Building Capacity in Transition Services: Moving an Educational Organization Forward

A Doctoral Thesis presented by

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Abstract

The purpose of the case study was to investigate how an educational collaborative in Massachusetts was implementing federal mandates and state policy in transition services for secondary level students with special needs. The theory of Organizational Change by Burke-Litwin informed the design and analysis of this case study. A literature review of the historical foundations of transition, organizational change in education, best practices in transition services, and personnel preparation in transition further informed this study. The primary research question for this case study was, how are four secondary level special education sites within one educational organization adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming required by IDEA 2004? Six subquestions further assisted in identifying attainment of organizational and individual performance objectives as well as obstacles faced. Through document reviews, interviews, and observations, this case study identified and analyzed current practices and compared them to federal requirements, state policy, and best practices. It is evident that ongoing, targeted professional development and effective leadership are required to build capacity in transition services. In addition, clear systems, policies, and communication between and among the staff members responsible for transition documentation and programming is required. The findings from this research could potentially inform other educational organizations and school systems trying to understand the process of change as they implement transition content, practices, and policies required to align with transition mandates.

Keywords: transition services, IDEA 2004, Indicator 13, transition specialist, transition programming
Acknowledgements

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Finally, none of this would have been possible without the students, families, and staff of the educational collaborative that participated in this case study. Thank you all for allowing me to access your information and learn from you. Those that agreed to be interviewed were incredibly honest, eager, and excited to participate. Thank you for trusting me; I hope this document makes you all proud.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In 1975, the historic federal education legislation, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was passed (Yell, Rogers & Lodge, 1998). This provided for a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). The title of this legislation was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and is today known as IDEA (Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). Once a student is identified with a qualifying disability, entitled services must be provided to accommodate the disability while in public school (Martin, et al., 1996). Students with disabilities may receive specially designed instruction, accommodations, and curriculum modifications while they are in public school. Overall, students with disabilities have met with various levels of success and growth while in the confines of a classroom since legislation has included these students in public education (Will, 1986; Martin et al., 1996).

Educators and researchers began to notice the same level of success did not necessarily carry into adult life beyond public school for these students (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Looking into this, researchers began to discover high dropout rates, poor employment numbers, and less social integration for special needs students exiting public school (Kohler & Field, 2003; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993; Wagner, Newman, D’Amico, Jay, Butler-Nalin, Marder, & Cox, 1991). As a result of these and other studies, incremental changes began to appear in the language of IDEA as the topic of transition was introduced into the legislation in an attempt to mitigate the noticed poor postschool outcomes.
The 1990 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) formally introduced transition services into the law (Johnson, 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003; Morningstar, Bassett, Kochhar-Bryant, Cashman & Wehmeyer, 2012; Wagner et al., 2005; Yell et al., 1996). Planning for the transition needs of a student includes age appropriate assessment in post-secondary domains, including but not limited to employment, post-secondary education and independent living skills (IDEA, 2004). The results of these assessments are used to create post-secondary goals in each student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These goals then drive the coordinated set of activities that will facilitate the student’s ability to move from school to postschool activities (Severson, Enderle, & Hoover, 2006). Clark and Patton (2000) describe the purpose of transition planning to provide seamless movement from school to post-secondary settings (p. 1).

Subsequent reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 strengthened the language, expectations, and data collection protocols for all students with disabilities aged 16 and over (Wagner et al., 2005). Key components to this final reauthorization mandate that post-secondary IEP goals must be based upon age appropriate transition assessment and must assist the students in reaching their transition goals (H.R. Report No. GOA-12-594, 2012; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark, Zhang & Ju, 2010; Morningstar, Frey, Noonan, Clavenna-Deane, Graves, & Williams-Diehm, 2010). In addition, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA established 20 indicators that require data collection for students with disabilities, to be reported by each state to the federal Department of Education. One of these indicators, the thirteenth, relates specifically to transition language mandated to appear in the student’s IEP (www.nsttac.org). Commonly referred to as Indicator 13, this data collection point looks specifically to the IEP for the presence of transition
language, student participation, interagency collaboration, and evidence of transition planning. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts also looks for the presence of the Transition Planning Form (TPF), a mandated state form to be added to the IEP of all students 14–22, which is to be updated annually (See Appendix A). Despite these federal and state mandates, many schools have failed to change the focus of secondary special education programming to concentrate on postschool outcomes (Carter, E.W., et al, 2013; Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of organizational change at four secondary special education sites within an educational collaborative as they implemented the mandated transition practices into programmatic offerings and documentation. Two primary factors guided this research. First, elements from the external environment in the form of a federal mandate augmented by state policy require secondary level special education professionals to provide documentation of transition programming and planning for students (IDEA, 2004; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2008; DESE, 2012). The educational collaborative is therefore required to respond to these forces from the external environment to comply with the mandates.

The educational collaborative has four independent secondary level programs striving to reach the legislative and collaborative performance objectives for transition. Organizationally, the collaborative is attempting to implement transition programming while it establishes transition services and policy as an institutional priority. Individually, the four embedded secondary sites are required to improve their transition documentation through the IEP process while
implementing the institutional priority. Understanding how the individual sites are attaining the objectives and factors impacting their ability to do so are the goals of this research.

The collaborative has identified performance objectives for the organization and secondary sites. These objectives are designed to improve transition documentation and programming at the four secondary level sites and to establish transition services as an institutional priority for all students aged 14 and over. These objectives are informed by the federal statute and guidance provided from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In addition, documents and information gathered during the course of this research assisted in defining the collaborative performance objectives as programming and services at the four secondary level sites evidenced by the following: (1) age appropriate transition assessment, (2) ongoing transition related data collection, (3) activities and skill development in employment, post-secondary education preparation, and independent living, (4) a common language and common knowledge base regarding transition requirements. The individual performance objective is evidenced by secondary IEPs that are post-secondary based according to IDEA 2004 and DESE policy.

An educational collaborative in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is defined under the provisions of Chapter 40, Section E of Massachusetts General Laws. It is formed through an agreement among two or more school districts to provide special education services that would be difficult to provide locally within the public school setting. The research site is considered a representative case because it meets the definition of a collaborative set forth in Massachusetts General Laws, and the lessons learned might be informative to other institutions that serve special education students at the secondary level. Since public schools are also required to provide
transition services to secondary level special education students, this study will be relevant to educational organizations other than just collaboratives.

Educational organizations are one of the most stable, unchanging institutions in American society (Wallis & Steptoe, 2006). External forces of public opinion, policy, legislation, and litigation are the factors that will serve as a catalyst for an educational organization to seek change (Elmore, 2007; Fullan, 2007). Currently, heightened awareness pertaining to transition services has caused this research site and other secondary special education service providers to change their methodology in order to comply. Both evidence based practices and legislative mandates, have set the stage for this change in secondary special education. The intent of the changes to IDEA 2004 was designed to prepare students for positive postschool outcomes through post-secondary based IEP goals informed by age appropriate transition assessment. Despite these pressures, educational organizations, like other organizations, tend to seek stability and resist change (Burke, 2011; Szabla, 2007). Elmore (2007) describes the issues of school reform and change as a “disconnect between what education policies prescribe and what seems to happen in schools and classrooms in response to those policies” (p. 3). Therefore, a change model was chosen to frame this study. Specifically, the Burke-Litwin model was chosen due to its comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to the study of organizational change.

Specifically, this study focused on contributors to organizational change using the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change and Performance (see Figure 1). Thus the objectives of this study were (1) to describe the factors impacting the research site from the external environment through federal and state legislation, leadership, organizational mission and strategy, and organizational culture, (2) to investigate the policies and systems currently in place and how
they impact the mandates, (3) to explore current practice at the individual sites regarding task requirements and performance relating to transition mandates, (4) to probe the current motivation of those people responsible for change in transition documentation and programming, (5) to identify individual values, obstacles, and needs relating to this change, and (6) to understand the role of the work climate and culture to promote and support this change.

Research Questions

In an attempt to study the change process, the primary research question guiding this study was the following:

How are four secondary level special education sites within one educational collaborative adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming requirements set forth in IDEA 2004?

Six subquestions further guided this research:

1. How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in each site?
2. What factors impact the ability of each site within the educational collaborative to obtain the organizational performance objectives?
3. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in each site?
4. What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives?
5. How is the attainment of performance objectives reflected by the collaborative as a whole?
6. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected across sites?
Significance

Implementing the mandated transition practices to improve postschool outcomes for students with disabilities is the latest demand placed upon special educators (Kohler & Field, 2003; Mazzotti, et al., 2013). At its essence, this reform requires a paradigm shift in the ultimate purpose of secondary special education (Ianacone & Kochhar, 1996). Previous research indicates that many professionals responsible for transition practices are poorly informed and inadequately trained in this mandate (Morningstar & Clark, 2003). Research has shown that most secondary special educators entering the field are not familiar with transition legislation and practice (Morningstar & Clark, 2003). Transition planning and effective best practice represent a research-to-practice gap in the selected site. Unlike other recent special education reforms, this particular area is a federal mandate and not just another good idea with promising results. While resistance is common in organizational change, for this particular issue there is not really any choice of resistance; the changes must occur in order for the organization to be in compliance with federal and state law.

Educators are commonly known to feel overwhelmed by the constancy of demands and reforms placed upon them on any given day (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). Elmore (2007) describes school reform as a practice of jumping nervously from one reform idea to the next over relatively short periods of time (p. 2). This phenomenon may be especially prevalent within the field of special education due to the high level of documentation, litigation, and legislation (Wagner & Katsiyannis, 2010). Improved transition assessment, documentation, and practice are the law, and practitioners must comply. Although this mandate was strengthened over a decade ago, practice has been slow to comply (National Council on Disability, [NCD] & Social Security
Administration, [SSA], 2000). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires transition related assessment, documentation, and programming to begin at the age of fourteen (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2012). As a result of sluggish compliance, several cases pertaining to transition services and assessment have been presented to the Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA). A query of the BSEA website showed 90 cases related to transition services have gone to hearing since 2002 (www.doe.mass.edu). Parents have begun rejecting diplomas and/or demanding extended services due to the lack of progress around transition services and outcomes.

Through the case study analysis proposed in this research, the organization will be in a better position to analyze the transition planning and services currently available to students and their families, and look for areas to improve. Despite the presence of legislative transition mandates since 1990, effective practice and research implementation has been scattered (Kohler & Field, 2003). In studying the research site’s change process as it pertains to transition documentation and services, it is important to understand the experiences of those responsible for the change. This study will add to the research base through the analysis of the transition process as it moves from mandated documentation to effective practice, in the pursuit of improving postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this project is organizational change. There are many models and theories to study change within organizations, both within business and educational spheres. For this study, a model that would capture the many facets of change was required. Some models reviewed were deemed too simple, others too specific to business and industry or
education. A model was needed that could blend an educational environment with the complexity of business. An educational collaborative follows a business model, since the operational funding is generated through income produced by tuitions and services. Therefore, the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change was selected to comprehensively analyze the complex process of change within the selected research site.

This model allows one to analyze change through both transformational and transactional processes simultaneously. It was selected due to its research base and the interplay between the processes (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transformational factors can be defined as those caused by external environment and may require significant changes in behavior. Transactional factors are those that impact the day-to-day operations of the people within the organization (Burke, 2011). The Burke Litwin Model includes 12 interactive, bidirectional components, which can be viewed as a whole and then further refined through the separation of transformational forces and transactional forces that impact change. This represents the complexity of the change process within an organization. The interactive nature of the model implies that change in any component does not occur in isolation, but will impact other components.

Figure 1 represents a visual reproduction of the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change with its 12 component parts and bi-directional relationships.
This model represents an open systems method of perceiving change using arrows to demonstrate that each component affects the others (Burke, 2008, p.188). Burke and Goodstein (1991) use this anthropological term to describe an organization as a living, open system dependent on its environment for survival (p. 7). The analogy also indicates that this “living” system will seek out stability, which is an assumption of the Burke-Litwin model as well.

There are many external forces that impact practice and policy within an educational collaborative. As an alternative service provider to school districts, the educational collaborative

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*Figure 1. Visual depiction of Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change. Retrieved from Google Images http://research-methodology.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/New-Picture-22.png*
is dependent upon referrals to its programs and services for survival. Districts will access the programming and services of a collaborative when their programs and services cannot meet the needs of a student with a disability. Districts pay tuition for students to attend collaboratives. This tuition is necessary for the success of the organization. Satisfied customers will access an organization’s services. The educational collaborative is expected to provide excellent services to students and maintain proper documentation to satisfy the districts and meet the needs of students. Acceptable Indicator 13 audits and satisfactory coordinated program reviews, coupled with positive postschool outcomes for students are the drivers of expectations that the collaborative sites need to achieve for its districts and all secondary special education students.

The external environment is connected to individual and organizational performance in a feedback loop (Burke, 2010). Most organizations are affected by external factors that will require the individuals within the organization to change. For the purpose of this research, the external environment is represented by the legislation driving this mandate to improve transition services and documentation for students with disabilities. In addition, raised expectations of sending districts and families, as well as continued litigation through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals are driving the organization to improve its practices.

This model has two dimensions, known as transformational and transactional factors, that impact organizational change. The top of the model represents the transformational factors of organizational change. Burke and Litwin describe “transformation change occurs as a response to the external environment and directly affects organizational mission and strategy, the organization’s leadership, and culture” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 523). Transformational factors are described as “areas that require new employee behaviors as a consequence of external and
internal environmental pressures” (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p. 296). Transformational factors are external environment, leadership, mission and strategy, organizational culture, and individual and organizational performance. Because the transformational and transactional factors engage in a bidirectional relationship, transformational factors cannot be eliminated from this study. However, the primary focus of this investigation was the transactional factors present in the organization studies and how they are affected by the transformational factors. The figure below identifies the top segment of the model and those components that are considered transformational.

Figure 2. Transformational Components of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change. These factors typically respond directly to the external environment.
The remainder of the model contains factors that can be categorized as transactional. Burke (2010) describes these factors as those relating to climate that tend to impact the daily functions of the organization. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) express these transactional factors as those dealing with the psychological variables that predict and control motivation and performance in a work group’s climate (p. 296). Burke and Litwin (1992) identify these factors as responsive to and affected by the transformational factors. The figure below identifies the bottom segment of the model, and those components that are considered transactional.

*Figure 3.* Transactional Components of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change. These factors tend to impact the day-to-day operations of an organization.
Burke (2010) reminds us that the model generally flows from top to bottom, with an external factor moving toward performance. Many steps and dimensions are impacted as a change moves through the model. The change being proposed within the educational research site has a variety of dimensions and people involved. The change in focus and pedagogy required for the shift in current practice, to alignment with best practice and legislative mandates, are both transformational and transactional. The framework of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change best serves as the theoretical framework for this study because it highlights the complexity of factors inherent in this case as the mandates and expectations are imposed on the research site.

**Overview of Methods**

This research was designed as an embedded, single-site, qualitative case study (Yin, 2009). This research utilized qualitative methods to gather information primarily through interviews, document reviews, and observations. These are methods common to qualitative research in a constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005). Yin (2009) encourages multiple data sources as a key principle in conducting case study research. This qualitative study within the educational organization required several streams of pertinent information in an attempt to gain deeper insight into the current problem of practice. Merriam (2009) indicates that a characteristic of qualitative research is the role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Yin (2009) suggests utilizing the case study methodology when the goal is to attempt a deeper understanding of a complex social phenomenon.

A single embedded case study was chosen as the methodology for this research to provide insight into a specific, real life phenomenon. The intent was to explain how one educational
collaborative implements transition legislative mandates and services. Yin (2009) describes one rationale for the selection of a single case study when the case is typical or representative of other similar cases. This single case is representative of secondary special education programs that are grappling with the same required changes in secondary special education practice. Yin (2009) states that the case study is used to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena (p. 4). In addition, he indicates the single case study is used when the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation. This study was designed to investigate the change process experienced by an educational collaborative as it aligns its practices to the documentation requirements set forth in IDEA 2004 with regard to transition documentation and services. Results from this type of case study are designed to be informative.

This case was delimited by context and time. Data collection was conducted through document reviews, semi-structured interviews, and observations, each to be described within the research design section of this document. The purposeful selection of the secondary level sites’ staff and documentation, where all children are aged 14 and over, positioned the study in context. In addition, the IEP documents reviewed were only those signed and accepted for implementation between January 2, 2013 and June 28, 2013. This time constraint was selected due to the representative nature of these documents, and limited bias by selecting a sample that simply spanned half of a typical school year. In addition, this timeline represented IEPs that were created after the legislative mandates were enacted.
Definition of Terms

Two tables are used to highlight the definition of terms to be used within this document.

Table 1 defines the educational and transition related terms while Table 2 defines the 12 components of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Educational and Transition Related Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition domains</td>
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<td>IDEA 2004 defines the focus areas for transition as</td>
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<td>those that relate to further education, employment,</td>
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<tr>
<td>and independent living. In addition, these domains</td>
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<td>can refer to areas such as self-determination,</td>
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<td>community access, leisure and recreation, health,</td>
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<td>communication, and interpersonal relationships.</td>
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<td>(Clark &amp; Patton, 1997)</td>
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<td>Educational collaborative</td>
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<td>“Educational Collaboratives are formed by local</td>
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<td>school committees and charter boards under the</td>
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<td>provisions of Chapter 40, Section 4E. The purpose of</td>
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<td>an educational collaborative is to supplement and</td>
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<td>strengthen the programs and services of member school</td>
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<td>committees and charter boards.”</td>
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<td>(<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/collaboratives">http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/collaboratives</a>)</td>
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<td>Public day school</td>
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<td>“A program operated by a public school or an</td>
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<td>educational collaborative providing full day or</td>
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<td>residential special education services to eligible</td>
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<td>students in a facility serving primarily students</td>
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<td>with disabilities.”</td>
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<td>(<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=02">http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=02</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher/leader</td>
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<td>A term used by the educational collaborative that</td>
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<td>served as the research site. It refers to a</td>
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<td>professional with working responsibilities broken</td>
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<td>down as 51% teaching duties, 49% leadership/</td>
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<td>administrative duties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 13</td>
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<td>“The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
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<td>(IDEA) was reauthorized on December 3, 2004 and its</td>
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<td>provisions became effective on July 1,</td>
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2005. In conjunction with the reauthorization, the U. S. Department of Education through the Office of Special Education Programs required states to develop six-year State Performance Plans in December, 2005 around 20 indicators, on which data will be submitted annually (beginning February 2007) in Annual Performance Reports. The 13th Indicator relates to transition services for students. Current Measurement Language for Indicator 13: Percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and 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 services needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority." (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)) (http://www.nsttac.org/content/what-indicator-13)

Table 2
Definitions of Twelve Components of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Environment</th>
<th>Any outside condition or situation that influences the performance of the organization (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 531)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Strategy</td>
<td>What the organization’s (1) top management believes is and has declared is the organization’s mission and strategy and, (2) what employees believe is the central purpose of the organization (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 531)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Executives providing overall organizational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The collection of overt and covert rules, values, and principles that are enduring and guide organizational behavior (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>The arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, communication, and relationships to assure effective implementation of the organization’s mission and strategy (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Practices</td>
<td>What managers do in the normal course of events to use the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization’s strategy (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Standardized policies and mechanisms that facilitate the work of the organization (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>The collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings that members of a local work unit have that, in turn, affect their relations with their boss, with one another, and with other work units (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Requirements and Individual Skills/Abilities</td>
<td>The behavior for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required of people to accomplish the work they have been assigned and for which they feel directly responsible (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 532-533)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Needs and Values</td>
<td>The specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 533)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>The aroused behavioral tendencies to move toward goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 533)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual and Organizational Performance</td>
<td>The outcome or result as well as the indicator of effort and achievement (Burke &amp; Litwin, 1992, p. 533)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positionality

Acknowledging my positionality within this study is important for readers to understand as they review this research as well as for me to reflect on my biases. As a former special education student that has met with a level of success as an adult, I have often wondered how I made the transition from special education to successful postschool outcomes in my adult life. As I pursued my career as a special educator, I often bore witness to the dismal outcomes and floundering experienced by my students as they encountered adult roles and responsibilities. I have often pondered the process of successfully transitioning from a student to an adult with a disability. I have used this curiosity to mold some teaching habits and practices within my classes to inform students about a variety of issues and obstacles they may face as they transition to adulthood. These classes and experiences became formalized over the years and transition became an area of passion in my career focus.

As I embarked on this research, I reflected on assumptions and biases that might impact the study. First, I always assume that others are as passionate about the topic as I am, and will embrace the changes they are required to make. Second, the guiding direction from the federal mandate instructs special educators to address further education, employment, and independent living goals. I assume that all the students and families served by the collaborative share these goals. It is important to acknowledge that some families do not value employment, further education, and independence for their children for a variety of reasons. Some of our families are from a different socioeconomic culture than myself, and have depended upon Social Security and other government benefits to survive. As a white, middle class woman, I assume that these families would want these benefits to end, and this is not always the case. Finally, it is important
to note that the geographic location that is served by the collaborative is predominantly a white, middle class, New England area and therefore, this study may not be easily be applied to other regions and significantly different cultural groups.

Over the past few years, as transition has become a growing focus in special education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I have been given the opportunity to rise as a leader within my organization and pursue formal education in the field. I have also become involved at the state level, through participation with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and a community of fellow practitioners. I am passionate about this area of special education and I welcome this opportunity to improve and refine the practices within my organization and contribute to the growing body of research in transition services for students with disabilities.

