central Kentucky region. This geographic homogeneity may have produced a record of limited viewpoints and lived experiences from participant responses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Participants in this study were largely unaware of other district's transition policy and procedures concerning transition strategies and many reflected upon their own practice and experience. This development reflected the lack of collaboration and professional development related to the transition process for students with disabilities between districts, and the education and training concerning the professionals in special education. This study was informed by the literature examining transition strategies, evidence-based practices and self-determination in special education at various levels of education. Transition strategies were seen as a necessary part of education by participants, but practice and procedures can always be elevated as educational application and documentation of standards could be augmented by further research.

An expanded survey, with a larger sample size, of transition strategies as used by different grade levels might provide a more grade specific look at procedures practiced in classrooms. When conditions allow, investigations that involve observations with participant interviews could provide a more accurate accounting of transition methods and bring to light any discrepancies between participants' perception and observed practices. Additionally, the following suggestions for future research could expand the academic literature examining transition strategies and practice in classrooms:

1. Participants in this study all indicated that districts used transition strategies with their students. However, no participants were asked to detail the transition training that the state or school system has provided to them. Funding has been drastically cut for many years concerning professional development training for teachers at the state level for every school system. Further investigation into the amount of training received by special education teachers and staff, in the area of transition, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its use in curriculum.
2. The literature review mentioned putting students at the center of the decision making and goal setting (Denney & Daviso, 2012) as best practice in transition. Creating programs where career awareness and skill attainment could be practiced in a controlled real world environment before they leave school. It would be beneficial to apply a longitudinal study to see if students with low incidence disabilities improve their post school outcomes over time.

3. The disruption of traditional educational procedures by the COVID-19 pandemic influenced participant responses, and was noted in this study. The lasting effects on special education teachers is currently unknown, but more investigation is warranted. Many interviewees had changed their approach to teaching transition as a result of teaching in virtual settings, and a longitudinal study could examine the lasting effects of those changes. Research could document and analyze the evolution of methods concerning transition and the teaching of EBP during online instruction. Further study could also detail which methods adopted during virtual instruction continue to be used by teachers, and which are discarded. Research could focus on the impact it had on students with multiple disabilities and how it affects teaching style once the school personnel return to in-person settings in a post-pandemic learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study showed the need for districts to increase the use of the YOYO survey and its data to help guide school districts to increase the post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Increasing student participation is only one item in a long list of details that each district must try to solve. This study has uncovered that it takes a multifaceted team approach that must start with an administration that prioritizes, communicates and models the skills and strategies it wants the staff to teach. The staff in turn, will pass on with enthusiasm, the training and knowledge to create a transition program that will help all students gain a positive post school experience. Transition strategies will need to continue to be a focus of administrators and teachers

as the post Covid 19 world continues to evolve. Districts need to continue to expand and review studies involving multiple transition strategies, EBP's such as self-advocacy, self-determination, and others. While also continuing the expansion of the education community to involve their own community and other interagency organizations to connect students with disabilities with that increases the possibility of post school success. Special education administrators must organize and bolster the need for increased student participation on the YOYO survey. This increase will add reliability and validity to their transition program and let them assess what is or isn't working. The results will also help to establish action plan trainings to better utilize the following;

- a. Are the district's transition activities working for students with disabilities as they exit high school?
- b. Are self-determination/ causal agency theories being used as EBP to increase student participation response rates on the YOYO survey?
- b. Increase confidence and reliability in the YOYO results to shape transition policy within the district.
- c. Increase knowledge the stakeholders have of YOYO area results?
- d. What EBP can be implemented by the district to increase student participation completing the YOYO survey?

By duplicating this study, school districts will be able to increase the benefit and usefulness of the YOYO survey and aid other districts in implementing procedures to improve post school outcomes among its population of students with disabilities. Results from this study has led to the review of transition policy in the Madison County School district concerning;

- The assignment of a point person to collaborate the findings of the YOYO data to another team leads around the district
- Evaluation and alignment of district EBP.
- Exploring technology and protocol to obtain up to date contact information of families.
- Enlist networks between school districts in how they use the YOYO data
- Developing an action plan to create a guidebook that communicates the district mission for transition from early education to the exit into post school life with the parents and community. It will detail how the school district plans to increase the positive post school outcomes for all of the students with disabilities in its educational system.