**Organization of this Document**

The remainder of this document contains four chapters. Chapter two presents an overview of the literature. The literature review outlines the historical and legislative foundations of transition services for students with disabilities as well as the policies from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The review goes on to present literature relating to organizational change in the educational sphere and best practice research in transition, and concludes with personnel preparation in transition. Chapter three outlines the methodological design of this case study. Details pertaining to qualitative studies, data collection, and protection of human subjects are addressed in chapter three. Chapter four presents the findings from the research, and chapter five presents the discussion of the findings. Chapter five also highlights areas for further research and a reflection from the researcher. The document concludes with references and appendices.
Chapter II: The Literature Review

Introduction

The intent of this literature review was to set this case study within the larger arena of what is currently known about transition and organizational change as it pertains to education. Machi and McEvoy (2009) have identified the purpose of the advanced literature review as the “foundation for identifying a problem that demands original research” (p. 3). Four streams of literature were selected for analysis supported by five guiding question that informed this literature review. The four streams were

1. Legislative and Historical Foundations for Transition
2. Organizational Change in Education and Transition
3. Substantiated Best Practice in Transition
4. Personnel Preparation in Transition

The guiding questions for this literature review included

1. What are the federal and state legislative requirements regarding transition?
2. What is known about organizational change, as it specifically impacts an educational organization and transition?
3. What does the research say about best practice in transition services and programming for students with disabilities?
4. What is known about personnel preparation in changing transition practices?

Legislation

In 1975, the historic federal education legislation, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was passed. This provided for a free, appropriate, public education in
the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities. For the first time in history, children with disabilities, nationwide, were moved from institutions and placed in our nation’s classrooms. This legislation was the result of parent advocacy, the civil rights movement, and litigation (Hehir, 2004; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). P.L. 94-142 provided federal monies to the states to provide special education services to all students with disabilities. This law has been renamed and reauthorized by the federal government several times. Today it is known as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with the latest iteration reauthorized in 2004.

Provisions for transition services were first mentioned in this legislation in 1990 (Johnson, 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003; Morningstar et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2005). The 1990 amendment to IDEA represented the first time specific requirements were mandated for transition services (Morningstar et al., 2012). The 1990 IDEA reauthorization included transition language and mandated transition services (Landmark et al., 2010). Subsequent reauthorizations in 1997 and 2004 strengthened the language, expectations, and data collection protocols for all students with disabilities aged 16 and over (Wagner et al., 2005). Key components to this final reauthorization in 2004 mandated that post-secondary IEP goals must be based upon age appropriate transition assessments and assist the students in reaching their transition goals (H.R. Report No. GOA-12-594, 2012; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2010; Morningstar et al., 2010). According to a publication produced in 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs, the key components to 2004 IDEA requirements for secondary transition include

1. The purposes of IDEA include ensuring that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.
2. The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:
   Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to postschool activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
   Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and
   Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

3. Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:
   Appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills;
   The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.

4. The LEA must invite a child with a disability to attend the child’s IEP Team meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the post-secondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals under §300.320(b). [34 CFR 300.320(b) and (c) [20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII)]

5. To the extent appropriate, with the consent of the parents or a child who has reached the age of majority, in implementing the requirements of §300.321(b)(1), the public agency must invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. [34 CFR 300.321(b)(3)]

(US Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs, 2007).

In addition, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA established 20 indicators that require data collection for students with disabilities. The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities’ website describes these twenty indicators as “one of the ways in which States
measure and report their performance in educating students with disabilities” (www.nichcy.org). Indicator 13 is a data collection point that specifically addresses transition planning within the IEP process. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center’s (NSTTAC) website provides this definition of Indicator 13: “Percent of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals, and transition services that will reasonably enable the child to meet the post-secondary goals.” 20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B) (www.nsttac.org)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ policy begins the federal transition requirements for students at 14 rather than 16. Although Massachusetts is a state of local control, they have provided some policy relating to secondary transition with the publication of three technical advisories. In addition to this guidance, Massachusetts has a transition form that is to accompany all IEPs for students 14 and over. The Transition Planning Form (TPF) is a two-page document that serves as an action plan for guiding the transition process and identifying those responsible to meet the plan (See Appendix A). It is designed to lead the IEP process to identify the vision, disability related needs, and create a transition action plan. The action plan is designed to outline the specific instruction and employment opportunities, community and adult living experiences that the student will engage in during the course of the IEP period to achieve their post-secondary vision. This form is to be updated annually.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides districts with an Indicator 13 checklist (see Appendix B for checklist) to ensure compliance as part of their mandated state strategic plan (www.doe.mass.edu). Districts were assigned to cohorts and provided with guidance to complete these forms. In addition, the federally mandated IEP process, coupled with state level policy,
command that transition be documented and provided to all students with disabilities beginning at 14 years of age. These external factors are forcing the change in practice, policy, task requirement, and organizational performance of the leaders and teachers at the research site.

**Historical Foundations and Postschool Outcome Studies**

Research into postschool outcomes for students with disabilities emerged on a small scale as researchers began to notice high dropout rates, poor employment numbers and poor social integration for special needs students exiting public school (Kohler & Field, 2003; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993; Wagner, Newman, D’Amico, Jay, Butler-Nalin, Marder, & Cox, 1991). As a result, Congress directed the United States Department of Education to investigate the postschool outcomes for special education students. In 1983, Congress commissioned the first National Longitudinal Transition Study to be conducted to determine the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner et al., 1991). The first group of disabled students was completing a twelve-year standard education, and Congress was interested in discovering the success of special education legislation. In 1985, SRI International began collecting data on more than 8,000 youth to gain insight into the postschool outcomes for these children (Wagner et al., 1991). This first study examined three key factors: education, employment and personal independence. All eleven disability categories were represented, and results were reported by category. In 1988, and again in 2000, the National Longitudinal Transition Studies, NLTS-88 and NLTS-2, 2000, were conducted (Wagner, 1995). These studies produced waves of statistical outcomes in the areas of employment, community adjustment, post-secondary education, and independent living for students with disabilities once they leave public education. At a national level, NLTS-88 and NLTS-2 have provided much
quantitative data on the current postschool outcomes for students with special needs.

Research into transition practice and postschool outcomes for students with special needs has largely been categorized and presented in terms of the varying disability categories identified by the federal legislation and the multiple areas of transition. In their research, Clark and Patton (1997) found there is no agreed upon, finite list of transition domains; however, there is a core list that is predominant throughout the research and assessment, they include daily living skills, employment, self-determination, independent living, leisure/recreation, postsecondary education, social relationships, community participation, and vocational training. There is a pattern in the research, from studies that range in focus on one disability category with one or two outcomes, to the NTLS studies that included all disability categories and several outcomes. The research is also a combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

This research site serves students representing all disability categories. Although much of the reporting from NLTS focuses on students with disabilities as a whole, the nature and severity of their disabilities has a powerful impact on their transition to adulthood (Wagner et al., 1991). Other factors considered in the NLTS reporting include gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic standing, and high school completion. Major reporting was conducted in three primary transition domains: employment, postsecondary education/vocational training and residential independence.

The first NLTS results indicated that students with disabilities significantly lagged behind their nondisabled peers in the area of employment; roughly 12% lower (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Employment results also showed that students with disabilities have higher unemployment, lower wages, and fewer benefits, and work in less skilled positions (Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989; NCD & SSA, 2000; Wagner et al., 1991). Results for
postsecondary education and training were poorer, with only 14% of youth with disabilities reporting postsecondary attendance two years after high school completion, compared to 53% of the general student population (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner, et al., 1991). Results reported for the final transition domain, residential independence, showed that only 13% of youth with disabilities were living independently, compared to 33% of their nondisabled counterparts, two years beyond high school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Students with disabilities were reported to make slight gains in the three transition domains as time elapsed. However, their level of postsecondary education remained low, which ultimately impacts their ability to improve wages and residential independence (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner et al., 1993).

NLTS-2 began to produce results reports in April of 2003. The first several reports focused on the changing special needs populations and demographics (www.NLTS-2.org). In April of 2005, the panel examined how this second cohort of students was tackling its transition to adulthood. This new research increased its study population to 11,000 students with disabilities and was felt to be representative of the national trends (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levin, 2005). The transition domains of leisure activities, social involvement and citizenship are reported in NLTS-2 results. This research also reflects disturbing trends for students with disabilities that are being expelled or suspended from school, fired from a job, or arrested. According to Wagner, Cameto, and Newman (2003) there was a 6% increase in these negative consequences for students with disabilities between studies.

The results in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and residential independence in this second national study shows some improvements. The first wave of data on employment for students two years out of school showed a 10% increase for students with
disabilities who completed high school (Wagner et al. 2005). By the time students with disabilities were eight years out of high school, they were only 6% behind the general population in employment statistics, with 60% employment (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). In addition, students with disabilities demonstrated improvements in the type of jobs held and increased hours worked and wages earned, although they still lagged behind their nondisabled peers (Wagner et al., 2005).

Once students with disabilities leave the public education sector and enter higher education, their decision to declare their disability becomes voluntary (Newman et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2005). The current trends in employment for the 21st century indicate that employees need a higher skill level to earn a living wage (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Flannery, Yovanoff, Benz, & Kato, 2008). These higher skill levels are, for the most part, learned through post-secondary education and training. NLTS-2 data shows that 52% of students with disabilities chose not to declare their disability when entering a post-secondary institution of higher learning. In addition, their attendance is less than half of their nondisabled peers (Wagner et al., 2005). In general, students with disabilities’ attendance in higher learning is less than half of their nondisabled peers and does not improve over time elapsed out of school (Newman et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2005). In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a high-stakes testing state, earning a diploma is more difficult for students with disabilities. A lack of a diploma negatively impacts their ability to matriculate into an institution of higher learning. The higher education community still does not recognize the certificate of completion document as the equivalent of a diploma and this can impede acceptance into a post-secondary education program.
The NLTS-2 data relating to residential independence examined circumstances beyond independent living and included such items as obtaining a driver’s license and having a credit card and a checking account. It is not surprising that this particular transition domain is highly dependent upon extent and type of disability (Wagner et al., 2005). The number of youth with disabilities who still reside at home two years after high school is comparable to that of their nondisabled peers (Wagner et al., 2005). Differences between youth with disabilities and the general population were more significant eight years beyond high school, with a roughly 12% difference for living independently (Newman et al., 2011).

The data on postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities is an important impetus to examine implications for improvement in transition services for students with disabilities. Johnson (2008) implies that change in practice is best conducted at a local level by using this large-scale data to “identify gaps in services, needed program improvements and changes in policy” (p. 85). She also indicates that any data collected should be analyzed with the goal of programming enhancement to improve postschool outcomes (p. 87). This general knowledge of post school outcomes for students with disabilities has been accessible and available to special educators for over two decades. Richard Elmore (2007) describes the pace of educational change and reform as glacial. Transition planning for students was initially referenced in the federal legislation and educational research over twenty years ago, and has recently become a topic of discussion, research, and practice within the special education sphere. In addition to postschool outcome research, there is also a comprehensive scope of research that illustrates evidence-based best practice to assist in improving these postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.
Organizational Change

The federal and state transition mandates and subsequent policy have been designed to impact practice. However, as with many educational reforms, the research-to-practice gap remains and implementation of evidence-based practice (EBP) is limited (Cook & Odom, 2013). Obviously, much is known about EBP for transition that build positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities, yet practice at the research site has been slow to change. The primary goal of this research is to analyze this sluggish compliance through the theory of organizational change. The Burke-Litwin model has been chosen due to its focus on both transformational and transactional factors. Within the confines of the educational sphere, and the selected research site specifically, the interaction between transformational and transactional factors assisted in the analysis of data that was collected.

According to several Internet sources, Greek philosopher, Heraclitus is credited with the famous doctrine “Change is the only constant in life” (Graham, 2011). Although this statement is thousands of years old, people continue to struggle with change. Burke sets the stage for the history of the study of organizational change with this statement: “Organizational change is as old as organizations themselves” (Burke, 2012, p. 29). He also states that organizations tend to change because of external forces or an internal need or desire to change (Burke & Goodstein, 1991, p. 5). Organizational change within American education can be traced back to Russia’s launch of Sputnik in 1957 (Fullan, 2007). When the Russians beat us into space, a real push toward educational reform began. However, Elmore (2007) indicates that although schools have been constantly changing, the fundamental problem lies in the fact that all attempts to change the stable patterns of schooling remain small scale (p. 10).
The formal study of organizational change is credited to Kurt Lewin’s work on group behavior and his 3-Step Model (Burnes, 2004). His model addressed the steps of organizational change as unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. Burke and Goodstein (1991) further explain the Lewin concepts of change as, “unfreezing the present pattern to manage resistance…moving the organization to the desired new level and then taking steps to institutionalize the change” (p. 4). This simple model has been the basis for the more comprehensive theories used today (Burke, 2010). According to Burke (2010), the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change has its roots in the early work of George Litwin on organizational climate that evolved into the foundation of their work together (p. 210). In the 1960s, George Litwin was part of research on organizational climate that linked psychological and organizational variables in a cause-and-effect relationship (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 526).

There are many theories pertaining to organizational change that could be used for this research. To present all the theories is beyond the scope of this literature review. However, there are some that are worth mentioning to clarify the selection of the Burke-Litwin model for this particular research. Organizational change as a simple model, a revolutionary model for change, and an educational model will be discussed. Kurt Lewin’s work deals with the “unfreezing” of stable patterns, “moving” the organization to where the desired change leads, then “refreezing” the new ideal in place (Burke & Goodstein, 1991; Burnes, 2004). Although this simple theory addresses the basic tenets of organizational change, it fails to assist in the analysis of the complexity that actually occurs during such a change. The change indicated by transition service legislation represents a revolutionary change to practices at the secondary level of special education. Punctuated equilibrium is a change theory that addresses revolutionary change.
Gersick (1991) describes this theory as “an alternation between long periods when stable infrastructures permit only incremental adaptations, and brief periods of revolutionary upheaval” (p. 10). She goes on to say that revolutionary change is often the result of the equilibrium being broken (p. 26). The particular change to be investigated through this research may not be seen as a disruption to the equilibrium of the organization. Current practice has, and might continue to, maintain the stability it has enjoyed. However, the increase in attention, BSEA hearings, and mandated documentation from the Commonwealth may eventually cause stress to the equilibrium of the organization. Although it could be argued that educational organizations do maintain long periods of stability punctuated by brief periods of change, this model fails to capture the entirety of both the transactional and transformational components outlined by Burke-Litwin.

**Organizational change in education and transition.**

In the educational community, much of the change research comes from school reform and professional development (Eaker, Dufour & Dufour, 2002; Elmore, 2007; Fullan, 2007, 2009; Guskey, 2000). Educational statistics and government-based research have been the impetus for the latest school reform movement: accountability for student performance (Elmore, 2007). No Child Left Behind, the common name for the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 2002, began the accountability movement with performance-based accountability measured through student assessment (Elmore, 2007). The reform of public education is often completed through professional development. Guskey (2000) points to professional development as the means for school reform, due not only to policy, but also to the robust and ever-increasing knowledge base in education (p. 3). However, the practice itself is often top-down and too far away from what occurs in classrooms between students and teachers (Elmore, 2007; Guskey, 2000). Although
professional development is a means to make the changes required for improved transition services, it does not address the entirety of the change process.

Burke (2011) reminds us that most organizations do not change significantly. The changes required for transition compliance represent a significant change in practice. The federal requirement under IDEA state that for the IEP in effect for a student turning 16, it must include:

(1) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and (2) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals (34 CFR §300.320(b)).

At its basic level, this change would cause one to assume that all secondary level special education students receive some type of age appropriate transition assessment. This assessment would then be used to create goals that are post-secondary based, and might address several transition domains. The practice of creating goals, based upon assessment results, has been common as it relates to educational, psychological, and related service evaluations. Moving this practice to encompass transition is a required change. In reality, all assessments completed on students with disabilities over the age of 14 should be interpreted through a transition lens.

Resistance and ambivalence are common throughout organizational change research (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Burke, 2011; Piderit, 2000; Szabla, 2007). Researchers remind us that when members of an organization are presented with change, whether in the business or educational sphere, they form beliefs and feelings about the pending change that impact their behavior (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Burke, 2011; Levin, 2009; Lines, 2005; Szabla, 2007). Knowledge of successful and effective change within organizations is understood through the
research in the fields of human resource development, psychology, and scientific management (Burke, 2011). In the sphere of education, Levin and Fullan (2009) conclude that change in education is easy and is done all the time, but these changes may not improve the outcomes for students. The changes in IDEA to improve transition services and documentation are explicitly designed to improve student outcomes. Levin (2009) concludes that for change to be effective, people have to want to change and must have the knowledge to implement the change (p. 260). Transactional features of the Burke-Litwin model will help to address the phenomenon of resistance and provide insight into staff motivation, needs and values as they impact the system, task requirements, and individual and organizational performance.

Burke (2011), states that changing the culture of an organization is very difficult. In addition, changing patterns of behavior is equally difficult. For transition to be facilitated in compliance with current mandates and policy, a complete paradigm shift is required. The entire purpose of secondary special education is to prepare students for positive postschool outcomes. There are also regular education initiatives in the nation and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Individual Learning Plans (ILP) are used by multiple states across the country for regular education students to create annual goals to better prepare students for college and career (Solberg, Phelps, Haakenson, Durham and Timmons, 2011). The sense of urgency is present, the research is available, and EBPs are accessible to implement the change required, yet compliance to the mandates remains sluggish.

Research on changing systems in transition can be traced back to 1983 when federal funding was first provided to states to address personnel preparation in transition (Kleinhammer-Tramill, Baker, Tramill, & Fiore, 2003). According to this research, the priority remained
competitive through 1995. Guy and Schriner (1997) traced the development of federal funding for changing transition systems at the state level to 1991. Funding for these projects was intended to refine state systems to improve transition and adopt best practices. Guy and Schriner (1997) reviewed twenty systems change projects. The results found that practices in the involved states increased awareness of transition, student and parent participation in the process, working relationships among all stakeholders, and policy and procedures. In 1999, Hasazi, Furney, and Destefano reviewed the literature available at that time and discovered that, despite the years of federal grant funding to improve transition compliance, there was uneven implementation across the nation.

The research identifies several challenges encountered by states and local school systems in attempts to implement the transition mandate. Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, and Mack (2002) found that creating comprehensive transition systems has been slow across states and school systems nationwide despite the legislation. They also commented that this lag is present in spite of the presence of best practice and models. Hasazi et al. (1999) identified several challenges to policy implementation. They included the degree to which systems have the capacity to implement policy, relationships among stakeholders and their level of belief in the policy, and the nature of implementation strategies. Kleinhammer-Tramill et al. (2003) also found the lack of prepared professionals to lead the process was a challenge to transition system implementation. These studies point to the problems and challenges that impact systems as they attempt to implement transition service in compliance with federal requirements. Although transition was first mandated in 1990, states and schools have been slow to comply.
Substantiated Best Practices in Transition

Many studies have contributed to the body of knowledge regarding transition related practices that improve postschool outcomes for students with disabilities (Collet-Klingen, 1998; Kohler; 1993; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2010; Test, Fowler, Richter, White, Mazzotti, Walker, Kohler & Kortering, 2009; Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009). Kohler (1993) conducted an empirical search of the current data, at that time, to investigate transition practices that had a positive impact on postschool outcomes. Since then, other researchers have conducted studies that have proven certain practices have a positive impact on postschool outcomes (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Kohler & Field, 2003; Landmark et al., 2010; Test, Fowler et al., 2009; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009). NSTTAC has also published empirically supported predictors for improving the post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) research has identified eight substantiated practices that improve outcomes. These eight practices are common throughout the literature.

At the time Kohler conducted her review of the current literature pertaining to best practice, not much was known. She was able to determine that some practices were substantiated through follow-up data collection on students, or practices were implied to be a best practice to assist practitioners in program development (Kohler, 1993). Her results identified eight practices that were either substantiated by small-scale studies or implied by theory-based articles. These practices were vocational training, parent involvement, interagency collaboration, social skills training, paid work experience, individual transition planning, employability training, and mainstreaming in a least restrictive environment. She went on to report that since the database of
research articles was minimal at the time of her research, these practices should be further studied and may “constitute desirable components of transition programs” (Kohler, 1993, p. 116).

In 1994, The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) published a position statement addressing the important components to consider when developing an effective transition program for students with disabilities. They outlined a process for transition planning that was to be student driven and focused. Four vital components are suggested. They include student empowerment throughout the transition process, self-evaluation to assist in setting realistic goals, identification of specific postschool goals and appropriate educational experiences (Halpern, 1994, p. 118). Although this position statement was not supported by any research, the experts that contribute to this journal are well cited throughout the transition literature. These components have been supported in other studies as practices that have a positive impact on post school outcomes (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Kohler, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003).

Empirically substantiated practices are now available to practitioners working with secondary students who have disabilities. Landmark et al. (2010) conducted their research in a similar fashion to Kohler 1993. They culled through the research, which was available since the Kohler study, to search for substantiated practices using the same criteria set forth in her original seminal work. Eight practices were identified and reported from most to least level of supported efficacy. These practices are (in order of substantiation) paid or unpaid work experience, employment preparation, family involvement, general education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills training, self-determination skills training, and community or agency collaboration (Landmark, et al., 2010, p. 167). Some of these practices are present, to varying degrees, in the four sites selected for this research.
Despite the results of national longitudinal studies on postschool outcomes and research into best practices to improve these outcomes, the research is still unclear as to whether or not certain practices positively impact postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. Mazzotti et al. (2013) found that although some EBPs are found to be effective predictors of postschool outcomes, more research is required. They identified areas lacking in the research in relation to program structure, family involvement, and interagency collaboration. Recommendations were made for increased qualitative studies and research in transition indicating there is still much to learn about what practices impact the postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Personnel Preparation in Transition**

In the fall of 2003, The Division of Career Development produced a special edition of its quarterly journal focused on teacher preparation for transition services. The stronger inclusion of transition related language in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA 2004 led to the need for professionals to be prepared to implement transition services and programming. According to Kleinhammer-Tramill et al. (2003), the priority of transition from the U.S. Department of Education can be traced back to 1984. At this time transition services were established as a priority for students with disabilities, and the field of special education was alerted to build capacity in transition services by increasing the quantity and quality of personnel available to provide these services (p. 135). Morgan et al. (2014) found that transition teachers require skills and knowledge that may differ from general special education teachers (p. 158). Blackorby and Wagner (1996) identified one cause of the poorer postschool outcomes for students with disabilities as inadequate preparation of professionals to provide transition services. According to research conducted by Kochhar-Bryant (2003), most teachers’ training relating to transition took
place on the job. Although states identified transition as a top area of need at that time, many were unable to articulate specific personnel training needs (Kochhar-Bryant, 2003). Morningstar and Benitez (2013) also concluded that because all secondary special educators should be involved in transition planning, it is critical that they possess core knowledge and skills to enable them to effectively plan and deliver services.

Morningstar and Clark (2003) highlight that many transition professionals lack specific training and merely hold a special education license. In addition, they found that the program of study that awarded the special education license may have offered little to no training in transition. Professional development for transition focused on content and process, involving all those responsible for transition, is a large undertaking. Transition content supplied to professionals and other stakeholders might relate to legislation, research, and best practices. Morningstar and Benitez (2013) remind us that transition planning and services are equally critical for all types of students with disabilities, and ensuring that all secondary special education teachers have sufficient training to implement established practices should be a priority.

Research concerning the role of a transition coordinator/specialist and that of a transition teacher indicate that different competencies may be needed (Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffman & Kupferman, 2013; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Morningstar and Benitez (2013) identified the basic difference between transition teachers and transition specialists. They described a transition teacher as the person who engages in the IEP planning and direct instruction, while the transition specialist ensures that a coordinated set of activities occurs as specified by IDEA 2004 (p. 58-59). They also found that transition specialists were best prepared
to deliver transition services, and that it may be important to differentiate the roles of transition teachers and transition specialists.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been making strides to establish transition training for professionals. In addition to three technical advisories (DESE, 2008, 2012, & 2014) they hosted a statewide transition capacity building conference in April of 2012, and they provide free online transition related courses through their Focus Academy. In addition, they created a transition specialist endorsement certification and published related competencies in October of 2013 (MA Gen L ch 71 § 38G1/2). These competencies are attached as Appendix C. This separate endorsement and the need for specialized knowledge and skills are supported by the research (Hasazi et al., 1999; Morgan, et al., 2013; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). As a result of this endorsement and published competencies, a few Massachusetts colleges have begun to offer specialized programs of study to prepare professionals in transition. The Massachusetts DESE has established transition as a priority through their activities and publications.

**Summary**

Over two decades of research have demonstrated that students with disabilities have poorer postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers. The scope and depth of the literature has also demonstrated that such practices when adopted, can improve these outcomes. Kohler and Field (1996) indicated, over 15 years ago, that transition planning and programming is not an add-on activity, but is a fundamental change in the way special services are to be delivered for students with disabilities over 14 years of age. Michael Fullan (2007) describes change in education as a change in practice with three essential multidimensional changes, which are
necessary for real change to occur in education: changes in materials, teaching approaches and beliefs (p. 30).

Creating a world-class transition program within an educational collaborative will require this type of multidimensional change. The external environment is dictating that a change in practice is necessary. The research site has made changes in leadership and added improved transition planning and services to their mission and strategic plan. Implementing the necessary systems and policies to make this change is the goal for the organization. The shift in practice as it relates to transition documentation and subsequent practice will be the focus of this research. Specifically, it will explore how the required documentation, if properly utilized, can lead to the change in practice that will improve transition programming and services.
Chapter III: Research Design

Introduction

This chapter will present the research design for this study. This study was grounded in the theory of organizational change. The research questions presented are followed by a discussion of the methodology selected to best investigate and analyze the change process. A thorough discussion of the qualitative single case study and the research site will be presented. Data collection and analysis procedures will be outlined and this chapter will conclude with a discussion on trustworthiness. In addition, the steps taken to protect human subjects during this research, and a statement identifying potential researcher bias are addressed.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of organizational change at four secondary special education sites within an educational collaborative as they implemented the mandated transition practices into their programmatic offerings and documentation. The primary research question that guided this study was the following:

How are four secondary level special education sites within one educational organization adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming requirements set forth in IDEA 2004?

In addition, six subquestions further guided this research:

1. How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in each site?

2. What factors impact the ability of each site within the educational collaborative to obtain the organizational performance objectives?
3. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in each site?
4. What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives?
5. How is the attainment of performance objectives reflected by the collaborative as a whole?
6. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected across sites?

**Research Paradigm**

The discussion of a research paradigm assists in placing the researcher in the philosophical constructs of their beliefs around the nature of reality, or ontology, coupled with the beliefs about the nature of the knowledge, or epistemology (Merriam, 2009). This research was designed as an embedded, single-site, qualitative case study, using the constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2009). Mertens (2005) describes the basic assumptions of this research paradigm as knowledge that is being socially constructed by those active in the research process (p. 12). The underlying query in this research was to discover, through interviews, documents, and observations, how stakeholders are constructing their reality as it relates to their practice around transition mandates. Creswell (2009) indicates that a study grounded in a constructivist paradigm relies as much as possible on the participant’s view of the situation being studied (p. 8). Merriam (2009) also suggests that a constructivist paradigm be used when a study is designed to describe, understand, and interpret a topic through multiple realities bound in context (p. 11). In order to satisfy the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research and adhere to the basic tenets of the paradigm, a qualitative methodology was selected.
Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is that of the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam 2009). In addition to simply being the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, this researcher openly interacted with participants during the interview process. In alignment with the research paradigm for this study, this interaction was also central to the study. Ponterotto (2005) identifies this interaction as a central characteristic of a constructivist paradigm. He suggests that the researcher and participants jointly create (co-create) the findings from this interactive dialogue (p. 129). Finally, the researcher’s role was also one of personal and professional curiosity with deeper understanding as the ultimate goal of this research.

Qualitative Case Study Research

The research question for this study was best answered through a qualitative research design. Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers study in natural settings and use multiple sources to construct meaning. As previously indicated, this research was conducted to explore a natural setting of one educational collaborative in Massachusetts and used multiple forms of data including document reviews, observations and individual interviews to explore the research questions.

There are multiple approaches within the qualitative tradition. Case studies are designed to provide an in-depth look at a particular case, in this case, one educational collaborative in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Further, as an embedded case study, this study explored the change processes at each independent secondary level site within the collaborative. To answer the research question, it was necessary to understand the contemporary practices of each site in
relation to transition practices, and then analyze the larger organization. This required an in-depth exploration utilizing a variety of sources. Documents, observations, and interviews were used to tell in-depth stories and understand how people responsible for transition mandates and programming are making sense of their roles and responsibilities.

This research consisted of a qualitative embedded single-site case study. A case study method was chosen because the research question was designed to understand the change process from the perspective of various stakeholders. Yin (2009) describes these case study parameters as those used in a typical setting where the situation is commonplace (p. 48). He further categorizes representative case studies as either holistic or embedded. The educational collaborative chosen for this study is representative of other collaboratives in the Commonwealth. The embedded case study is used when subunits exist within the larger organization for study (p. 50). Therefore this study is classified as a single case, representative, embedded case study.

Yin (2009) defines a “case” as a unit of analysis. The unit for analysis in this research was an educational collaborative. As an embedded case study, the research also focused on four secondary level sites within the larger educational collaborative. The embedded sites were all given the task to change and/or improve their current transition practices in order to align with the collaborative’s performance objectives as well as the individual performance objective aligned with the policies set forth by federal and state legislation, and policy change within the organization. While the educational collaborative consists of thirteen program sites, these specific sites were chosen because they are responsible to meet the transition requirements in IDEA 2004. Students at these sites have diagnosed disabilities, are provided with IEPs, and are
between the ages of 14 and 22. These are the parameters and the ages that the federal and state mandates require transition to be addressed.

Site and Participants

Site.

The site was selected through purposeful sampling techniques (Creswell, 2009), as it was appropriate to gain insight into the research problem and address the research questions. This educational collaborative is representative of other collaboratives in the Commonwealth. It is primarily located in a suburban area, and the majority of students are middle class. The site may not be representative of public school systems, particularly those in urban areas. This site was purposefully selected because the embedded sites are required to address the federal and state mandates for transition documentation and programming.

Transition services, discussions, and assessments are indicated to begin at the age of 16 in the federal regulations and at age 14 in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (DESE, 2008). Although the research site, as an educational collaborative, provides services for students from age 3-22, for the purpose of this research, only the change at the secondary level programs embedded in the larger organization were studied. The secondary level sites were chosen to explore and understand the current processes associated with transition documentation and programming. Transition services and subsequent documentation in the IEP are mandated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to begin at age 14, which primarily encompasses the secondary level school level sites (DESE, 2012). Although some middle school level students are 14 years of age, for the scope of this research, they were not included. The elementary and early childhood programs within the organization will not be directly affected by this change.
As the organization strives to provide transition services to the students, the secondary level sites, staff, and students were identified as a logical starting point. Maxwell (2005) states that one of the goals of purposeful selection can be to establish particular comparisons, to illuminate the reasons and differences between settings or individuals (p. 90).

The four secondary level sites operate independently of one another, yet are each responsible to adhere to the same mandates and policies regarding transition documentation and programming. Transition planning is a process that involves ongoing data collection to gather information to drive IEP goals and objectives to inform daily practice. Understanding how to make this shift, and why the change is difficult, was best analyzed through a case study. Case studies are commonly used to answer “how” and “why” question within the social disciplines, including education (Yin, 2009). In this situation, the study aimed to understand how the four sites are implementing the federal mandate for transition. The four embedded sites represent those that provide services for students with special needs between the ages of 14 and 22, and therefore are subject to follow the mandate.

Participants.

The specific sampling for this research was limited to those directly responsible for the transition programming and services of students with disabilities at the secondary level. This included leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals. These groups were chosen because they were directly responsible for collecting ongoing age appropriate transition assessment data, creating post-secondary based IEPs, and providing direct services to transition aged students.

Three groups of staff were selected for the interview process: leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals. Of the eight program level leaders within the collaborative, only four were
identified as participants for this study. The leaders sampled for this research included only those responsible for the four secondary level sites. Their input was important in identifying the role of leadership in the transition process. In addition, it provided insight into the meaning individuals ascribe to their leadership practices in relation to transition.

Teachers were chosen because they are responsible to execute the policies set forth by external environmental factors and leadership. They must draft student IEPs, conduct direct services through educational practices, complete progress reports using ongoing transition data, and guide paraprofessionals in their roles and responsibilities. The information provided by the teachers also served to determine knowledge and sensemaking of their practice relating to the demands placed on them by the external environment. This group of professionals is most impacted by the change in task requirements and individual performance guidelines.

The final group for semi-structured interviews included paraprofessionals working within the collaborative. Due to the high numbers represented in this group at the research site, criterion sampling was used to reduce the sample involved to those who spend at least 50% of their day responsible for direct and indirect transition services. This included community based, employment based, and data collection responsibilities. Sites One and Three each have a paraprofessional identified as a transition assistant; Site Three also has a paraprofessional identified as a job coach. Site Two has two paraprofessionals identified as job coaches and Site Four has four paraprofessionals identified as either job coaches or community based paraprofessionals. This group consists of 13 participants, based upon the qualifying criteria. The group is largely responsible for collecting ongoing transition related data kept in a database and individual student transition portfolios. The assessment data they collect is based upon the IEP,
which was developed by the student’s team, including the classroom teachers. This information also informs quarterly progress reports and the creation of new annual IEPs.

This case study was designed to understand the process of change and compliance to federal and state mandates regarding transition documentation and programming for special education students at the secondary level. Twenty-eight staff members met the criteria for participation in this study. Ultimately, 22 people agreed to participate, signed consent forms, and completed the interview process. This participant group included staff members from all four sites and three staffing roles: leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals. Table 3 shows the number of participants and their respective site assignment.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Site One</th>
<th>Site Two</th>
<th>Site Three</th>
<th>Site Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table highlights the breakdown of interview participants by Site and job category.

Recruitment.

Participants were recruited through voluntary agreement to participate. The selected participants all received a recruitment email identifying them as potential participants for the study. Interested persons were then gathered at their respective sites and presented a brief overview of the research, participant responsibilities, and asked to provide informed consent if they were interested in participating. These recruitment activities took place on site, during regularly scheduled staff meetings, with prior knowledge emailed to each potential participant. A
clear explanation of tasks and time requirements was addressed and an opportunity for individual questions, away from the larger group, was provided prior to eliciting their written consent. In addition, the researcher was available to participants to answer questions and respond to any concerns that arose during the research process. Participants were provided no remuneration for their participation. No recruitment activity took place until after Internal Review Board (IRB) approval of the study.

**Informed consent.**

Prior to any activities relating to this study, consent from the site was obtained from the executive director of the collaborative to allow this research to be conducted at the sites (see Appendix D). Each identified participant was asked to sign a written informed consent form prior to the collection of data (see Appendix E for form). This consent form outlined the parameters for participation in the interview process. Potential participants were informed of their voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time, without prejudice. In addition, a second informed consent was provided to parents and students (if at the age of majority) in the form of an “opt out” consent if they did not wish their IEP to be part of the document review process of this study (see Appendix F). Although the researcher had access to the IEPs, they were not verified for use in a research study prior to parental consent. Therefore, consent was required. Finally, site participants were supplied ample notification prior to any observations and were provided with a copy of the observation protocol (see Appendix G) so they were informed, in advance, about the focus of the direct observations.
Data Collection

General overview.

Data collection aligned with common methods in qualitative research. The primary data collection methods for this case study were document reviews, interviews, and observations. Yin (2009) indicates the “strength of case study research is in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence” (p. 11). The methods selected for data collection in this research were also supported in the research literature by Mertens (2005), who states that the researcher in a qualitative case study serves as the instrument of data collection through observing, interviewing, examining records and documents (p. 382). The research questions were designed to guide the data collection (1) to describe the factors impacting the research site from the external environment through federal and state legislation, leadership, organizational mission and strategy, and organizational culture, (2) to investigate the policies and systems currently in place and how they impact the mandates, (3) to explore current practice at the individual sites in regard to task requirements and performance relating to transition mandates, (4) to probe the current motivation by those people responsible for change in transition documentation and programming, (5) to identify individual values, obstacles, and needs relating to this change, and, (6) to understand the role of the work climate and culture to promote and support this change. In addition, reference to historical data, generated by the collaborative, as it relates to transition services, at the research sites was utilized. Yin (2009) indicates that a good case study will want to use as many sources as possible (p. 101). Finally, a reflective journal was maintained throughout the process by the researcher. This journal documented thoughts, questions, and insights gained throughout the
process. The primary research question served as the lens for data collection during document reviews, interviews with leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals, and, observations.

All findings were used to respond to the primary research question. The six subquestions were used to gather specific information from the sites and the entire collaborative. The first four subquestions were addressed through data collected from the individual sites and the final two subquestions were used for the composite site. The third subquestion was not used to formulate themes from interviews and observations, but was answered through the IEP data. This question focused primarily on the individual performance objective of creating IEPs that are post-secondary based according to IDEA 2004 and DESE policy.

**Interviews.**

Yin (2009) states that one of the most important sources of case study data is the interview (p. 106). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were the primary method for gathering data, relative to the staff’s current knowledge and sensemaking surrounding transition mandates and practice implementation. The conversations with leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals consisted of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions (see Appendices H, I, and J for interview protocols). All semi-structured interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient to the participants. Interviews were scheduled with all participants in advance and ranged from 15-88 minutes in length. Seidman (2006) recommends the 90-minute interview to ensure that participants know what to expect in advance and reduce undue anxiety that may be produced by an open-ended time period. This time was outlined to participants in advance although many did not take that long. Interviews were recorded using the Supernote App on this
researcher’s personal iPad, coupled with note taking in color-coded notebooks previously assigned to each site.

**Document reviews.**

This research required multiple and varied data sources to address each research question thoroughly. One collection method utilized was a document review of current active Individualized Education Plans (IEP) at each site. A current active IEP is one that is accepted and signed by both the parent and sending district for implementation. It is the legal document that creates the annual educational, clinical, and related service goals for a student with a disability. IDEA 2004 mandates that for all students aged 16 and over, the IEP process must be post-secondary based. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandates this process to begin at 14 (DESE, 2008). Due to the large number of students in the study sites, a sampling of documents was determined appropriate. IEPs that were generated and accepted, and therefore active, between January 2, 2013 and June 28, 2013 were reviewed. The educational collaborative uses a software program to generate and manage IEPs. This software allowed for a query of IEPs generated and signed within this time period. This sampling represented plans generated within the school year following an Indicator 13 training that all secondary level staff received. Age appropriate transition assessment and subsequent post-secondary goals and services drive the entire transition planning process. In the process of aligning the practices between and among the sites, documentation, and IEP writing is the starting point, as this process drives the entire service delivery and is the indicator of individual performance identified by the collaborative for its four secondary level sites, and is mandated by the federal government and Commonwealth of Massachusetts. IEPs reviewed for this research were representative of the four embedded
secondary sites within the educational collaborative. The six-month timeline ensured the sample would represent IEPs written after Indicator 13 trainings were provided and bound them by a specific period of time.

In reviewing the IEPs selected, the researcher reviewed the Indictor 13 checklist (see Appendix B) provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This checklist has provisions for transition assessment, post-secondary based goals, student participation in the IEP process, and the completed TPF (see Appendix A).

In addition to the student IEPs, many other documents produced by the organization were referenced and reviewed to provide background information. Program handbooks were examined to gather information on each of the four embedded sites specific to goals, services, ages, and populations served. The collaborative’s Policies and Procedures Guide was reviewed to learn about the IEP process guidelines established by the collaborative to ensure that transition language was present. Job descriptions and the union contract were accessed as part of the criterion sampling of paraprofessionals selected for the study and definitions of specific roles. The collaborative’s website, annual reports and organizational chart were also reviewed to provide necessary background information. Finally, internal professional development data was accessed to gather the topics, dates, and total hours of transition related professional development offered to the collaborative and to the four secondary level sites. All of these documents were considered historical and provided necessary background and descriptions for this research.

Observations.

In addition to the interviews with staff members, observations were conducted at each site. They were scheduled in advance, and were designed to last at least 60 minutes. While formal
observations were conducted as part of this research, there were other opportunities to observe the daily operations of each individual site.

Merriam (2009) distinguishes the observation from the interview as a firsthand rather than a secondhand account of what is occurring in the natural setting. One 60-minute casual direct observation of each site was part of the data collection for this study, and the protocol is attached as Appendix G. Staff members were informed at least 48 hours prior to the observation and the observation protocol was supplied to all staff involved. The observation focused on the transition related activities, documentation required by IDEA 2004. Elements identified in the observation protocol were informed by the theory chosen as the lens to view in the study. The option to conduct a follow-up observation was also addressed in advance and remained a decision that this researcher maintained to clarify information gathered from documents or interviews.

**Analytic memos.**

Finally, a reflective journal was maintained to capture impressions, reactions, and initial interpretations (Merriam, 2009). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggest the use of analytical memos as a rapid way to collect thoughts during the collection of data. These memos assisted in the reflective process throughout data collection and analysis. Color-coded notebooks were maintained to collect field notes with analytical memos as other data collection methods were being implemented. Each site was assigned a color to keep information initially categorized by research site. In addition to data collection methods, Maxwell (2005) describes the use of analytical memos as a tool used to capture thoughts as a way to facilitate reflection (p. 12). Merriam (2009) contends such notes and reflections engage the researcher in thoughtful
questioning and speculation about what is actually going on, and are a preliminary step in data analysis (p. 131).

Data storage and management.

All interactive data, including interviews, was recorded and transcribed by the researcher. All notes, transcriptions, and writings were stored on the researcher’s personal computer and iPad, and housed in a locked file cabinet at the residence of the researcher. All written memos and observational data were stored in color-coded notebooks and remained in the possession of the researcher at all times.

Data analysis and representation.

This research produced a copious amount data that was analyzed throughout the project. Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as the process of making sense out of the data collected (p. 175). As suggested by Mertens (2005), data analysis for this qualitative study was an ongoing process throughout the data collection. Miles et al. (2014) suggest three concurrent flows of activity in the data analysis process: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification (p. 12). Miles et al. (2014) suggest concurrent data analysis throughout the data collection process. This allows for the possibility of new questions to be addressed to fill in gaps while sustaining a healthy corrective process for the researcher (p. 70). These processes were followed for interviews, the IEP Indicator 13 audits, and observations. The analysis process of all data collected is described in detail in the sections that follow.

The reporting structure for these research findings followed the multiple-case version of the classic embedded single-site case. Yin (2009) describes this structure as containing multiple narratives representing each case individually, then providing a cross-case analysis section to
study the case collectively (p. 170-171). Narrative descriptions were selected as the reporting format to capture the essence of each site’s experience. Cross-case analysis was conducted simultaneously to record codes and themes that represented the entire organization. These results are also presented in narrative form.

**Individual interviews.**

The practice of immediate interview transcription, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was used after conducting interviews with each participant. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “immediately following the interview, the interviewer should get the notes in order for subsequent analysis” (p. 272). This practice involved rough draft transcription of recorded interviews and review of written notes, and was helpful in determining the need for future questions and informing observations. While reflections were collected, and the interviews transcribed in a timely manner, the data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection. This process allowed for thoughts, insights, and speculations to be considered throughout the process (Merriam, 2009, p. 174).

Transcribed interviews were organized by site and read through prior to condensing the data and identifying commonalities. The second reading of the interviews involved looking for chunks of information. This distilled the data into themes that emerged at each of the four secondary sites. Themes were identified for each site, consolidated with field notes and observation data, and then reconfirmed through several reviews of the transcripts. After the first round of coding was completed for each site, the researcher returned to the data and began to identify codes for the entire collaborative. These were further condensed using in vivo and axial coding techniques to develop themes for each site and the collaborative as a whole (Saldaña,
Displays of the data were then created on chart paper and displayed for conclusion drawing.