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Appendices

Appendix A:
IRB Application

Eastern Kentucky University Institutional Review Board Form R: Protocol Revision Request

1. **IRB Protocol Number:** 3875

2. **Title of Study:**

3. **Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor:**

Principal Investigator Name: Jerry Lynn Petrey

Primary Faculty Advisor (required if principal investigator is a student): Dr Ann Burns

4. **Initial Review Level and Approval Date:** Expedited Review Full Review Limited Review (Exemption)

Approval Date: April 17th 2021

5. **Most Recent Review Type and Approval Date:** Initial Review Revision Review Continuing Review

Approval Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

6. **What is the current status of your study?**

Study is active and subjects continue to be enrolled

Study is closed to subject enrollment, but subjects are still participating in the study

Subject participation is complete, but study is still open for follow-up

Subject participation is complete, but study is still open for data analysis

7. **To date, how many subjects have been enrolled in the study?** 0

8. **Have any of the enrolled subjects withdrawn from the study?**

No Yes (explain below and include the number of subjects who have withdrawn)

[Click here to enter text.](#)

9. **Have there been any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others?**

No Yes (explain in detail below)

[Click here to enter text.](#)

10. **Please provide a summary of your research protocol and activities that have been completed to date.**

Recruiting participants

11. **Please provide a summary of any new information relevant to human subjects, including risks associated with the study**

[Click here to enter text.](#)

12. **Type(s) of Revision Requested (check all that apply):**

Revision(s) to the study's procedures

Extension of study's end date through: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

Revision(s) to recruitment materials

Revision(s) to consent, assent, and/or parent/guardian permission form(s)

Revision(s) to data collection instrument(s)

Revision to the number of subjects to be recruited: [Click here to enter new number.](#)

Revision to study personnel to add the following individual(s):

▪ [Click here to enter text and type one name per line.](#)

Attach CITI training documentation for each individual.

Other revision (explain): add Dr Ann Burns as committee Chair

Appendix B

Email Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Jerry Lynn Petrey, and I am currently enrolled in the Ed.D program in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at Eastern Kentucky University. I am in the process of writing my dissertation, and I invite you to participate in a research study entitled “Appreciative Inquiry: Transition Strategies for Students with Disabilities”. The purpose of the study is to examine how school districts use different transition strategies to promote successful post school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and would involve agreeing to be interviewed via online video conference or email survey. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. Your responses will remain confidential and in any report will be anonymous. Data from this research will be kept under lock and key and reported only as a collective combined total. No one other than the researcher will know your individual responses.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please respond to this email so that we can set up a time for an interview. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact me at (859) 582-3733 or Jerry_petrey@mymail.eku.edu

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jerry Lynn Petrey

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Examining Appreciative Inquiry: Transition Strategies for Students with Disabilities

Key Information

You are being invited to participate in a research study examining transition strategies used by school districts that focus on students with disabilities and positive post school outcomes. This document includes important information you should know about the study. Before providing your consent to participate, please read this entire document and ask any questions you have.

Do I have to participate?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you decide to participate, you will be one of about 15 people in the study.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to examine the transition strategies school districts use in guiding policy and practices toward the post school success of students with disabilities. Educators participating in this research will be licensed Kentucky special education teachers or administrators currently working in a school district. Participants will have at least three years of relevant teaching experience and will have spent time and be familiar with the IEP and transition requirements for students with disabilities. This may include ARCs, Youth One Year Out (YOYO) surveys, and Evidence Based Practices (EBP), Vocational Rehabilitation Service, and Community Work Transition Programs.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted through an interview, via online video conference or google form document. This interview will take about one hour.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked a series of interview questions that will allow you to describe the transition strategies that guide the policies and practices in the post school success for students with disabilities. Interviews will be conducted via online video conference, or google document form and will last approximately 1 hour. Questions will relate to transition strategies that promote successful post school outcomes such as but not limited to; YOYO, EBP, Self Determination, and others that may not be listed.