**Coding.**

Interviews were grouped by site for the first round of data analysis. The researcher read through the interviews from one site several times to complete the first cycle of coding. This process was then repeated for each of the four sites. According to Miles et al. (2014), first cycle coding is designed to assign meaning to “chunks” of data (p. 71). Interviews were read in conjunction with field note observations taken during the interview process to clarify the meanings and codes. Once codes were established for the site, second cycle coding began. Miles et al. (2014) describe this round of analysis as a means to group codes into a smaller number of categories or themes (p. 86).

To address the research question, the decision to separate the data analysis process into a site-to-organization continuum was logical. Interviews from each site went through the same process of reading, first cycle, and second cycle coding. Second cycle coding involved the axial method, which involved analytic memos and visual displays to determine the themes that emerged from the individual sites (Saldaña, 2009). Visual displays of codes and themes were created by site.

During the process of analyzing the transcripts from each site, the researcher kept a separate sheet of paper and began to jot down common codes that were repeated throughout the sites to begin the cross-site analysis. Saldaña (2009) refers to this process as in vivo coding, in which a researcher focuses on pieces of the data that seem to stand out. There were several initial codes identified and the use of tally marks began to narrow and collapse these initial codes into
clearer themes. Once data were analyzed by site, and organizational themes were identified, visual displays using chart paper were created following the axial coding process. Themes were displayed for each site and one was created for the collaborative. Transcripts were reviewed again to further organize themes by job category of interviewees to assist in the writing. Identifying the specific participants and useful quotes to verify the themes and prepare to tell the story concluded this process.

**Analysis process for documents.**

Many documents were examined during this study. Preexisting collaborative documents such as program handbooks, policy and procedural guides, contracts, and job descriptions were reviewed for their required content to supply background information and context about the collaborative. These documents, in addition to annual reports and the collaborative website, were necessary to gather historical data and evidence of procedures and strategies relating to federal legislation and state policy. Documents from the Massachusetts DESE were also reviewed for their required content. Other documents reviewed for this study included field notes, the selected and approved IEPs, and the Indicator 13 checklist.

Miles et al. (2014) suggest an initial plan to process and prepare data for analysis by converting all field notes and memos into “write-ups,” that may easily be read and edited (p. 71). The initial organization of data from field notes was completed by site and then by participant groups within each site. The data was then reviewed and read through to “obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning” (Creswell, 2009, p. 185). Once all documents were read for their required content and field note data was converted to “write-ups”, the process of coding and looking for themes began. Saldaña (2009) defines a code in qualitative
research as a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). This is where patterns in documents and participant responses become clearer. Creswell (2009) states that this “coding process is designed to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis” (p. 189). The historical documents and field note write-ups were then blended with the themes identified from the interviews. The last set of documents reviewed for this research was the selected IEPs that were granted permission to review for an Indicator 13 audit. The IEP data was not used to develop the themes for the individual sites, but were reported separately, as they informed individual performance objectives at each site.

IEPs approved for this study were separated by site in color-coded folders and given numbers. The Indicator 13 checklist is composed of seven yes-no questions that indicate the level of transition language contained within the IEP. The process of then reading each document and scoring its corresponding Indicator 13 checklist began. Once all 35 IEPs had a completed Indicator 13 checklist, they were reviewed and organized. The review of these documents captured the transition related task requirements based upon policies generated from the external environment. The seven yes-no questions on the checklist were documented in a chart and analyzed by site. A display of these results was created on large chart paper to analyze the overall results for each site and for the collaborative. These displays were then used to draw conclusions, which are reported in Chapter Four.

**Analysis process for observations.**

Observational data served to augment the interview data and gain further clarification on what was actually occurring in the natural setting of the case study. Yin (2009) indicates that
observational data can add a new dimension for understanding the phenomena being studied with the context in which it occurs (p. 110). Due to the nature of the collection strategy, observational data was separated by site, which served to easily analyze this information as it related to the individual site. This data was coupled with the interview data from the staff at each respective site to either clarify or identify gaps that were evident. Findings from all observational data were presented in conjunction with the interview data. This decision was arrived at in an attempt to provide a clearer, more detailed picture of how each site is adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming as it applies to mandates outlined in IDEA 2004. The information was coded to align with the themes identified from the interviews. Observational data was collected in an ongoing fashion throughout the document review process and interviews.

**Trustworthiness**

**Validity and credibility.**

In qualitative research, the terms dependability and trustworthiness are used to validate and give credibility to the researcher, methods and findings (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four components of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Several methods were used to uphold the rigor and trustworthiness of this research.

First, member checking was employed immediately following the transcription of the interviews. Participants were offered the choice to receive their transcription in person or via email. All participants selected the email option. They were asked to review the transcription to confirm that it captured the essence of the conversation and provided the option to add, edit, or delete any information. Maxwell (2005) describes this process as systematically collecting
feedback from the people you are studying. This, he concludes, “is the single most important way to guard against misinterpretation of respondent results” (p. 111).

Second dependability and confirmability were addressed through thick, rich description. Creswell (2009) identifies the use of thick, rich description as a validity strategy for a case study (p. 191). Interviews were part of data collection strategy and whenever possible, direct quotes from participants were used to provide authentic detail.

In addition, ongoing reflection was used to allow the reader of this research to follow the processes employed to arrive at the conclusions made. The researcher maintained an audit trail of steps in analysis along with jottings. These reflections would allow someone to recreate the data condensation and analysis to follow the logic employed to arrive at themes and conclusions.

Third, three sources of information were accessed for this study to provide triangulation of the data. Interviews and documents were primary sources of data while observations served as a third source of data collection in an attempt to triangulate the findings. According to Maxwell (2005), the use of several data sources serves as a “strategy that reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or methods, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (pp. 93-94). Creswell (2009) also recommends this validity strategy to establish justification for the themes identified (p. 191).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest the use of an audit trail for all data collected to assist in ensure the dependability of this research. All steps and documents related to this research were documented and are available for audit.
Maxwell (2005) reminds us that qualitative studies often employ small samples of uncertain representativeness and therefore only general answers to the question can be ascertained (p. 71). The issue of reliability in this research lies in its ability to be replicated. For qualitative research, this may not be possible, especially in a case study, because the findings are specific to the setting being studied. However, Merriam (2009) states, “The question is not whether the study can be replicated but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 221).

Researcher bias is always a central concern in qualitative research. Potential bias is acknowledged, as this researcher is an employee of the educational organization where the research was conducted. In addition, this researcher’s role of transition leader for the organization is acknowledged and could be interpreted to complicate the research process and findings. To address these concerns, a number of processes were employed. First, to minimize researcher bias, the researcher explored and presented her positionality (see chapter 1). In addition, analytic memos allowed the researcher to reflect on her interpretations as the data collection and analysis progressed. Although the involvement of this researcher at the research site could also bias the study, the researcher made every effort for this not to occur by sharing with participants the intent of the study and clarifying that her role as a researcher was independent from her role in the organization.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The protection of human subjects during the course of this research began with informed consent. This form was provided to all potential participants and addressed many of the parameters for their participation. Each member of the research groups identified for interviewing was provided an informed consent form to sign indicating their willingness to
participate in the interview process (see Appendix E). All participants are adult employees of the educational organization. Only staff members willing to participate were part of the final project. Participants were informed regarding their rights and the option to withdraw from the process at any time. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the process through the anonymity of the organization and participants. Participants were coded by site and position, using numbers and generalizations for transcribing and reporting of the results. This research imposed no direct risk to any participants. Any time required by participants was scheduled well in advance and convenient to their schedule. Participants were assured that their decision to participate or not in no way reflected upon their employment or ability to participate in any professional development that arises from the study.

In addition to the informed consent form for interview participants, parents were sent an “opt out” letter. This letter was sent to each parent of the identified student IEP, and where applicable (18 years and older) the student also received this letter (see Appendix F). No IEPs were reviewed for the purpose of this research until the timeline expired and opt out’s were received.

Prior to contacting potential participants, the researcher completed the “Protecting Human Research Participants” provided by the National Institutes for Health Office of Extramural Research website. The certificate of completion is attached as Appendix K. An application for conducting this study was sent to the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the university, and no data was collected prior to the approval of that application. The IRB application included all interview protocols and consent forms.
Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research design for this single embedded case study. The stream of three data collection strategies assisted in the triangulation of the data to answer the research question. All attempts to protect the participant’s identities and specific site location have been presented and add to the integrity of this study. The procedures outlined for data collection and analysis served to guide the writing of the final report.

In general, these opening chapters have demonstrated how this research project guided the investigation into what was occurring in the research sites related to transition documentation, programming, and practice. Chapter four will present the findings that served to answer the research questions.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

This chapter presents the research findings generated by the completion of document reviews, interviews, and observations. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of organizational change at four secondary special education sites within an educational collaborative as they implemented the mandated transition practices into programmatic offerings and documentation. Results will reflect the documents reviewed, and the viewpoints of the various stakeholder groups interviewed coupled with the evidence from observations to reflect the process of organizational change.

One primary and six subquestions guided this research.

Primary Research Question:
How are four secondary level special education sites within one educational organization adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming requirements set forth in IDEA 2004?

Subquestions:
1. How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in each site?
2. What factors impact the ability of each site to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?
3. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in each site?
4. What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives?
5. How is the attainment of performance objectives reflected by the collaborative as a whole?
6. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected across sites?

The external factors set forth in federal legislation and state policy are addressed organizationally through the implementation of transition programming, services and policy as an institutional priority. The collaborative objectives for transition documentation and programming are informed by the federal statute and guidance provided from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). They were identified as (1) age appropriate transition assessment, (2) ongoing transition related data collection, (3) activities and skill development in employment, post-secondary education preparation, and independent living, (4) a common language and common knowledge base regarding transition requirements. In addition, an individual performance objective for the secondary level sites was identified as: the creation of IEPs that are post-secondary based, according to IDEA 2004 and DESE policy.

Findings present the process of change that the four embedded sites experienced as they adapted their documentation and programming to align with the federal mandate, state policy, and internal performance objectives. Readers will find a description of the overall collaborative followed by a detailed description of the four secondary level sites that are mandated to implement the mandate.

This chapter includes a presentation of contextual factors that impact the activities in transition documentation and programming within the educational collaborative, and then at each of the four individual sites. A description of the educational collaborative, including its overall goals and mission, will first be described. This will be followed by a discussion of each individual site including a detailed description of the site and data obtained and analyzed through documents reviews, interviews, and observations. General findings addressing the primary
research question will be presented after the description of each site to provide an overview. These are then followed by the results from each site as they addressed the sub questions. This chapter concludes with the findings from a cross-site perspective as they relate to the subquestions.

**Purpose of the Case Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of organizational change at four secondary special education sites within an educational collaborative as they implemented the mandated transition practices into programmatic offerings and documentation.

**Contextual Factors**

**External factors.**

While there are many external factors that influence the educational collaborative, for the purpose of this study, two contextual factors were considered. These included the federal mandate as reflected in IDEA 2004 and state policy mandates as reflected in the three technical advisories published by DESE.

**Federal mandate.**

IDEA 2004 and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) continue to inform transition related practices for students with disabilities. A review of the documents by these governing entities provided the legislative foundation for this study. The inclusion of post-secondary IEP goals based upon age appropriate transition assessment designed to facilitate the child’s movement from school to postschool activities continues to serve as the guidance for states and local education agencies (IDEA, 2004). Transition services proposed and implemented for a student are also required to meet the Indicator 13 standards. Indicator 13 is the
federal data collection point relating to the evidence of transition related services noted in a student’s IEP (see Appendix B). Individual states are required to provide this information to the federal government in their Annual Performance Reports. The collaborative is not responsible to report this data, but the IEPs generated by the collaborative are counted in the data of the districts where the students reside.

**State policy.**

At the state level, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts continues to highlight transition as a focus for secondary level special education students and professionals through growing policy and professional expectations. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has provided educators with three technical advisories defining policy for transition documentation and practice for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Prior to these advisories, there was no direct guidance from the Commonwealth. The first advisory was published on the DESE Special Education Homepage in September of 2008. This advisory indicated that transition planning for secondary level special education students begins at age 14, two years prior to federal legislation. This advisory also introduced the Transition Planning Form (TPF), a form designed to document that a transition was discussed at the IEP meeting and is to be included with the IEP (DESE, 2008). The Massachusetts TPF is attached as Appendix A. The second advisory was published in September of 2012. This three-page advisory highlighted the “central role of appropriate post-secondary goals and annual goals in the transition planning process for students with IEPs aged 14-22” (DESE, 2012). This advisory also provided further guidance regarding the role of the TPF in the transition planning process. The final and most recent advisory published in April of 2014 defined and clarified the purpose of age appropriate
transition assessment in the post-secondary planning process for students aged 14-22, and provided guidance concerning the selection and use of transition assessments (DESE, 2014). The federal and state legislation mandates the use of the IEP as the foundation for all special education services provided to students with an identified disability. It is a legal and binding document. Transition planning is required to be a central part of this document for all students 14-22 in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Federal legislation (IDEA 2004) and Massachusetts policy, in the form of three technical advisories, has provided guidance to special education professionals regarding transition language in the IEP.

Massachusetts has also instituted a transition specialist endorsement to be attached to certain Professional licenses (MA Gen L ch 71 § 38G1/2). This voluntary endorsement is guided by a list of competencies created by Massachusetts DESE that identifies and clarifies the skills required to be a transition professional for the Commonwealth. They awarded the first endorsement in 2014. A copy of the DESE transition specialist competencies is attached as Appendix C. Three college programs have been approved by DESE to supply the required knowledge and skills to obtain the transition specialist endorsement. The teacher/leader for the collaborative was awarded this endorsement in October of 2014 and will be referred to as the Transition Specialist throughout the findings section of this chapter.

**Description of the Educational Collaborative**

Since its inception, the educational organization that was the subject of this research has strived to provide educational and functional skills to the students it serves. As it has evolved throughout the decades, the original single site has grown into a service center providing a cadre of services to students with disabilities from ages 3-22. Three of the four sites in this case study
have always focused on life skills, community experiences, and vocational skill training while the fourth site has focused primarily on academics and most emulated a comprehensive high school with accommodations and modifications to meet individual student needs. In addition to these four secondary level sites, there are four middle school programs, four elementary programs, and an early childhood program. The collaborative also provides related services, assessment, and professional development both internally and as fee for service to the districts. A description of all programs and services was accessed through the organization’s website.

**Collaborative Transition Implementation and Initiatives**

**Policy and staff development.**

In the summer of 2011, the organization underwent a redesign in the structure, creating teacher/leaders to serve a variety of roles and responsibilities. The 2012-2013 Annual Report defined this restructure in the leadership of the collaborative and the creation of distributive leadership and the introduction of teacher/leaders for programs and related services.

One new role created during this leadership restructuring was that of a teacher/leader for transition services. While a specific job description was not available, some information could be obtained from the transition services sections in the collaborative’s last two annual reports. The primary responsibilities of the teacher/leader for transition services was to serve as a resident expert and provide professional development, teaching support, and assistance for the overall organization in its mission to build capacity in transition services. Aligning practice informed by mandates, policy, and substantiated best practice research, the organization set a goal to provide world-class transition services to its secondary level students. In addition, one of the Core Values of the organization was specifically focused on transition as one of the driving missions of the
organization. In its 2012-2013 Annual Report, the third core value reads, “Our ultimate goal is to enable students to participate and contribute as fully as possible in the communities in which they live and to begin planning upon admission for transitioning to their home, school, or adulthood.” This same annual report, for the first time, included a Transition Services report, which addressed goals, initiatives and accomplishments.

During this same time period, the organization has indirectly been involved in three cases that went to the Massachusetts Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA), all relating to transition documentation and practices. A review of all BSEA cases is available through the DESE website. To protect the anonymity of the specific research site, the specific cases will not be referenced in this document. These cases involved issues of the appropriateness of transition assessments conducted and transition services offered through the IEP. All of these cases dealt with transition issues as a matter of FAPE, free appropriate public education. Two of the cases were found in favor of the representative school district, and one found the district in violation of transition mandates.

According to the documents reviewed for this research, the primary purpose of the teacher/leader role for transition services was to provide professional development to staff members, conduct transition assessments, align practice with mandates, and develop data collection systems to capture the transition related information necessary to develop informed post-secondary based IEPs. The position of teacher/leader for transition services began as a part time position and has evolved into a full time position over the course of three years. The development of transition services at the research site has evolved since a teacher/leader responsible for transition services was appointed in the spring of 2011. Information gathered
from interviews indicated that prior to this time, transition practices could be found throughout the organization, but they were not standardized.

The teacher/leader for transition services also began to conduct transition assessments for students when referred by their sending public school district, typically as part of the three-year re-evaluation. Leaders and teachers were encouraged to suggest that these assessments be conducted for all students aged 14 and older. These assessments were offered as part of the students’ regular programming and were not charged to the students’ sending public school district, but rather were part of the tuition already paid. Staff members were provided training on how to incorporate this assessment into an IEP, as they would reference any other assessment typically used in special education. Age appropriate transition assessment is part of the transition mandate outlined by IDEA 2004. In April of 2014, the Massachusetts DESE published its third transition related technical advisory specifically outlining its policy on transition assessment. Each staff member received this advisory and was provided one professional development session devoted to its content. Following the IEP review for this research, and the new advisory from DESE, transition related trainings to staff members continued throughout this research period.

While the organization was identifying their needs relating to transition compliance, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was developing policy, creating workgroups to address transition needs, and planning its first Capacity Building Conference. The teacher/leader for transition services was identified as a liaison between the organization and DESE, and participated in all the aforementioned activities. DESE published two lengthy technical advisories relating to transition, one about post-secondary IEPs in 2012 and a second providing guidance relating to transition assessment in 2014.
Professional development.

Beginning in January of 2013 the opportunity for regular large and small group professional development was provided for all programs and staff at the research sites. Professional development logs and discussions with program site leaders provided the background for this information. An entire professional day in January of 2013 was devoted to the topic of transition. Members of each research site actively participated in this full day training/workshop. Subsequently, ongoing, job embedded professional development was encouraged to continue at each secondary level site. Leaders of each site were contacted, via email, and invited to schedule monthly trainings for staff members at their respective sites on the variety of topics introduced at the full day training. These topics were designed to cover the federal mandate, state policy, and organizational guidance as they relate to transition documentation and programming for students. In addition, the teacher/leader for transition services was also available to support individual leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals for coaching and assistance. Appendix L provides an overview of professional development topics and the number of hours provided to each research site. Professional development sign-in documents were reviewed to produce the overview chart.

Information gathered from documents and interviews indicated that prior to the creation of the position of teacher/leader for transition services, the organization had no standard for documentation and trainings in this domain. Individual sites developed their own practices and community contacts. During paraprofessional interviews, it was noted that on several occasions these community contacts overlapped due to lack of communication between and among the sites. These overlaps in communication caused conflict within the collaborative and the perception of
an unprofessional impression upon potential community partners. The need for common language and practice, improved documentation aligned with federal mandates, and professional development was identified as a goal of the organization. Appendix L outlines the hours and topics of professional development each site received during the course of this research.

**Transition data collection.**

In addition to professional development offered to each research site, the organization instituted procedures to improve transition documentation to inform programming. In an attempt to improve documentation and gather informal transition assessment data to inform the IEP process, each student aged 14 or older was assigned a three-ring binder to serve as a transition portfolio. A review of the 2012-2013 Annual Report indicated that a DESE grant was obtained to improve transition practices. The grant monies provided the binders for each site, and training on their use was conducted. Each binder was organized in the same manner, with dividers labeled employment, post-secondary education, self-determination, recreation and leisure, and daily living skills, with one divider left blank. The purpose of the blank divider was to highlight individualized transition needs that may be the focus for particular students. Potential topics for this section were provided to staff members and could include topics such as transportation, health care, or independent living. According to the staff members interviewed, and a review of these binders, a variety of informal assessment forms were also created and published in the organization’s email account in a public folder labeled “transition.” Each staff member with an organizational email account had access to these forms and was provided training regarding their use.
Finally, an Internet based situational assessment form was created to collect basic employability skill data for all students going into the community for employment internships or participating in school-based vocational experiences. All pertinent staff members were supplied training and the link to the form. This collaborative initiative was designed to collect transition related data to inform the post-secondary goals for students. The use of this information was to provide documentation for IEP writing to align with the federal mandate and state policy.

These experiences and changes in leadership, mission, and structure have all been an attempt to build capacity and align practice with mandates, policy, and current research to ultimately prepare the students to have successful postschool outcomes. Throughout the 2013 and 2014 school years, ongoing, job-embedded professional development has been offered to all staffing levels at every grade level. Trainings tailored to elementary staff and related service providers have attempted to provide all staff members within the organization, not just those responsible to students 14 and over, with a general overview of transition. Topics have ranged from an overview of the federal mandate, review of state policy, ongoing data collection, transition assessment, Indicator 13 requirements, self-determination, and post-secondary based IEP writing. All four individual sites had evidence of some transition activities integrated into their programming. A thorough description of the individual sites follows this section.

**Description of Embedded Secondary Level Sites**

The four embedded secondary level sites within the collaborative are each unique. Each site is responsible to address the collaborative performance objectives, while they also address the individual performance objective of creating post-secondary based IEPs aligned with IDEA 2004 and DESE policy. Program handbooks, annual reports, and the collaborative website were all
used to gather the information required to provide an adequate description of each site. Sites Two, Three, and Four had a community-based vocational component that allowed for students to participate in employability activities supervised by paraprofessionals. Students participated in unpaid internships, volunteer activities, and recreational activities in the community. In addition, students from Site Two were assisted in locating and securing paid employment in their local communities. Site One, the site that most closely resembled a public high school, prepared students to access post-secondary institutions of higher learning by assisting with applications to colleges and completing financial aid forms. Site One staff members would also transport twelfth grade students to visit local colleges. These activities were primarily part of the individual site based program offerings and were not based upon age appropriate transition related assessment. These activities were not located in student IEPs, nor was ongoing data collected by the site and used to inform programming for individual students. To briefly describe each setting, and maintain anonymity throughout the research process, each site was assigned a number (One-Four) to allow for easy reference.

**Site One.**

Site One is a public day program providing educational and clinical supports to students aged 14-19 with emotional and behavioral disorders. Students at this site typically work toward a standard diploma meeting all high school graduation requirements set forth by their sending Local Education Agency (LEA). State testing requirements for a high school diploma are met by these students through the administration of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Examination System (MCAS) in the standard manner, allowing students a variety of approved accommodations that are outlined in their IEP.
**Site Two.**

Site Two is also a public day program located within the same building as Site One. This site primarily services students between the ages of 16 and 22 with intellectual disabilities, and provides academic, vocational, life skills, clinical, and ancillary services. This site has a major community based component, in which students gain employment experiences with the support of paraprofessionals serving as job coaches. The majority of these students do not participate in standard MCAS testing, but will participate in MCAS-Alt, a portfolio based version of the exam that does meet competency requirements for a standard high school diploma. They typically earn a Certificate of Completion at the time of aging out of special education services at 22 in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

**Sites Three and Four.**

The remaining two sites (Site Three and Site Four) provide vocational, life skills, and ancillary services to students with significant co-morbid disabilities. Students at these sites are between the ages of 14 and 22, and will not earn a high school diploma. They all participate in the MCAS-Alt and will earn a certificate of completion at the time they age out of special education. Any academic skills taught at these sites are primarily of a functional nature. Many of these students also have significant health related needs, mobility concerns, and may be non-verbal. These sites also have a community component with students participating in recreation, life skills, and employment related tasks in the community with paraprofessional supports. Three of the four sites (Sites One, Two, and Four) are considered public day programs in substantially separate settings. Site Three is located within a local public high school and is a substantially separate classroom.
Collectively, there are four administrators, thirteen teachers, and forty-three paraprofessionals currently working in these sites. These three levels of staffing are directly and indirectly responsible for meeting the transition requirements for students with disabilities. Table 4 briefly describes each program in more detail.

Table 4

Description of Staffing Levels and Student Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Paraprofessionals</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Teacher/Leader</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23 students with primary diagnosis categorized within the federal disability category of emotional disability. Students within this site have average to above average intellectual ability, graduate with a diploma, and complete their secondary education within the typical 4-5 year period. Students are between the ages of 14-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Teacher/Leader not included in the Teacher category although they serve at least 51% of their contracted time as a teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38 students with primary diagnosis categorized within the federal disability categories of: intellectual impairment, autism. A small percentage of these students graduate with a standard diploma. The majority students participate in MCAS-Alt and receive a Certificate of Completion. Students are between 16-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Teacher/Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16 students with primary diagnosis within the federal disability category of: intellectual impairment, autism. Students participate in MCAS-Alt and earn a certificate of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
serve at least 51% of their contracted time as a teacher

| Four | Principal | 4 | 12 | 34 students with primary diagnosis categorized within the federal disability category of: intellectual impairment, autism. Students participate in MCAS-Alt and earn a certificate of completion. Students are between 16-22 |

Note. This information represents the Sites’ staffing and student populations at the time of the research and data collection.

Research Findings

The data collected for this study included the review of 35 IEPs, 22 interviews and four site observations. In addition, many documents produced by the collaborative were reviewed to gather supporting information and descriptions of sites and transition initiatives. The collaborative has instituted the performance objectives of improved transition programming and services for all secondary level students in compliance with IDEA 2004 and state policy. Individual sites are responsible to carry out these objectives, set forth in the external environment, to improve organizational and individual performance in transition programming and documentation. During the data collection process for this case study, themes and observations emerged in individual sites and in the organization as a whole. This chapter outlines the unique issues encountered at each site, and then presents a picture of the overall collaborative.

Site One.

According to the Program Handbook and information gathered from interview participants, all students in this site are aged 14 or over, and therefore, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, should have transition to post high school endeavors as the focus of their
secondary education. Historically, this site has most closely aligned with a contemporary high school; focused on academics, MCAS preparation, and the graduation of students with a standard diploma from a standard 10-month academic year. Students at this site have average to above average intellectual functioning, and most typically qualify for special education services under the federal disability categories of emotional disturbance and autism. The majority of the students receive intensive behavioral and social/emotional supports in conjunction with social pragmatics instruction and interventions.

It is important to note that during the research a major change effecting Sites One and Two was being planned. This change would take place in the summer of 2014, after the data collection for this study was completed. According to the leaders of these two sites, a programmatic restructuring would be occurring in the summer of 2014. Historically, Sites One and Two have been located in the same building for over two decades, but each program has had a different focus, structure, student population, and administrator. In the summer of 2014, a major restructuring of Site One and Site Two occurred with a greater focus on transition planning. Staff members and students combined and the programs underwent reorganization with a new, renewed focus on transition, project based learning, and computer assisted instruction, as they became one site.

Subquestion 1.) How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected at Site One?

Site One is demonstrating growth toward the attainment of the collaborative objective to collect ongoing transition related data, develop activities and skill development in employment,
post secondary education preparation and independent living, and develop a common language and knowledge base. Theme #1 highlights this growth.

Theme 1. Growth of transition reflected.

All four participants from Site One discussed the growth in transition documentation and programming for students. Document reviews and observations supported their conclusions, and demonstrated a general increase in the focus on transition services and documentation. All the staff members interviewed at this site stated that transition is becoming a bigger focus. The teachers and the paraprofessional indicated that they are trying more than ever to get documentation in the transition binders in an attempt to collect more transition data. Observation data at this site provided supporting evidence of the following staff comment: A staff member suggested collecting information from a recently completed lesson and placing it in the student transition binders. The other staff members would collect potential transition related evidence and place it in student binders weekly.

One staff member observed, “Some staff have truly embraced transition and have run with it. For example, we had a project in engineering today that related to a life skill, and another paraprofessional suggested we take pictures and print them out for the student’s transition binders.”

The addition of two courses at this site demonstrates a greater focus on the transition programming growth. This site offers two classes in their daily schedule that are labeled “Transition.” One of these courses is designed for freshman students and the other is structured to meet the needs of students in their final year of high school. In addition, since all topics presented in these courses focus on transition topical areas, e.g., financial literacy, employability
skills, preparation for post-secondary education, and self-determination, documentation for the
binders is easier to collect. The teacher indicated that all assignments and experiences completed
by the students in these courses are appropriate for the student’s transition binders. She stated,
“My classroom para (paraprofessional) has done a really nice job this year of collecting the data
and making sure it gets into their binders.” In addition, during the data collection process, one
class was observed. This data collection demonstrated their growing focus on transition
programming and documentation. Students were engaged in a financial literacy lesson learning
about the many services offered by a bank.

Further evidence of growth at this site was captured through the sharing of staff members
who described the connections they were now able to make between this other educational trends
currently in focus in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The teacher/leader of Site One stated,
“Building a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) component into the program
and doing it right means that I have to be closer tied to transition; they are complementary in
some regards.” He went on to discuss the impact that PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of
Readiness for College and Careers) will have in the future. “If we adopt this test, less of our
students will graduate with a diploma, so they are going to need other stuff. We are looking to
create credentialing in things like CPR/First Aid, OSHA Safety, and landscaping. The districts
are excited about this, and in my mind it will give them a leg up.”

Evidence of growth as a theme for Site One was further evidenced through interview and
observational data. The teachers discussed new practices they had implemented based on
trainings that were conducted in the spring of 2014. They began to conduct “Pre-Conference
IEP” meetings with students in preparation for their IEP meetings. This practice was designed to
glean input from the student about their vision for the future and use this information for the creation of a post-secondary IEP. In addition, the teacher in charge of the IEPs, known in the organization as the facilitator, had begun the practice of retaining the IEP Invitation and Attendance sheet, with the students’ names and signatures present, to satisfy the Indicator 13 question six mandate, and capture the proof that the student was not only invited to the meeting, but participated in some manner. One teacher discussed beginning to have students take on a larger role in their annual IEP meeting and this site has begun the practice of student led IEPs.

Subquestion 2.) *What factors impact the ability of Site One to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?*

Site One demonstrated some gaps in reaching the collaborative performance objective of transition programming and the establishment of transition as an institutional priority. Data collected and themes identified for Site One demonstrate that although staff members at this site identified that they were growing and improving their practice in relation to the implementation of collaborative-wide transition initiatives, they also identified factors that have impacted or slowed their growth. These factors include a lack of site-based systems to collect data, lack of general resources, and a perception that it is not a priority of site based leadership.

Theme 2. *Lack of site-based systems and ease of documentation.*

While the site has access to data collection forms and transition binders to house this data, it lacks a system to capture and gather transition related data. During the observation of this site, it was noted that transition binders were housed in the “transition classroom,” which requires staff members to make a special trip during the school day or save this task for the end of the day. The teachers and the paraprofessional identified said that the lack of clarity around exactly what is to
be collected and by whom impacted their ability to develop a cohesive system. A teacher stated, “It is hard to keep up (with data collection). We do a lot in the moment but are losing it because we don’t have a system in place.”

**Theme 3. Not a perceived priority.**

The second factor that is impacting growth at Site One is the general perception that transition is not a priority for the leader of the site. The two teachers and the transition assistant at this site all commented on the fact that their leader does not attend the professional development sessions offered at their site. One teacher stated, “It sends a strong message that these trainings are scheduled in advance, and our leader seems to plan other activities at that time.” The transition assistant added, “I feel my boss doesn’t understand the significance of transition.” This perception that the leader of this site does not see transition as a priority was further described by participants in the lack of ability to access the community.

According to the transition assistant at this site, one of her primary roles is to take kids out into the community. She feels stifled in her ability to complete this task because her perception is that her leader is always hesitant to allow her to plan activities because she may be needed as a classroom paraprofessional. The two teachers supported her perception by commenting on the inability to get kids out of the building. One teacher stated, “Sometimes I want to plan a community activity for my students and I feel it is met with resistance, depending on what might be going on that day.” The other teacher tied this lack of community access to transition assessment. He stated,

Sometimes I am asked to complete a form for a transition assessment and realize I cannot answer the questions because I have no clue. I need our transition person to get the kids
out there so she can tell what the kids don’t know. That’s the biggest problem; it is rare for us to actually have a kid leave the building.

Theme 4. Lack of resources.

All four participants made reference to the impact resources have on adequately implementing transition programming. Resources identified by staff included time, competing interests in education, people, vehicles, and access to the community. The leader of this site made reference to what he described as “competing interests” that can impact the implementation of transition related programming. As the leader, his responsibilities include being sure that students are prepared for the state mandated testing, meeting the requirements for time on learning, and ensuring his site is adequately staffed to maintain safety for all staff and students. In addition, he mentioned that financial limitations impact his ability to have access to transportation and enough staff to engage in community based activities while ensuring that students remaining at school are adequately supervised and engaged in learning. He commented that if he had unlimited funds, he could secure adequate human resources and purchase enough vehicles to have more students in the community.

The two teachers and the paraprofessional also confirmed lack of resources as an obstacle to implementing transition programming at this site. “Not enough time in the day” was a sentiment shared by both teachers. Behavioral issues, staff absences and other demands often make it difficult to prioritize transition. They also referenced the lack of transportation this site experienced for the majority of the school year as a major obstacle in ability to provide adequate community based transition experiences for their students. One teacher expressed her frustration by saying,
I feel like not having a vehicle this year has really screwed things up, because things that should have happened by now did not happen. It’s so hard to plan without consistent transportation and that has been a real source of frustration.

The teachers also commented on the role of the teacher/leader at their site as an issue impacting their individual performance. One teacher stated, “There is no way someone can be a teacher and an administrator. That is the reason they are two different jobs. When he needs to deal with something, the paras have to teach and can’t go out with kids.”

All three staff members also perceived that “behavior management comes first,” and the transition assistant is not able to leave the building unless all staff is present and there are no potential behavioral issues. The transition assistant added,

My perception is that if a kid is having a behavior, I might be asked to get them out and lump it into a transition activity. Or on the other hand, if I have planned a transitional activity I have to work very hard to keep my obligation because if a student is having an issue, I don’t feel I have the support of my staff to fulfill the obligation if everything isn’t smooth sailing here.

This was also confirmed through the observation at this site; the job coach was in the classroom and never left the building or engaged in any transition related activity with the students. She was observed in the classroom supporting students in an academic lesson.

**Subquestion 3.) How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected at Site One?**

Individual performance is based upon the site’s ability to meet the federal mandate in documentation. All secondary level students are to have evidence of transition language in their
IEP. Seven IEPs from Site One were reviewed during the Indicator 13 audit portion of the data collection. Table 5 highlights the results from the Indicator 13 audit for Site One IEPs.

Table 5

_Site One Indicator 13 Results_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 13 Questions</th>
<th>Site One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1 – Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form?</td>
<td>Yes – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) that are based upon age-appropriate transition assessment?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) are updated annually?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 - Transition Services, including courses of study that will reasonably enable the students to meet these post-secondary goals?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5 - Measurable annual skill-based IEP goals related to the student’s transition service needs?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6 – Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed?</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7 – Is there evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the agreement of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA - 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to interviews with the two teachers at this site, creating the Transition Planning Form (TPF) has been a priority and was confirmed during the Indicator 13 audit in which all but one IEP reviewed from this site had a TPF available for review in the students’ files. During the
interviews the teachers also identified their goal to have students more involved in their IEP through assisting in the creation of their vision and attending their meetings. Of the seven IEPs reviewed for Site One, only two had evidence that the student was invited to the meeting. Aside from Indicator 13 questions #1 and #6, all other IEP areas required to be present in the IEPs were lacking.

**Subquestion 4.) What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives in Site One?**

Site One participants indicated factors that impact their individual performance as it relates to IEPs and transition services can be traced to the need for more knowledge.

**Theme 5. Need for knowledge.**

Staff at this site all spoke of the need for more knowledge, professional development, and information regarding policy and best practice in transition. This organization has a transition specialist that provides professional development and individual coaching. All four staff members stated that this had been helpful, but they all felt they required more knowledge of transition policy and professional development to be in compliance. The leader acknowledged his need for more training and felt that checklists for the variety of mandates might be helpful.

The teachers, who are primarily responsible for the transition mandates required in IEP development, both stated they required more specific transition knowledge around policy and practice. One teacher stated that in the course of the day, he does not have the time to research all the transition mandates, and he finds it very helpful to have someone on staff to relay this information to him. In addition, he also indicated that he has historically viewed himself as an academic teacher and that he needs guidance regarding how to incorporate transition into
academics. The other teacher stated that, “Whatever my understanding and perception is, I always want to double-check it. I want to make sure I am always following the law and just feel I can never have enough knowledge.”

In summary, staff interviewed from Site One all indicated that while they have been slow to adapt to the change in transition related documentation and programming required by IDEA 2004, they collectively indicated that they are moving forward. Lack of resources and a primarily academic mindset have caused this site to be slow to comply with transition mandates. They agreed that site based professional development has been helpful in expanding their understanding, connecting it to their daily tasks, and assisting them in improving their documentation and programming for students. While they all believed there is some growth, they still collectively acknowledged the need for more resources and training.

These findings were the result of four interviews conducted at Site One, document reviews, and site observations. This group consisted of the site’s teacher/leader, two teachers, and one paraprofessional. This sample represented 50% of the staff member categories identified for this study at this site. Average interview time for the four participants was 63 minutes. Site One was formally observed once for 75 minutes.

Site Two.

Similar to Site One, Site Two also provides educational and related services to students over 14 and therefore is required to have transition as the main focus of service delivery for all students. As previously reported, this site shares the same physical space as Site One but operates as a completely separate entity. According to the program handbook and annual report data, students at this site have primary diagnoses of autism and intellectual disabilities, and typically
remain in school until entitlement ends at the age of 22. A very small portion of students at this site earn a standard high school diploma; most are unable to meet competency on the state mandated test and therefore exit high school with a Certificate of Attendance/Completion.

This site has historically provided students with community based learning experiences and vocational exploration. There have been paraprofessionals identified as job coaches at this site for over 20 years. These staff members have made community connections with employers to provide paid and unpaid work experiences for students. This site also has offered Life Skills programming focusing on daily living skills for all students. They offer two vocationally based courses: one in culinary/hospitality, and one woodshop/technology course, and an academic component primarily focused on functional academics. In addition, they have provided students the opportunities to complete a variety of tasks within the organization. These tasks include light landscaping, the maintenance of a greenhouse, and light building maintenance.

Subquestion 1.) How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in Site Two?

Site Two demonstrated strength in attaining the collaborative performance objectives. Transition as a priority was evident in the daily operation of this site and the staffing roles. In addition, they seemed to offer activities and experiences to develop skills in employment, post-secondary preparation and independent living skills for their students.

Theme 1. Transition programming and resources.

Based upon the data reviewed, Site Two appears to have the most transition related programming available to their students. Several staff members commented that they feel Site Two does a good job offering transition programming to their students. Site Two has four
classrooms, all with some transitional focus as well as a job development component staffed by paraprofessionals identified as job coaches. In addition to the programming located in the building, they have five vehicles assigned to the site for transportation and community based learning opportunities. During the data collection process, three classes were observed and all were focused on some vocational or daily living task.

One class observed was the culinary program. The site has a fully functioning industrial kitchen that is state approved to provide breakfast and lunch to all the students at Sites One and Two, as well as a middle school program that is located within the building. The students run this kitchen under the supervision of a vocational culinary teacher. She has all her students complete a Serve-Safe certification program. She feels, “This site has always had transition as its primary focus.” In addition to the culinary program, at the main site, they maintain a second school lunch program at Site Four. Students and staff from Site Two also work at and run this kitchen. The teacher spoke of the employment skills practiced by the students in the culinary program in addition to the basic life skill of preparing food. She explained that, during the class periods that are not focused on the school lunch programs, students have the opportunity to choose and execute recipes that they could easily make and serve at home. During the observation, a student was selling cupcakes that she had made the previous day based upon a recipe she had selected.

The second class observed was the transition class. This classroom is located at a satellite location at the local public high school. Students were observed completing a group lesson on communication etiquette for employment. According to the teacher, the entire focus of her curriculum is on life skills and employment. She also includes a community component to many of her lessons. She described a recent trip the students had taken to a low-income housing
property in a local city. This trip followed a unit of instruction on paying for housing. During the observation, a job coach came to take a student out to an unpaid community based internship.

This site had three paraprofessionals whose primary responsibility is to take students into the community for vocational based experiences. These job coaches also stated that in addition to supervising students at unpaid internships, they seek employers to work with students, and assist the students in finding paid employment. One job coach described his role. “As a job coach I go out and find work sites, internships, find things for the students to get involved with, and then for older students, finding them paid employment.” Site two is successfully meeting the collaborative performance objective in transition programming.

Subquestion 2.) What factors impact the ability of Site Two to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?

While transition related programming at Site Two is present, staff indicated they require support to elevate their level of sophistication in planning and capturing the various experiences students have daily. The collaborative performance objectives of age appropriate transition assessment and ongoing data collection are factors to improve this goal. They will require support and guidance to accomplish this goal.

Theme 2. Need for guidance and support.

The leader of this site indicated his need for support from other knowledgeable staff members. He commented that sometimes it is difficult to keep up with all the changing regulations in transition. He identified his role.
As the principal of the building, I’d say that transition is about 20% of my day because I have to think of everything. I can’t specialize in transition. That is why we have others for support and to answer questions that I may have.

Teachers reported varying needs for support and professional development. While they were mostly aware of the federal mandate, and some Massachusetts policy, they still expressed the need to translate this information into practice. One of the teachers stated, “To be brutally honest, I have not received a lot of support or guidance. I was told I’d be teaching the transition class and responsible to teach kids about living skills like budgeting, cooking, laundry, and some job preparation.”

The paraprofessionals at this site collectively self-reported that they have very limited knowledge of the federal mandate and state policy regarding transition. Many paraprofessionals also felt they require more direction and direct supervision. They expressed concern about their role and lack of support and guidance. They collect transition related data and provide students support in community based experiences that are related to employability, daily living skills, and recreation and leisure. However, they do not clearly understand the legal importance of the information and data they collect and make available to teachers. The three paraprofessionals at this site designated as job coaches claimed they have no one directly overseeing them. One shared, “I’m still learning and there is no one overseeing us, so I don’t know if I’m doing things right.” Another shared the sentiment of need for direct supervision of the job coaches. “We have a lot of responsibility and have no direct supervision in our office.” Paraprofessionals generally shared that they want direction and clearer guidance, “I need to be more educated on the laws and requirements. “I feel I’m a little behind in that.” They seemed to realize the importance of the
role they play in transition programming and documentation, but they expressed that they require more support and training.

**Theme 3. Use of transition data.**

Ongoing transition related data is to be collected to inform an age appropriate transition assessment designed to inform the creation of a post-secondary vision for each student. This vision is to address the three areas listed in IDEA 2004: employment, post-secondary education and further trainings, and independent living. The vision statement, taking each student’s individual disability related needs into consideration, then provides the information required to create annual IEP goals to help the students facilitate movement toward their vision. Proper documentation of transition services can primarily be found in a student’s IEP based upon the Indicator 13 checklist. Observations at this site demonstrated a wide variety of transition opportunities for students, but no identifiable system or consistent data collection. Each student at this site has a transition binder designed to collect ongoing transition related data in five categories. The categories include employment, post-secondary education, independent living, recreation/leisure, and self-determination. While many opportunities existed within the school day for students to engage in activities aligned with the topics in the binders, many binders were empty or had very few documents in them.

During an interview with a job coach referred to the transition binders and demonstrated the level of data collected on the students. Paraprofessionals are largely responsible to collect transition related data at this site. Data collection forms have been provided to the staff members at this site, and while in the community paraprofessionals collect data on employability skills, career specific data, and reflections on recreational, leisure and other community-based activities.
One paraprofessional stated that prior to these forms, information was never captured and was never used. While there is now a process for collecting data, his impression was that it was still not being used. He shared, “I collect a ton of data on these kids and no one looks at it. I save it to the server so everyone has access.” Paraprofessionals from this site were all in agreement that the system in place for collecting and reporting data to inform IEPs and progress reports was flawed. One paraprofessional commented that only the transition specialist provided guidance and viewed the data collected. Another paraprofessional stated that he felt the data was not being utilized to demonstrate how a learning experience occurred.