Additionally, you will be asked to share any artifacts used to promote EBP and any future planning your district may be thinking about to enhance the transition needs concerning students with disabilities.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm or discomfort than you would experience in everyday life. While online video conferencing or online google forms do carry an inherent risk of outside hacking, every precaution will be taken to minimize that risk. Interviews will be conducted using an official Madison County Schools Zoom account, on Madison County School networks, thereby ensuring the protection of Madison County's IT security measures, thereby reducing any technological risk.

What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

You are not likely to get any personal benefit from taking part in this study. Your participation is expected to provide benefits to others by providing a clearer picture of the transition strategies school districts use to promote the successful post school outcomes for students with disabilities.

If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

Other Important Details**Who is doing the study?**

The person in charge of this study is Lynn Petrey at Eastern Kentucky University. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Ann Burns, Dr. Norman Powell, and Dr. Abbey Poffenberger.

What will it cost me to participate?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information I give?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write up the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about this gathered information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

The study will be kept confidential just myself will know that the information you give came from you.

However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court (if applicable: or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child or are a danger to yourself or someone else). Also, I may be required to show information that identifies you for audit purposes.

I will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, I cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have terms of service and privacy policies outside of the control of the Eastern Kentucky University.

Can my taking part in the study end early?

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individual conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the University or agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of reasons.

What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?

If you believe you are hurt or get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Lynn Petrey at (859) 582-3733 immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study. These costs will be your responsibility.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the costs related to your care and treatment because of something that is done during the study will be your responsibility. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer's willingness to pay under these circumstances.

What else do I need to know?

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

I will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

Consent

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Lynn Petrey at (859) 582-3733 or jerry.petrey@madison.kyschools.us. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you can contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636.

If you would like to participate, please read the statement below, sign, and print your name.

I am at least 18 years of age, have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Appendix D
Focus Group Questions

School District:

Position:

Remember your responses will remain confidential.

DISCOVERY

- From your perspective as an educator, describe a specific memorable situation in which a student with disabilities made a successful transition to post school life based on resources the school provided.

Destiny

- Describe your vision and the progress you envision for your district's transition programming in the future. What do you imagine the most exceptional programming to look like? How is that different from your current programming? What is your role/contribution toward this goal?

Discovery

1. What are some of the district transition tools used for students with special education planning to exit high school?

Dream 2. Why is it important for a district to have a high percentage rate of student participation in the follow up Youth One Year Out survey (YOYO)?

Dream 3. What evidence based practice(s) (EBP) does your district use the most for post-secondary transition for students with a disability exiting high school?

Dream 4. Has your district utilized data obtained from the YOYO survey to help shape your transition policy? If yes, please explain in what capacity. If not, please explain the limitations of the survey.

DESIGN 5. In general, should self-determination curriculum be taught in the classroom for the future planning of a student with a disability exiting high school? If so, to what extent.

DESIGN 6. In your professional opinion, what year is the most important for a student with a disability to start preparing for transition to post school? Does your opinion mirror your district's initial focus year to begin transition activities? Please explain your reasoning

Discovery 7. What procedures does your district implement to obtain 65% student participation response rate on the YOYO survey as recommended by HDI? Is the student participation process reviewed on a yearly basis to positively impact future response rates?

DESIGN 8. Describe the positive strategies and/or supports from the Kentucky Department of Education that assist your district in the transition process for students with disabilities.

DESTINY9. Self Determination/Causal Agency Theory view people as active contributors to, or agents of, their behavior. They have high aspirations, and persevere in the face of obstacles. How does your district foster self-determination in students with disabilities to actively participate in their post school planning activities?

DESTINY 10. From your perspective, what are the most important steps a school district must take to increase student participation in the youth one year out survey?