The data stream between collection and proper documentation was identified as an area for concern. While paraprofessionals expressed they are generally pleased to be capturing data, the perception was that the data collected was not utilized in the IEP process. Two paraprofessionals, identified as job coaches, shared that they are not informed in a meaningful way about goals in the student IEP and therefore are often unaware of the specific experiences the student is supposed to have in the community. One shared, “It would be nice to know how much time a student is to have in the community, based on their IEP goals or a discussion that occurred at an IEP meeting.” Another shared, “Sometimes we find out the kid is graduating in six months and they were supposed to have more community hours. I can have up to fifteen kids on my caseload, and having an efficient way to know this information would help.” Finally one paraprofessional said, “We don’t know when an IEP is coming up and don’t have the data ready because we were not aware of it.”

Students’ experiences were documented at this site, but there appeared to be a disconnection between the collection of the information and the application of its purpose.
Paraprofessionals generally expressed they feel it is their responsibility to be collecting the data, but it is not getting where it needs be; namely in the IEP. One paraprofessional even described her role as, “documentation; my role is to capture data.” Documentation related to transition related experiences is to be kept in the student transition binder, and used to inform the IEP and progress reports. The types of experiences, data to be collected, and time in the community is to be driven by the IEP goals. The overall sentiment at this site relating to transition documentation was that a system is missing and the information collected is not being effectively used. One paraprofessional stated, “You might not realize how much information you have on a student until you get into their binder…it will show gaps.” Paraprofessionals identified the need to create a clear system with written guidelines to be sure that the data collected is informed by the IEP and then used to inform the upcoming IEP for each student.

**Subquestion 3.) How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in Site Two?**

Individual performance is based upon the site’s ability to meet the federal mandate in documentation. All secondary level students are to have evidence of transition language in their IEP. Thirteen IEPs from Site Two were reviewed during the Indicator 13 audit portion of the data collection. Table 6 highlights the results from the Indicator 13 audit for Site Two IEPs.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 13 Questions</th>
<th>Site Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1 – Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form?</td>
<td>Yes – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) that are</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicate this site does a good job completing TPFs and ensuring they are in the student files. Their overall poor performance lies primarily in not clearly connecting the students’ vision to their goals and transition services. As previously indicated, the transition programming is occurring at this site, just not being correctly documented in student IEPs. The IEPs reviewed for this site were particularly weak in the Indicator 13 areas relating to assessment, goals, and transition services (Indicator 13 questions 2-5). Only one of the IEPs reviewed from this site referenced transition assessment as the basis of the post-secondary goals. This same IEP had clearly identifiable post-secondary goals and transition services outlined in the document and disability related annual goals that were identifiable as transition related. The transition related programming and data is there, but it has not being clearly reflected in the student IEPs. Results
from the Indicator 13 audit of student IEPs at this site demonstrates that while students have access to a variety of transition related programming options, these experiences are not clearly documented in the IEP.

**Subquestion 4.) What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives in Site Two?**

Two issues were identified as hindering Site Two’s ability to obtain individual performance objectives designed to improve IEPs and the information needed to inform the IEP process.

**Theme 4. Communication.**

This theme is closely tied to the previous one, as much of the reported communication concerns are between teachers that are responsible for documentation and the paraprofessionals that collect the data. Paraprofessionals are often not a part of the IEP writing process, nor are they typically invited to the meetings. The collective sentiment among the paraprofessionals was that they know the students better than most of the teachers, and they get to see the students in the community. In addition, they are the primary data collectors and can identify strengths, areas for concern, and student preferences. However, they indicated that they are not consistently asked to share this information. Job coaches also felt they need a communication system between themselves and the teachers to share the IEP goals that are to be addressed in the community.

A related issue at this site was the often-missed communication about where students and staff are at any given moment. Many felt this impacts the site’s ability to build capacity in transition services. One teacher described it as a “scheduling nightmare.” She went on to say,
I have to know where everyone is at all times. I don’t like to waste time looking for a kid that is supposed to be in my class, only to find out that they are out in the community with a job coach.

During an observation, this fact was confirmed as staff was heard continually looking for students over the walkie-talkies used in the building. A common phrase used at Site Two was heard over the walkie-talkies, “Does anyone have eyes on (student name)?” When a teacher was asked about this statement and the constant observation of the walkie-talkie use, she stated that it occurs “all day long.” Another teacher stated, “I have no problem with my kids being out, I’d just to like to know in advance.” Finally, this lack of clear communication can impact a student’s ability to participate in a class. A job coach shared that he was not aware that because he continually took a student from one particular class, the student did not have a good grade. He wondered why the student was not being graded for the work he did in the community. This general lack of communication between the teachers and paraprofessionals was a common theme at Site Two.

*Theme 5. Chaos.*

Many staff reported the atmosphere of this site as chaotic. Of the nine people interviewed at this site, seven participants made reference to the disorganization often felt and four described the site as “chaotic.” There were several reasons for this sense of chaos. One was the large amount of movement by staff and students. There are two satellite locations, students out in the community, and students and a staff member providing lunch services to another building within the organization. The leader described it as a “program with many moving parts.” Students and staff are moving between three physical locations coupled with students that are out in the
community for vocational experiences. One paraprofessional estimated that up to three hours per day were spent daily, simply moving students between the three locations. She explained,

I did the math last week and, suppose I was doing transport to just our high school site, going back and forth would be 2 hours and 40 minutes of my day. This does not include transport to other locations or job coaching.

With all of this movement it was easy to understand that communication can be an issue at this site and a sense of chaos can ensue. A few staff members also indicated that there is a high level of staff absenteeism at this site, which exacerbates the level of movement and sense of chaos. A teacher described it by saying, “Everything is so chaotic and feels like an emergency because of poor communication. Everything is done last minute and we often go into ‘band-aid’ mode.” This sense of chaos often leads to people making last minute decisions and a paraprofessional shared, “Sometimes it feels like there are too many chiefs and not enough Indians. I often get told what to do by other paraprofessionals and really just want to know who I take direction from.” Another paraprofessional shared this sentiment and described the site as “functional chaos.” He elaborated, “Our leader is spread so thin and delegates a lot. There is a great gray area. People will just do their own thing and that is not necessarily a good thing.”

This sense of chaos makes this site less effective at instituting consistent transition programming and documentation systems.

These findings were the result of nine interviews conducted at Site Two, one observation, and the review of IEP data. This group consisted of the site’s teacher/leader, two teachers, and six paraprofessionals. This sample represented 56% of the staff member categories identified for
this study at this site. Average interview time for the nine participants was 52 minutes. Site Two was formally observed once for 75 minutes.

Site Three.

Site Three consists of two classrooms located within two separate public high schools. They operate as parallel programs. They are separated logistically, but they offer very similar programming, and were therefore reported as one site. Students at this site are all between 15 and 22 years of age and are considered moderately to significantly intellectually impaired. According to the program handbook and annual report data, students at this site are typically diagnosed with autism and an intellectual disability, and several students are nonverbal, requiring augmentative communication devices. Students at this site participate in the alternative state mandated testing through an alternative portfolio assessment. These portfolios are designed to capture the students’ ability to access the general curriculum, but will not allow them to reach competency determination and earn a standard diploma. These students typically age out of special education and receive a Certificate of Completion/Attendance. Each classroom is staffed with a nurse for students with specialized health care needs.

The focus of this Site is transition and functional academics. However, based upon the IEP audits for this site, these activities are not properly documented within the IEPs. Students have vocational and daily living skills goal areas, but these are not clearly based upon transition data or assessments. According to the interviews with participants, ongoing transition assessment data is collected and stored in the student transition binders, but is not reflected in the IEP. The results of the data collected are not specifically mentioned in the IEP, and therefore it was difficult to discern where the goal focus originated when completing the Indicator 13 audit.
Although these students are significantly cognitively impaired, the policy provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (DESE, 2013) clearly states that the post-secondary vision is to be that of the student. The vision for future employment, learning, and independent living should belong to the student, regardless of their level of intellectual functioning, and informs the disability related annual goals to help the student reach their post-secondary vision.

A recent practice at this Site has been the adoption of student-led IEPs, where each student participates in the creation of a PowerPoint presentation that highlights his or her favorite activities and interests. These presentations are narrated by the students and are used to start their annual IEP meeting. Interestingly, while each student attends their IEP meeting to show their presentation, the IEP Indicator 13 audits for this site indicate that there is no documentation that the students were either invited to, or attended the meeting. This Site has also conducted Person Centered Planning activities. These activities involved staff members visiting with students and families in their homes to host a meeting designed to capture the students’ goals, barriers, and potential resources. This practice is designed to gather all interested stakeholders in student’s life, in a non-school related environment, to plan for their goals and barriers in a group setting with the students’ interests and preferences as the focus. Again, while these activities have occurred, there was no documentation of this in IEPs and therefore no clear link to the IEP goals established for the students.

**Subquestion 1.) How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected Site Three?**

Data collected from Site Three indicated that they fully embrace the collaborative performance objective to institute transition as an institutional priority. In addition, there is ample
evidence of transition activities and skill development in employment and independent living skills.

**Theme 1. Transition services as a priority.**

Data collected through interviews and an observation indicate this site has a strong transitional focus. Community based experiences are a significant component of the student learning experiences at these sites. Students are engaged in community-based activities daily for vocational, recreational, and daily living skill practice. During the observation, the weekly visual schedule indicated that students have the opportunity for two daily community-based activities. Morning trips into the community focus on vocational activities at local businesses and afternoon trips focus on recreation, leisure, or daily living skills. When asked for specifics, staff members informed this researcher that afternoon trips involve dining at restaurants, going to the local YMCA for a swimming trip, shopping at stores for classroom supplies, and going to the local library. In addition, the students in these classrooms perform school-based jobs, and interact with students and staff members within their respective public high schools. When students are not in the community, they are an integral part of the public high school where the program is located. They complete jobs in the school such as delivering UPS packages, sorting mail, recycling and shredding.

The teacher/leader for Site Three has a very strong transition focus and has shared this with his other staff members. The teacher stated, “Transition is one of the strong points and an interest area of my teacher/leader. He has groomed me to see everything through a transition lens.” The teacher/leader expressed that he feels his students learn more skills outside of the classroom. He shared,
I take my role as a teacher very seriously in terms of providing as many meaningful experiences for my students in as many settings outside of the classroom as possible. We do things in the entire school, not just in the classroom. A lot of learning takes place outside of the classroom and is a great way to address a lot of functional academics.

The staff members at this site are also in close, regular contact with families. The teacher/leader shared his recent passion for informing families about transition related planning. “I’ve been very interested in and involved in working with families in terms of providing them good information about the entire (transition) process.” He went on to share about community based trainings for families that he and his staff members attend with the families of their students after hours. The teacher at Site Three reinforced this family focus point with his comment,

I think communication with families is really important in this process for students. We have talked about wanting to provide families with as much information about the (transition) process, and it’s never too early to begin. Once you begin dialogue with the families about the transition process it makes things a little easier for everyone involved.

**Subquestion 2.) What factors impact the ability of Site Three to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?**

While Site Three has opportunities for students to have activities to develop skills in employment and independent living, they indicate they require more depth to their current offerings.

**Theme 2. Programming to expand opportunities.**

The collaborative has identified transition programming as one of its performance objectives. While Site Three clearly has a transition focus as their priority, they also expressed
the desire to open new doors for their students. The leader of this site stated that a high school and a classroom may not be an age appropriate setting for these kids to learn in, and would like to see opportunities expand for this population on college campuses. Students at Site Three typically remain in high school until their 22nd birthday, and staff members expressed that a high school may not be the best setting for them to have age appropriate interactions. He expressed, “I would like to see opportunities for our type of students to interact with their own age peers on a college campus setting.” The teacher who was interviewed added, “I’m really interested in the college stuff like the ICE (Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment) program and Self-Advocacy course offered at Bridgewater State University. I think options for college are really cool, age appropriate setting and activities.” The teacher and teacher/leader described their participation at the Self-Advocacy Series program at Bridgewater State University. The free course is offered once per semester to students with disabilities in high school. The students attend an hour-long class on campus and then typically eat lunch in the cafeteria. The teacher shared, “The kids are so excited to “go to college.” They wear their BSU sweatshirts on Fridays, and having lunch in the cafeteria is a cool experience for them.”

Theme 3. Not developing new opportunities for students.

This site has a focus on community-based activities designed to prepare their students to be productive contributing members of society. All staff members are focused on preparing the students in employability, daily living, and social skills. Those that participated in this research expressed that they feel they do a great job focusing on transition, but struggle to make new community partnerships for their students. The paraprofessional in this site is identified as a “transition assistant” according to her job title and description. She captured this sentiment by
stating, “We are mastering our jobs where we are at, but we are not growing job sites for the kids.” The leader and teacher who participated in this research also mentioned the struggle to locate more community partners while managing the ones they have and meeting the other demands of their daily requirements. They both shared how they feel their current schedule is full, and their commitment to their current “jobs” both in the school and the community, leaves little room to develop new opportunities for students.

According to the interview data collected, they strive to provide the best possible outcomes for students. The students will ultimately live in their community, and providing students with real world experiences in employment, recreation, leisure, and community functioning are their goals. The teacher/leader shared, “Our students make progress in the community; being in real places, doing real things, instead of doing simulated things in the classroom.” The ability to grow these opportunities is their goal. The teacher noted, “We are very strong in school and community inclusion, but we could always do more.”

**Subquestion 3.) How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in Site Three?**

Individual performance is based upon the site’s ability to meet the federal mandate in documentation. All secondary level students are to have evidence of transition language in their IEP. Seven IEPs from Site Three were reviewed during the Indicator 13 audit portion of the data collection. Table 7 highlights the results from the Indicator 13 audit for Site Three IEPs.
Table 7

*Site Three Indicator 13 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 13 Questions</th>
<th>Site Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1 – Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form?</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) that are based upon age-appropriate transition assessment?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) are updated annually?</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 - Transition Services, including courses of study that will reasonably enable the students to meet these post-secondary goals?</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5 - Measurable annual skill-based IEP goals related to the student’s transition service needs?</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6 – Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7 – Is there evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the agreement of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No- 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA - 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus of this Site is transition and functional academics. However, based upon the IEP audits for this site, these activities are not properly documented within the IEPs. Students have vocational and daily living skills goal areas, but these are not clearly based upon transition data or assessment. Ongoing transition assessment data is collected and stored in the student transition binders, but is not reflected in the IEP. The results of the data collected are not
specifically mentioned in the IEP, and therefore it was difficult to discern where the goal focus originated when completing the Indicator 13 audit. Although these students are significantly cognitively impaired, the policy provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], September 12, 2013) clearly states that the post-secondary vision is to be that of the student. The vision for future employment, learning, and independent living should belong to the student, regardless of their level of intellectual functioning, and informs the disability related annual goals to help the student reach their post-secondary vision.

**Subquestion 4.) What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives in Site Three?**

There was no clear theme indicating why the IEPs at Site Three were not following the Indicator 13 standards. This Site has received the greatest amount of professional development (see Appendix L) yet is not writing IEPs that meet the requirements set forth in Indicator 13, or the guidance from DESE. Their practices and activities appeared to be their priority, and IEP writing was secondary. It was inferred from interviews that “paperwork” was not the strength of their teacher/leader. This site collects ample transition data as evidenced by their transition binders, and all of this information is used to develop the student IEP presentations. It was reported that every student assists in the development of their PowerPoint presentation, and presents it at their IEP meeting, yet there was no evidence in the IEP documentation that the student was present.

These findings were the result of three interviews conducted at Site Three. This group consisted of the site’s teacher/leader, one teacher, and one paraprofessional. This sample
represented 60% of the staff member categories identified for this study at this site. Average interview time for the three participants was 47 minutes. Site Three was formally observed once for 75 minutes.

**Site Four.**

Site Four is a public day program serving the organization’s most involved students. According to the program handbook and annual report data, students at this site have significant and multiple disabilities and primarily qualify for special services under the federal disability categories of autism, multiple disabilities, and intellectual disabilities. Many students at this site are nonverbal and may have significant mobility and health care needs. Visual supports are used regularly throughout the site and for individual students; in addition, many students utilize augmentative communication devices. The students range in age from 16-22 and all participate in the alternative state mandated testing and will not be eligible for a standard diploma. Increasing the individual level of independence for each student is a goal of this program. There is a large focus on basic skills at this site such as following a routine, signing their names, self-regulation, and communicating their needs in an effective manner.

This site has recently undergone some staffing changes with the appointment of a new leader, an influx of new teachers, and the transfer of several staff members to other program sites within the organization. The changes at this site have directed leadership to prioritize culture building as the main focus. They are also focused on the creation of a programmatic collective mission and vision, which has transition at its core. However, with all the recent changes, transition has not been as great a focus for their staff trainings and professional development opportunities. This site has received the least amount of professional development (See Appendix
L). Transition programming was still available to the students with a focus on functional daily living skills, and community experiences designed to expose the students to vocational and life skills activities. Transition related data was collected at this site, and all students have a transition binder to collect this information.

Each student at this site participates in a vocational course and a daily living skills class as part of their daily schedule. Access to community-based experiences was also available; there are two community-based experiences scheduled each day. Situational assessment data was collected on the students during these experiences. They also have added a staff member whose primary responsibility is to increase both classroom and community-based recreation and leisure experiences for these students. Most students at this site will move on to adult programs and may not be employed in the community, and therefore will need meaningful ways to spend their time. Exposing them to a variety of classroom and community based recreational and leisure opportunities and experiences is important to the staff members. So, while other areas of focus have been identified as priorities for this site, transition related programming is still a large component of this site.

Subquestion 1.) How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in Site Four?

As previously indicated, this site has been focused on other priorities to improve their overall culture and activities. Despite these priorities, they do have transition experiences for students designed to develop skills in employment and independent living. However, these experiences are riddled with perceived disorganization.

Theme 1. Disorganization of community experiences.
Community trips for vocational and recreational activities are part of the daily functioning of this program. However, the paraprofessionals that are primarily responsible for implementing these experiences and collecting data during the trips shared that they have no input to the grouping of the students. A paraprofessional indicated that there appears to be no thought or planning that goes into the students’ groupings for community trips. He stated, “No one takes the kids’ interests into account. They need meaningful jobs or they’ll never find out what they want or what they’re good at.” Two of the paraprofessionals stated that they felt they knew the kids better than anyone else, but were never asked for their input. A sentiment shared by both was summed up by one of them, “I’m just a para; no one asks me.”

It was reported that staff absences and student behavior dictates the groupings for community trips. One paraprofessional reported, “There’s no plan. There is supposed to be a plan, but it changes depending on staff outages and kids’ behavior.” During an observation at this site, a group of students was scheduled for a community trip, but the some students were changed just as they were about to leave. There was no clear reason given for this change. This lack of planning, and sudden changes to schedules that have been established, cause a sense of disorganization to the community component of this site. The disorganization can also impact the students. A staff member shared, “This bad planning can cause problems. These kids need to know when they’re going and where they’re going in advance. They don’t adjust to change easy.” Three staff members also reported that this spontaneous decision-making could present unsafe situations in the community. Two paraprofessionals reported that often community experiences are used as behavioral management, and that students having a rough time in school will be sent into the community. One paraprofessional described this fact. “People don’t think
about peer interactions, and when certain kids are together, especially if they are having a behavior, sending them out in the community is ridiculously unsafe.”

**Subquestion 2.) What factors impact the ability of Site Four to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?**

**Theme 2. Placed on the back burner.**

Based upon all the changes and the reprioritizing occurring at this site, many staff members expressed their feeling that transition has not been a formal focus at this site over the past school year. The leader described their focus by saying, “We have spent this year working on the ground level of program development.” She went on to describe the site as having a damaged culture and a general mistrust in leadership when she took over in May of 2013. While she acknowledged transition as an overall priority for this site, her first focus had to be on rebuilding the culture. “You have to look at culture first, and I think everyone is at a different place. I am trying to inspire people to do the right thing for the kids, not just so they won’t get in trouble.”

This site was provided with the initial transition trainings, data collection forms, and student transition binders. They do have a programmatic focus on transition related skills, and initially began to collect and use the data. One teacher shared, “Sadly, I feel everyone was gung-ho at the beginning, but unfortunately it has faded away a bit.” She and another staff member that participated in the interview portion of this research, both used the wording “backburner” to describe the level of transition documentation and programming aligned with the federal mandate and local policy at this site, stating, “Transition has kinda been placed on the back burner.” The second staff member to use this terminology was a paraprofessional completing a master’s
program and stated, “I am more aware of why it is important and why it shouldn’t be on the backburner. Especially for our kids, people tend to shoot low for them and our whole purpose is to increase independence, locate their strengths and weaknesses, and preferences, and help them find what they like to do.”

Staff collectively shared their desire to learn more about transition and to be held accountable. One staff member shared that there are not enough systems in place to keep this topic in the forefront. He contributed, “There aren’t enough systems in place, or structure, so the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Whatever is the hot topic of the moment gets all the attention and then that is replaced by the next hot topic.” Another teacher echoed this sentiment when she shared, “There is so much all the time, new initiatives, new schedules…I can’t even remember when I last filled out a data form, or collected something for a student binder.”

This site is clearly addressing other priorities to improve culture and program development. Those that participated in this research expressed their gratitude for the reminder this process gave them. They collectively articulated that compliance with the federal mandate and state and local policy around transition programming and documentation needs to be a priority. However, since they have been focusing on other goals, a gap has occurred in transition programming and documentation at this site and is the second theme identified.

**Subquestion 3.) How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in Site Four?**

Individual performance is based upon the site’s ability to meet the federal mandate in documentation. All secondary level students are to have evidence of transition language in their
IEP. Eight IEPs from Site Four were reviewed during the Indicator 13 audit portion of the data collection. Table 8 highlights the results from the Indicator 13 audit for Site Four IEPs.

Table 8

*Site Four Indicator 13 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 13 Questions</th>
<th>Site Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1 – Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form?</td>
<td>Yes – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) that are based upon age-appropriate transition assessment?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) are updated annually?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 - Transition Services, including courses of study that will reasonably enable the students to meet these post-secondary goals?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5 - Measurable annual skill-based IEP goals related to the student’s transition service needs?</td>
<td>Yes – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6 – Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed?</td>
<td>Yes – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7 – Is there evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the agreement of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority?</td>
<td>Yes – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously reported, there are transition related activities that students at this site participate in on a daily basis. However, a quick reference to the Indicator 13 audit information for this site indicates they had very poor performance capturing this information in their IEPs.
This site has some excellent opportunities for their students in the various transition domains of employability, daily living skills, and recreation and leisure, but there is a gap between these experiences and their relation to age-appropriate transition assessment, student disability related needs, and current IEP goals.

**Subquestion 4.) What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives in Site Four?**

*Theme 3. Transition data not codified.*

Since transition practices have been placed on the “back burner” it was not surprising to uncover that transition related data is not currently a priority at this site. A review of student transition binders confirmed the perception that data collected in the community is not used in the IEP to inform programmatic planning for the students. The binders were virtually empty. While data is collected in the community in the form of situational assessments and time in the community, there was no evidence of it to be found. The paraprofessionals interviewed from this site shared that data collection occurs daily in the community. They stated they complete the situational assessment forms on a regular basis. They also reported their perception is that no one looks at the data they collect in the community. This perception was captured by one of the paraprofessionals: “The data is never used for anything. It’s there just in case.” A teacher confirmed this current data usage issue when she stated, “I haven’t seen a data form completed by anyone and brought to me for the binders in my homeroom. I feel like we’ve dropped the ball. We don’t even have a data stream right now.”

This site is also preparing for some staffing changes that will impact the IEP process. During the interview process a teacher indicated that participating in this research study has
brought all they are not doing to the forefront. She stated, “I’m kinda scared…this discussion about Indicator 13 and Transition Assessment has made me realize what we are not doing. Maybe the upcoming staff changes will present an ideal opportunity to improve our transition stuff in IEPs and data.” The Indicator 13 results for this site demonstrates that there is room for improvement in their IEP process. These results reveal that the data collected is not utilized to inform post-secondary IEP goals. A teacher stated, “Transition data is not a priority right now, and it should be.” In addition, those that go into the community, primarily paraprofessionals, do not know specific goals that the students should be addressing while in the community.

These findings were the result of document reviews, six interviews, and observations conducted at Site Four. This group consisted of the site’s leader, two teachers, and three paraprofessionals. This sample represented 40% of the staff member categories identified for this study at this site. Average interview time for the six participants was 57 minutes. Site Four was formally observed once for 75 minutes.

**Composite analysis.**

Once each site was examined as a separate entity, they were then considered together as representing the organization as a whole. Once the data from each site was individually analyzed and the themes were developed above, the data was revisited and analyzed across cases to identify codes, which were then condensed into themes. The following represents the findings from this composite analysis.

The themes identified served to answer the primary research question: How are four secondary level special education sites within one educational organization adapting to the
change in transition related documentation and programming requirements set forth in IDEA 2004?

In addition, the composite analysis assisted in answering the remaining subquestions not addressed by the individual sites:

**Subquestion 5.) How is the attainment of performance objectives reflected by the collaborative as a whole?**

**Subquestion 6.) How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected across sites?**

Themes identified through the composite analysis included resources, lack of internal shared practice, having a transition specialist as a valued leadership position, and transition is fun and rewarding.

**Attainment of performance objectives.**

The performance objectives identified by the collaborative are addressed organizationally through the implementation of transition programming, services and policy as an institutional priority. The collaborative objectives for transition documentation and programming are informed by the federal statute and guidance provided from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). They were identified as (1) age appropriate transition assessment, (2) ongoing transition related data collection, (3) activities and skill development in employment, post-secondary education preparation, and independent living, (4) a common language and common knowledge base regarding transition requirements.

Transition programming for students was evident at all four sites in varying levels. Interview data collected at all four sites produced a picture of an organization that is changing. As individual sites attempt to align their practice to comply with the collaborative’s mission for
transition services and programming, levels of attainment and factors that impact the ability to reach attainment were discovered. The findings reflected the obstacles and triumphs at each site, demonstrating that while there is transition programming in place at varying levels at all four sites, the documentation required in the student Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) is lacking. Despite the obstacles encountered throughout the collaborative in this change process, there is an overall enthusiasm to improve. While programming is evident throughout, the challenge appears to primarily lie in the documentation.

**Theme 1. Transition is fun and rewarding.**

Staff members that work with students in the community and those that address transition related domains in classroom based activities collectively identified transition programming as a rewarding and enjoyable part of their job. All staff members that had the experience of working in the community with students expressed the rewarding nature of this aspect of their job. They collectively conveyed a sense of pride in their students when they witnessed them in a variety of community settings. One job coach expressed, “Seeing the kids out in the community has been an eye opening experience. I was like, wow, this is amazing.” Several teachers and paraprofessionals described the marked difference they observe in many students when in a community setting versus a school-based setting. A common statement was, “They (students) do a great job in the community.” One teacher expounded on this by saying, “In the community, I see kids work together and encourage each other, things I’d never see in the classroom.”

The ability to watch students succeed in experiences and demonstrate skills that would not be possible in a classroom setting was described as rewarding and fun by many staff members. Paraprofessionals are primarily the group that is responsible for community-based activities, and
they consider themselves fortunate to get to know students on a different level. All paraprofessionals who contributed to this research shared individual experiences they have had with students in the community. Collectively, they shared that these experiences allowed them to know the students on a different level, and this caused them to conclude that they know more about the students than any other staffing group. They told stories about moments when students demonstrated skills and successes that could only be observed in community settings. They also indicated that these experiences were rewarding to them in their role.

The ability to teach students skills and share experiences with them that will carry them into their adult roles and responsibilities provided staff with a sense of accomplishment. A paraprofessional shared, “Helping students get a paid job, or achieve something like a learner’s permit, helps us feel like we make a difference.” Another paraprofessional felt that he had a unique opportunity to assist students in finding their interests and strengths. He felt that if this did not happen in school, it might not ever happen. A teacher summed this theme up by illustrating, “This type of work is fun. The ability to do real things in real settings with kids is meaningful and very exciting.”

Theme 2. A transition specialist as a leadership position.

During an organizational restructuring at the leadership level in the spring of 2011, a position was created for a teacher/leader primarily responsible for transition services within the organization. This staff position was created in an attempt to build capacity, improve organizational knowledge and practice, and provide professional development relating to secondary level transition. This position was designed to provide a common source of information and support for all organizational sites and staff members providing services to
students 14 and older. During the data collection for this research, 18 out of 22 participants identified this position as an overall positive addition, and helpful resource.

Each level of staffing identified this position as a benefit to the organization for slightly different reasons. Leaders of all four sites identified this position as helpful to their work. One leader stated, “I tend to leave this to our transition specialist to inform and guide me and tell me what we need.” Leaders’ individual responsibilities are quite demanding, and taking this responsibility from them was collectively identified as a benefit. Accessing a resident expert when they have questions, and having an internal source of professional development for their staff members, saved the leaders both time and money. One leader shared, “As long as I have support when I have questions…it’s not my area of expertise and I have to oversee everything. Having a person to contact stops me from getting overwhelmed.” Another leader stated, “The work of the transition specialist has been very valuable, especially as it relates to creating our mission and policies. Trainings around Indicator 13, documentation and data collection have been helpful to me and my staff.”

Teachers that identified this resource as beneficial to their role also commented on the professional development opportunities and assistance with documentation as helpful to their work. A teacher at Site One shared, “The trainings have been most helpful to me. In the course of my day I don’t have time to research the policies that come down. I rely on the transition person to bring these to my attention.” As the staff members primarily responsible for the creation and implementation of IEPs, transition policy as it relates to proper documentation and programming is essential for this group. They primarily rely on the Transition Specialist to provide this information. A relatively new teacher commented that during their recent formal
education, transition was never mentioned. “I remember being asked what I knew about transition when I first started, and I had no clue.” This was a common finding among all the secondary level special education teachers in this organization.

Paraprofessionals who took part in this research were those identified by their job titles or primary roles as having a large community based component to their responsibilities. Collecting transition related data on students while they are out in the community has evolved into a major function of their role in the transition documentation and programming process at the organization. In addition, they collect informal assessment data during transition classroom based instruction. The paraprofessional from Site One felt having someone on the staff to turn to for assistance in implementing transition documentation and programming has been helpful. As a staff person without a formal training in special education, she communicated that professional development has been helpful in informing her of the federal and state laws regarding transition. She is primarily responsible for collecting community-based transition related data, and stated that it is very helpful to have the emotional and physical supports provided by her transition specialist. She stated, “My transition coordinator has been very helpful to me in educating me about what the state and federal laws are…and provides support when I feel like things aren’t moving as fast as I’d like them to.”

Many of the transition related documentation forms created for the organization, by the transition specialist are primarily the responsibility of the community-based paraprofessionals. They have received training on the specific forms, and typically collect this data daily. Overall, these paraprofessionals expressed their gratitude for these forms because they felt the work they complete in the community with students was finally being captured. One paraprofessional
shared, “The data is great. I want my day to count.” Many paraprofessionals shared that they often felt like their role was insignificant. At least five paraprofessionals stated the phrase, “I’m just a paraprofessional; no one listens to me.” Several also shared that the trainings they have received and documentation responsibilities they now have around collecting transition related data made them feel like valued members of the team. Three paraprofessionals shared that prior to the transition related data collection they felt that no one really took an interest in what they did with students. One paraprofessional conveyed, “The Transition Specialist was the first person to ask me what I do and what would help me.” Finally, paraprofessionals related that they appreciated the trainings supplied by the transition specialist on the laws and requirements that drive transition related documentation and programming for students. One shared, “My transition specialist has been very helpful in educating me about federal and state laws and giving me suggestions about what to do with the kids.”

In conclusion, all staffing levels indicated that having a staff member, as a resident expert has been helpful. Leaders found value in this position by having professional development provided internally and having someone to consult when questions or particular issues arose. Teachers found the professional development, especially around laws and policies as they related to IEPs, to be most helpful to their role. Paraprofessionals also indicated the professional development as valuable to their roles in addition to the new data forms they now use with students in the community.

Theme 3. Lack of internal shared practice.

The data reviewed and collected for this study highlighted the fact that each site operates in the silo mentality, which is common in the field of education. Even Site One and Site Two,
which share the same physical space, rarely work together to share resources and community contacts. Based upon the data collected through this study, each site was identified to have strengths as they relate to transition programming and documentation, but there are no opportunities to share the best practices occurring within the organization. Twelve of the 22 participants stated that they had never visited another secondary level site within the organization and therefore did not really know about their transition practices. One teacher stated, “I can’t really speak to other programs. I’ve never seen them.”

During an observation at Site Three, a student who had just participated in their IEP meeting was excited to show this researcher the PowerPoint presentation he had just presented at the meeting. The presentation reflected his likes, favorite activities, and goals. This self-determination activity and evidence of student participation in the IEP process does not occur at all secondary level sites within the organization. Staff members at other secondary level sites were aware of this practice at Site Three, but had not replicated it at their respective sites. In addition, the evidence of this practice is not captured in the individual student IEPs as indicated by the overall results of Indicator 13, Question 6 data for the organization. Only seven of 35 IEPs reviewed for this study had evidence of student attendance at the meeting and none of the IEPs from Site Three indicated that the students were invited to the meeting, even though they actively participate in the process.

Each secondary level site has some level of community based instruction and vocational experiences for their students. The data indicates that this lack of shared practice impacts the level of community participation. Site Two has three staff members solely responsible for community based vocational and independent living activities. They are identified as job
coaches, and have time in their daily schedule to make community based contacts for their students. Other sites do not have this staffing level and therefore have limited community contacts. A staff member at Site Four shared, “I know other sites have a lot of variety in the community, and I’m a bit jealous. That is the direction we need to be headed in, but don’t have time or people to do it.” A staff member at Site Three shared this sentiment with her comment, “We need to grow, and I can’t do it alone. We need a better team within the organization.” Finally, a staff member at Site One stated, “I would like access to all contacts in the organization because I am so limited with time and accessibility to the community.”

It is important to note that all four secondary level sites occupy the same geographic locations, spanning the same five towns and an area of roughly 150 square miles. There are a finite number of potential community partners in this area, and there have been occasions when multiple staff members contact the same employer for their own interests, and have damaged relationships with community partners.

**Theme 4. Resources.**

The lack of adequate resources was a common theme identified among many respondents. Resources identified included vehicles, community sites, staff members, time in the course of the school day, and money. Eighteen of 22 participants identified the lack of resources as a challenge to implementing transition programming and maintaining appropriate related documentation. Although the organization has staff members primarily charged with community-based activities, many felt there was still not enough staff to meet the needs of all the students that could be out in the community, while maintaining the academic, behavioral, and related services also identified
as priorities for the students. One leader summed up this sentiment by saying, “Lack of resources, both human and money, make transition a challenge.”

The organization requires all new employees to obtain their 7-D license within thirty days of hire. This license allows staff members to drive the vehicles with the school bus designation. Currently, the organization has a fleet of 15 vehicles with the 7-D designation. These vehicles are used throughout the organization at all sites, including those that do not service secondary level students. Nine of the vehicles are minivans that can transport up to five students. There is one wheelchair accessible van and three cars. Eleven of the vehicles are assigned full-time to the secondary level sites that were part of this study. While students at all four sites participate in community-based experiences, many sites identified time to make new community contacts and develop new work sites as a challenge.

Each site is responsible to develop community contacts and develop work sites for students. Site Two is the only site that has staff members solely responsible for community-based activities. These staff members develop work sites and community contacts, but do not share them with other sites. The time required to meet with business owners, call community resources centers, schedule trips, and organize these activities was identified as an obstacle. The other sites rely on contacts they have developed over the years, and struggle to create new experiences for their students. One paraprofessional commented, “We need to grow. The experiences that we have are great, but there is no time to develop new contacts.” Several staff members shared this sentiment. One leader commented, “Managing the time is difficult. If we find new businesses, how do we schedule them in with the ones we already have? It becomes very challenging.”
Leaders had a different perspective regarding resources, and primarily focused on the cost related to transition. One leader commented, “It’s very costly for one staff to take one student out for three hours alone; it’s very time consuming and costly.” The four leaders that participated in this study collectively identified resources as a challenge in implementing transition related programming and documentation at their respective sites. Two leaders shared that if they had unlimited funds to hire staff and purchase vehicles, transition programming would be much easier. In addition to funding, leaders need to address the issues of daily staffing, and how to keep doing scheduled community based activities while keeping staff levels back at school adequate to maintain safety. Sometimes community trips and internships need to be cancelled to allow safe and appropriate staffing levels in the buildings. This has frustrated the paraprofessionals who work in the community. One paraprofessional shared, “I feel my job is for both the students and employers. I’m the one that needs to smooth things over when kids don’t go to their job.” Community placements are a limited resource, and can be difficult to obtain and maintain.

*Individual performance attainment.*

For this case study, a sample of IEPs were selected based upon a time span that followed the Indicator 13 training presented to all four secondary level sites within the research site. IEPs that were created, signed, and implemented between January 2, 2013 and June 28, 2013 were selected as potential documents to be reviewed. Opt-out consent forms (Appendix E) were sent to the families, and when appropriate, to the students. Of the 39 IEPs identified as meeting the criteria for selection, 35 were ultimately used, as four families exercised their option to opt out of the study.
The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) provides guidance on the federal requirements for completing an Indicator 13 checklist. In addition, the Massachusetts Annual Performance Report provides instructions for the completion of their Indicator 13 checklist form. Both were referenced as the IEPs were analyzed. According to the NSTTAC directions, if one of the questions is answered with a “NO,” the entire IEP fails the Indicator 13 checklist. Overall, all IEPs reviewed for this study received at least one “NO,” and therefore it is to be assumed they all failed to pass the Indicator 13 checklist requirements. Although the Massachusetts directions never indicate this, the federal standards are assumed to supersede the state directions. Results of the 35 IEPs reviewed are presented below. A description of the results is followed by a visual depiction of the overall collaborative performance for each question.

**Question 1 - Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form?**

The Transition Planning Form (TPF) is a state required addition to the IEP, beginning when a student turns 14. This Massachusetts specific form is not legally part of the IEP, but is intended to serve as an action plan for transition planning and services. The information used to make the determination for question one was based upon the evidence in the student’s file. The instructions provided by DESE indicate a “NO,” to be entered if the TPF is not in the student’s file. When these findings were checked against the IEP management database used by the organization, all students had completed TPFs. While all students had a TPF, they were not all printed and placed in the student’s file. Since the DESE guidance provided in the Technical Advisory from September of 2012 indicates that this document is to be presented before the
actual IEP to lead and inform the remainder of the planning for the student, the lack of a printed copy retained in the student file means there is no evidence the form was completed. The lack of a printed copy also indicates that not all staff will have access to this transition planning document. Interview data revealed that paraprofessionals do not have usernames and passwords to access the IEP database utilized by the organization. The graphic below depicts the organizational performance for question one of the Indicator 13 checklist demonstrating that slightly less than half of the files reviewed met this indicator. Figure 4 depicts the overall collaborative performance on question 1 of the Indicator 13 checklist.

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4. Composite results for question 1 of the Indicator 13 checklist. Slightly over half of the TPFs are missing from student files.*

**Question 2 - Appropriate measureable post-secondary vision/goal(s) that are based upon age-appropriate transition assessment?**

While each IEPs reviewed contained a vision statement, only one of these was clearly based upon age appropriate transition assessment as outlined by the 2012 DESE technical advisory and Indicator 13 checklist. Of the 35 IEPs reviewed, fifteen students had transition assessment reports contained within their student files, and only one was referenced within the appropriate section of the IEP: the key evaluation summary section. In addition, all students
within the organization that are 14 and older have transition portfolio binders designed to collect ongoing informal transition related data. Information contained within these binders could also be referenced as informal transition assessment data to inform the student’s post-secondary vision. No evidence of this could be found in 97% of IEPs reviewed. Figure 5 depicts the collaborative’s performance for question 2 of the Indicator 13 checklist demonstrating the poor collaborative wide performance on this indicator.

![Figure 5](image)

Figure 5. Composite results for question 2 of the Indicator 13 checklist. While many students had post-secondary goals, only 3% were derived from age-appropriate transition assessment.

**Question 3 - Appropriate measureable postsecondary vision/goal(s) are updated annually?**

Each IEP reviewed was current, signed by districts and family, and identified as the active document for the school year reviewed. The information for this Indicator 13 question is again based upon the student’s vision statement that is based upon age appropriate transition assessment and is located in the key evaluation, or vision section on the IEP and TPF. Beginning at age 14, the student’s vision statement is to belong to them and be stated in the first or third person. Prior
to the age of 14, the vision statement belongs to the IEP team and is often presented as a team vision for the student.

The guidance provided by DESE in the technical advisory from September of 2012 clearly defines that the vision statement is to be written in goal form using measurable language. The one IEP from Site Two with a “YES” for question 2 also demonstrated at least one annual goal that was readily connected to the vision and assessment data. The IEP from Site Three with a “YES” response for this question, while not based upon age appropriate transition data, did present annual goals that were connected to the student’s vision, and was therefore answered affirmatively. Figure 6 depicts the collaborative’s performance for question 3 of the Indicator 13 checklist, demonstrating that a small portion of the IEPs reviewed satisfied this indicator.

![Pie chart](image)

**Figure 6.** Composite results for question 3 of the Indicator 13 checklist. When compared to the previous IEP, only 9% of the post-secondary goals/vision were measurable and updated.

**Question 4 - Transition Services, including courses of study that will reasonably enable the students to meet these post-secondary goals?**
None of the IEPs reviewed contained an identifiable course of study for the student. The three IEPs that received a “YES” response had specific transition services related to the information from questions 2 and 3 located in the service delivery grid. The graphic below depicts the collaborative’s performance for question 4 of the Indicator 13 checklist demonstrating that only 9% of the IEPs reviewed for this study contained an identifiable course of study.

![Figure 7. Composite results for question 4 of the Indicator 13 checklist. Only 9% of the IEPs reviewed had a clear course of study outlined.](image)

**Question 5 - Measurable annual skill-based IEP goals are related to the student’s transition service needs?**

The primary intent of this Indicator 13 question is to determine if the annual IEP goals that are based upon disability related needs are clearly designed help the students meet their post-secondary goals. For students that do not have clear transition related needs identified through an age appropriate assessment in their vision statement, a “NO” response to this Indicator 13 question is a logical conclusion. Where the justification for the student’s transition related goals is not clearly indicated in other sections of the IEP, the information that their goals are based upon is missing. Based upon this lack of a clear need for the goal, indicated by assessment, this
question is not able to receive an affirmative response. Figure 8 shows that only 6% of the IEPs reviewed demonstrated a connection between the disability related goals and the student’s post-secondary goals.

Figure 8. Composite results for question 5 of the Indicator 13 checklist. Only 6% of IEPs reviewed had skill-based goals that were directly related to their transition service needs.

**Question 6 - Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed?**

According to the guidance provided by the DESE technical advisory from 2008, students that are 14 and over are to be invited to their annual IEP meeting. Evidence of this is located on the actual invitation notice that is sent to all participants of the meeting. The student’s name should be included in this list of participants once they turn 14. A copy of the invitation, placed in the student file, is the evidence required for this Indicator 13 question. In addition, this information might also be captured on the attendance sheet where the student’s name should appear as a participant and attendee of the meeting, or indicated in the IEP itself, typically under Additional Information on page 8 of the document. Evidence to answer this question was determined by the presence of the invitation or attendance sheet, with the student’s name present.
Despite the fact that students were invited and even participated in their meetings, only 20% of the files reviewed had evidence.

*Figure 9.* Composite results for question 6 of the Indicator 13 checklist. Only 20% of the IEPs reviewed had evidence that the students was invited to the IEP meeting, or attended the meeting.

**Question 7 - Is there evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the agreement of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority?**

This Indicator 13 question is designed to capture the presence of an adult agency representative at the IEP meeting. Typically, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, adult service providers get involved in a student’s case following a referral from the public school district two years prior to graduation or the student’s 22nd birthday. Special education services terminate in Massachusetts upon the awarding of a standard high school diploma or at the time a student ages out at 22. There is a Not Applicable (NA) option for this question if the student is not of the age where they are two years from exiting public education, or 18 years old. For those students who are within the two years of exiting special education, evidence of the indicator should be located on the IEP invitation and the attendance sheet. Of the 20 IEPs that met the
criteria for involvement of an adult agency representative, only two were able to confirm the presence of such an individual through the IEP attendance sheet. In cases where an attendance sheet could not be located, the entire document was reviewed. Figure 10 demonstrates that of the 20 students this was applicable to, only two students had evidence that an adult agency was invited to, or attended the IEP meeting.

Figure 10. Composite results for question 7 of the Indicator 13 checklist. Twenty of the IEPs reviewed met the criteria to have an adult agency representative present at the meeting; yet only two had evidence of an adult agency representative on the invitation.

Summary of the Findings

This chapter has presented the research findings of data collected through document reviews, observations, and interviews. As the collaborative attempts to meet its objectives to implement effective transition programming and establish transition services as an institutional priority, several important accomplishments and deficits were identified through the research findings. The ability to address these objectives is tied to the individual sites’ ability to produce documentation that is aligned with IDEA 2004 and current state policy in the IEPs.

The four secondary level sites within the research site all demonstrated levels of attainment toward the collaborative’s performance objectives. The findings also highlighted...
factors that are impacting the individual sites’ ability to meet these objectives. All four sites had shortcomings in the documentation as evidenced by the collective Indicator 13 data, which hinders their individual performance. All IEPs reviewed for this research failed to pass the Indicator 13 checklist. While transition related programming is occurring for students, it is not clearly based upon transition assessment or outlined in student IEPs. In addition, transition related data is not consistently being captured and retained to inform programming. Finally, each site had evidence of unique factors that impacted their ability to perform adequately as a site to align with the federal requirements in transition related documentation and programming. In the chapter that follows, implications for these findings will be discussed.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Based upon provisions in IDEA 2004, and guidance from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the organization that served as the site for this research has introduced policy and performance objectives that were designed to impact the transition practices in documentation and programming for the collaborative’s secondary level sites. Transition as an institutional priority at the collaborative was defined by the objectives in transition programming to be met by each embedded secondary level site. These objectives included (1) age appropriate transition assessment, (2) ongoing transition related data collection, (3) activities and skill development in employment, post-secondary education preparation, and independent living, (4) a common language and common knowledge base regarding transition requirements. In addition, an individual performance objective for the sites is the creation of IEPs that are post-secondary based according to IDEA 2004 and DESE policy. This chapter will discuss the research findings of the case study that was completed and draw implications for theory, research and practice.

Referencing the results that were revealed in chapter four, the discussion will address the primary research question that was introduced at the onset of this case study: How are four secondary level special education sites within one educational organization adapting to the change in transition related documentation and programming set forth in IDEA 2004?

The subquestions addressed through this research produced findings from the four individual sites and the collaborative as a whole. These subquestions were:

1. How is the attainment of the collaborative performance objectives reflected in each site?
2. What factors impact the ability of each site to obtain the collaborative performance objectives?

3. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected in each site?

4. What factors impact the ability to obtain individual performance objectives?

5. How is the attainment of performance objectives reflected by the collaborative as a whole?

6. How is the attainment of individual performance objectives reflected across sites?

Theoretical Links

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used as the lens through which to view this research was the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change and Performance (Burke, 2011). The twelve interactive, bi-directional components of this theory indicate to readers and researchers the complexity of organizational change. Figure 11 presents the model.
The components of the model are separated into two categories: Transformational and Transactional Factors. Transformational components include the external environment, leadership, mission and strategy, and organizational culture. Transactional Features include management practices, organizational structure, systems and policies, work climate, task requirements, motivation, and individual needs and values. Individual and organizational performance is impacted by and will be the result of both transformational and transactional change components.
Transformational factors are most often caused by the external environment and require significant new behaviors from organizational members. Transactional factors are those that most closely impact the day-to-day operations of an organization (Burke, 2011). Framing the findings of this research into the two main categories of this model will assist the reader in understanding the complex nature of change required to align the practices in transition documentation and programming with IDEA 2004, state, and collaborative policy. As a change filters its way through the model, the ultimate outcome is to change individual and organizational performance. This research highlighted the complexity of this change. Participants clearly required more than knowledge of the external factors to impact individual performance. This model is an excellent demonstration of the multifaceted process of change.

Implications for Theory

The themes revealed by the individual sites, and the collaborative as a whole, demonstrate that both transformational and transactional factors are equally important and serve to inform one another. While an organization attempts to implement a change, transformational factors are important to establish the parameters for the change. The role of leadership to clarify the new mission and strategy based upon the external environment was found to be an important piece of the process. However, the results of this study implied that the transactional factors that most closely impact those responsible to institute the change are perhaps more significant.

Conclusion 1.) The process of change is more significant than the content of the change to impact individual performance.

One of the most significant findings from this research was that those responsible to implement a change require much more than knowledge of the content. While many participants
acknowledged their need for increased knowledge regarding the federal mandate and state policy, the fact that they required more support in knowing how to translate this content into practice was undeniable. This researcher made an analogous comparison of the Burke-Litwin model to a pinball machine. As a pinball moves through the machine, it continues to attempt to escape at the base of the machine. Along its journey, obstacles that it bounces against impede the pinball’s progress. This analogy demonstrated that change does not enter the top of the Burke-Litwin model and move unobstructed to the ultimate goal of changed individual and organizational performance. It became quite evident that the external environment does not lead directly to individual and organizational performance changes. At each point throughout this research the “pinball” of the external environment mandate and policy driving this change would inevitably bounce back throughout the model as it attempted to make its way to the bottom to change individual and organizational performance.

During the course of the data collection for this research, each component of this model was hit by the “pinball”. At times it appeared to get stuck as it bounced repeatedly on the components of systems and policies, leadership, individual needs, and task requirements. These components are each related to and impacted by the components above, below and beside them. The connections between the components of this change model are important. One of the major findings from this research lies in the finding that how the change is to be demonstrated is as important as what is driving the change. This finding is consistent with the Burke-Litwin model that implies the external environment has great impact, but once change enters an organization, the transactional factors have the greatest impact on influencing the individual and organizational
performance (Burke, 2011, p. 224). Burke (2011) further asserts that the downward arrows carry more weight, indicating the process is as important as the input from the external environment.

**Conclusion 2.) Transformational and Transactional factors are both required for organizational and individual success.**

Many of the themes that resulted from this study demonstrated that much more than pressure from the external environment, a new mission and strategy, and the appointment of leadership is required to make a change. While these changes in the transformational factors were evident, many of the transactional factors had not adjusted significantly, and they prevented success at the individual level. Transformational changes were immediately implemented, but did not result in the immediate attainment of collaborative and individual goals. The transactional factors were identified through the findings as the primary source of concern and may be what has prevented collaborative and individual performance objectives from being attained. In this way, the findings are consistent with the model, which states that, “changing transactional features is more likely to result in continuous improvement” (Burke, 2011, p. 229).

The change in practice driven by the external environment and performance objectives addressed through the transformational factors continually was inhibited by the lack of clear systems and policies. Referring back to Figure 19, it can be seen that systems and policies are impacted by leadership, organizational culture, work climate, organizational structure, management practices and individual needs. There were several instances during this research that demonstrated the importance of the interaction between transformational and transactional factors. Themes identified during this research often came back to the lack of clear systems and policies to guide staff members at all levels within the collaborative. It was clear that there was a
strong relationship between the transformational factors such as leadership and transactional factors such as systems and policies that were emphasized.

According to the Burke-Litwin model, the promotion of clear systems and policies is the responsibility of leadership within the development of management practices. A theme that arose from this research was the importance of having a transition specialist in a leadership position. This theme was also implied throughout the requests of participants for more guidance and support and the need for more knowledge. The placement of leadership at the top model indicates it is a pivotal factor to cause the change in transactional components and individual and organizational performance. The role of the Transition Specialist requires some clarification and goal setting for the sites and organization. Site-based leaders working with the transition specialist to identify individual needs at their sites will assist in the creation of systems and policies that address their specific needs and ensure organizational policy is being adhered to consistently throughout the collaborative. In addition to the role of the transition specialist to develop systems and policies to clarify task requirements and maintain motivation throughout the organization, site based leadership is equally important. Each site has individual needs and will require the support of site-based leadership to ensure a priority is established and systems and policies are implemented once adopted. Leaders are ultimately responsible to hold their staff members accountable. Another interesting finding that demonstrated the interaction of both transformational and transactional connections was that two sites identified that transition was not a perceived priority at their site, despite its addition into the organizational mission and strategy. These particular findings demonstrated the interplay and importance of both transformational and transactional features of the model.
Transformational changes were evident in the collaborative’s identification of transition as an institutional priority. The inclusion of transition documentation and programming integrated into the collaborative mission, with the addition of a leadership role, indicate the presence of transformational change. The establishment of transition as an institutional priority was verified throughout the collaborative. The themes that were indicative of this were expressed by identifiable growth, the evidence of transition programming, expressed prioritization, and realization that it was not currently a priority. In addition, the findings indicated a change in the organizational culture regarding transition. Participants clearly understood transition documentation and programming as important. Many of the themes identified at individual sites indicated the culture had changed and transition as an institutional priority was acknowledged. However, the transactional factors were continually identified as a source of struggle in effectively attaining collaborative and individual goals.

Transactional features that continually arose as obstacles to attaining the performance objectives were in organizational structure, systems and policies, and clarification of task requirements to meet individual needs. With regard to the structure, each site was witnessed to operate as a silo within the collaborative, and the others did not readily know the strengths and struggles of each site. When the research was completed, it was clear that overall there were great things occurring programmatically and none of it was shared. Several participants referred to rumors of great things they had heard go on at other sites, yet they had no way to further investigate these practices. These findings demonstrated lack of clear organizational structure impeding the organizational and individual performance, demonstrating once again that transactional features were the primary contributors to lack of performance objective attainment.
This lack of shared practice also pointed to the absence of institutional policies and systems that each site could refer to and assist others in improving their individual performance and meet the collaborative’s performance objectives.

A major finding from this research was identified by the themes of communication breakdowns, disorganization, and a sense of chaos at the individual sites. While these themes presented themselves in different ways at individual sites, the overall message that systems and policies were lacking was evident. This lack was a reoccurring theme throughout the findings. Meeting the individual needs of leaders, teachers and paraprofessionals continually came back to the need for clarification in the task requirements. Clarifying the process of how to inform transition experiences and then capture the necessary data to inform IEPs is clearly in need of change. Each site has adequate transition programming for their students, with the exception of potential small improvements that could be made at each site. While separately, there were challenges presented by each of the transactional factors, the way in which they interacted with one another was also apparent in the findings and represented the model.

The findings from this research point to the importance of both transformational and transactional factors working in conjunction to effectively implement change. The collaborative and individual sites responded to the change in transformational factors by utilizing their transition specialist, adjusting their mission to prioritize transition, and changing the culture through embracing transition as a goal. However, the fact remains that many transactional factors did not adequately adjust to assist in changing individual and organizational performance. Systems and policies are lacking, the organizational structure has not changed and individual needs were not met. Participants expressed their knowledge of the required change, but struggled
to translate the mandate and performance objectives into understanding and ultimately into practice. These findings support the importance of transformational and transactional factors working in conjunction to effect change as depicted in the Burke-Litwin Model.

**Implications for Research**

The research base referenced for this case study was centered upon four general topical areas: legislative and historical background of transition services, organizational change relating to educational organizations and transition, substantiated best practices in transition, and personnel preparation in transition. The legislative and historical foundations were presented in chapter two to provide context, but will not be part of the connections to the literature.

**Factors impacting change.**

The literature shows that the following factors are important in implementing policy change: the desire to change and the knowledge to implement the change (Levin, 2009), the capacity to implement change and the relationships among the stakeholders involved (Hasazi et al., 1999), and preparation of professionals to lead the process (Guskey, 2000; Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2003). The literature also identifies resistance and ambivalence as common to organizational change (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Burke, 2011; Piderit, 2000; Szabla, 2007). Resistance and ambivalence were not identified as factors impacting the change in this study. However, the other factors supported by the literature did impact the collaborative’s ability to attain its goal.

According to the results of this study, the factors that had the greatest impact on the collaborative’s ability to attain its goals was lack of knowledge and capacity to implement the change, and the preparation of the professionals. This finding is consistent with the research on
both school improvement and implementing transition (Guskey, 2000; Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2003). The desire to change and the level of motivation present at the collaborative indicates there is a strong belief in the institutional priority focused on transition services. However, the knowledge to implement the change was not present. Levin (2009) indicates that both of these conditions are required factors for change. The lack of knowledge to implement the change was a reoccurring theme among the study participants. While participants expressed desire and motivation to change, they continually pointed to the lack of systems and policies, and organizational structure as not adequate to support them in their individual performance. This finding is supported by the research of Hasazi et al. (1999), who found that capacity to implement change is also a factor influencing change. While the desire to change was expressed by the participants, the knowledge and capacity required to implement the change was lacking.

**Preparation of transition personnel.**

This study is consistent with the previous studies that showed those responsible for transition are not adequately prepared (Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; Morgan et al. 2013; Morningstar & Clark, 2003; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). A reoccurring theme throughout the sites and at the collaborative as a whole was the lack of knowledge regarding transition mandates and policy, and the participants’ acknowledgement that more knowledge was needed. Findings from the sites either pointed directly to the need for more knowledge, or suggested it as the need for guidance and support.

The findings from this study also pointed to the importance of professional development coupled with systems and policies to impact practice. This finding is consistent with previous research (Guskey, 2000; Hasazi et al., 1999; Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2003). According to
research conducted by Kochhar-Bryant (2003), it was discovered that most teachers’ training relating to transition took place on the job. This research was supported by the findings regarding the hours of professional development provided and the fact that the participants indicated they require more training.

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) concluded that because all secondary special educators should be involved in transition planning, it is critical that they possess core knowledge and skills to enable them to effectively plan and deliver services. The licensed professionals, those that hold a DESE special education or administration license, who participated in this research all completed special education or administration college programs and hold at least a master’s degree. Morningstar and Clark (2003) highlight that many transition professionals lack specific training and merely hold a special education license. In addition, they found that the program of study that awarded the special education license might have offered little to no training in transition. These findings were supported by this research.

The literature points to the differentiation in roles between transition teachers and transition specialists (Morgan et al. 2013; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Morningstar and Benitez (2013) found that transition specialists were best prepared to deliver transition services, and it may be important to differentiate the roles of transition teachers and transition specialists. It appears this is the model that the collaborative is striving to implement. Although the collaborative has a transition specialist, ultimately teachers and leaders are responsible to implement the requirements in transition related documentation and programming. Therefore, it should be noted that because of the scope of the needs in transition documentation and the difference in role expectations, transition specialists couldn’t deliver services on their own.
Morningstar and Benitez (2013) identified the basic difference between transition teachers and transition specialists. They described a transition teacher as the person that engages in the IEP planning and direct instruction, while the transition specialist ensures a coordinated set of activities occurs as specified by IDEA 2004 (p. 58-59). Many of the findings from this research are connected to personnel preparation in transition. This conclusion was most notably evident in the IEP data. All IEPs failed to meet the Indicator 13 criteria indicating that those responsible to write them were either unaware of these criteria, or unsure how to execute the requirements.

Perhaps the most significant connection to the literature and current research is the finding that specialized knowledge and skills are required to carry out this work, but is sorely lacking by most special education professionals (Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; Morgan et al. 2013; Morningstar & Clark, 2003; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). All of the teachers interviewed hold a Master’s Degree in Special Education and are licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at the secondary level. Three of the four leaders hold an advanced degree in special education. However, each shared that they were not informed of transition requirements in documentation and programming for their students. While they all have a high level of education, they were collectively not prepared during their pre-service education to meet the transition requirements set forth in federal legislation and state policy. Paraprofessionals do not hold advanced degrees or specialized training in special education and collectively had a very poor knowledge base of transition requirements despite their role in the process. This finding appears to be a gap in the research, and study of the role of the paraprofessional in the transition process, and their need for specialized training is an area for future study.
Implications for Practice

The findings from this research have many implications for practice, and will serve to assist the organization in improving their transition documentation and programming for students. The primary focus of this research was in adapting practice to the requirements set forth in IDEA 2004, while remaining cognizant of state policy that continues to evolve. This focus provides the content for the change required within the organization, at individual sites, and within specific roles. The implications for practice include some practical suggestions that could serve as a foundation for moving the organization forward in building capacity for transition services while aligning practice with mandates and policy. The implications are not presented in any particular order of importance, but should all be considered to assist the organization, sites, and individuals and are considered significant findings generated by this study.

Pre-service teacher/administrator preparation.

The lack of knowledge regarding transition mandates and research was apparent during the course of this research. All the professionals that participated in this research, teachers and leaders, received no formal training during their pre-service education. Although beyond the scope of the changes the organization can make, to leave this point out of the findings was not possible. The fact that special education administrators and teachers are leaving their college preparation programs with little to no knowledge of the mandates requiring transition service, appropriate documentation, and programming requirements is suspect. The current research on teacher preparation and transition supports this lack of adequate preparation.

Studies produced in 2003, primarily the results of a national survey investigating personnel preparedness in transition, indicated that special educators were exiting their
preparation programs with a lack of knowledge of transition competencies which hindered their ability to implement effective practices (Anderson et al, 2003). Morningstar & Benitez (2013) revisited this pre-service preparation for secondary special educators and found that teachers may have completed one course, but almost one half of their study respondents had no transition coursework. Those institutions of higher learning that prepare special education administrators and teachers are responsible to provide the information required to be in compliance with federal law. IDEA 2004, with all of its component parts, needs to be the focus of these preparation programs so those who graduate and become licensed can insure their practice meets the requirements of the federal law. In addition, those participating in pre-service preparation programs within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should be informed of the policy coming from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding transition practice and documentation, including the competencies outlined for transition knowledge and practice.

**Professional development and individual coaching.**

As previously stated, national research supports the lack of adequate preparation of teachers in transition. Findings from this research support the need for professional development to assist practitioners that are already in the field. Most of the participants in this research identified the professional development opportunities as helpful in their changing responsibilities regarding transition. This practice will need to continue to assist the organization in moving forward. Findings from this study imply that each individual site and staffing level has their own areas of need. Future professional development targeted for each site and staffing level will assist the overall organization. Leaders, teachers and paraprofessionals have slightly different roles in
the transition process and will subsequently require development in topics targeted specifically to their roles.

In addition to small group targeted professional development by site and staffing level, individual coaching with teachers and paraprofessionals will help to address group specific needs. One-on-one assistance with teachers to write appropriate post-secondary based, Indicator 13 compliant IEPs will be required. These IEPs will serve as needed exemplars for other teachers to reference. Ongoing Indicator 13 audits will also serve to gage the progress made by the organization in adapting their transition documentation practices with federal mandates. Teachers will also require assistance in utilizing the data captured by paraprofessionals in transition related activities to inform student post-secondary goals. These goals will then need to be communicated to the paraprofessionals to ensure they are creating appropriate experiences and capturing the required data to inform progress reports.

Paraprofessionals will require training in community-based instruction and programming based upon student IEPs. In addition, they will require training in data collection and require a system to communicate this data to teachers. Since paraprofessionals are typically the least formally educated group, they will also require formal knowledge of transition mandates and policy, to support them in their important role in the transition process. Finally, leaders will need to be informed of all the requirements that teachers and paraprofessionals have in the transition documentation and programming for students, to guide and hold their staff members accountable.

The role of transition specialist.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed competencies for the position of a transition specialist and began awarding an endorsement to qualified professionals in 2014.
While this position is not currently required in a school system, the findings from this and current research indicate this is an important role in providing appropriate transition services to students with special needs. Morningstar and Benitez (2013) found this position has emerged with the advent of transition focused education and legislation. They also found that these professionals enhance transition by ensuring that teachers are equipped with relevant information and methods for implementing practice. The findings from this research support this claim. Eighty two percent of the participants in this case study identified the transition specialist as an important position in the organization’s mission to improve transition documentation and programming for students.

The identified need for professional development, improved systems and policies, and implementation of best practices in transition requires an expert to facilitate. Having an internal person that clearly understands the individual and organizational needs relating to transition will be beneficial to a school system interested in building capacity. This research discovered that leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals are not well versed in the current legislative mandates and best practice research. Leaders indicated they have many responsibilities and do not have the time to become experts in transition. Teachers also indicated that their daily responsibilities impede their ability to gain the required knowledge to comply with transition mandates. The ability to access a resident expert, whose primary responsibility is to obtain and convey knowledge to develop systems and policies aligned with mandates and best practice, was identified as a benefit to the participants and is considered a significant finding from this research.
**Systems, policies and resources.**

Study participants collectively identified the need for clear systems, policies, and access to organizational resources as essential in their effort to improve transition services. Miscommunication between teachers and paraprofessionals, lack of written policy to reference, and systems designed to improve communication and practice were consistent findings among all the sites. The creation of organizational systems, written policy, and a process to share resources will provide the structure needed to assist staff members in improving their practice.

Systems are required to inform assessment practices, communication, documentation and practices. Transition assessment is required by IDEA 2004 and is to inform the IEP process and therefore, the activities and services provided to the students. Transition binders have been provided to all sites for each student aged 14 and older. Findings from this research indicated that staff members were unclear about the types of information to be included, whose responsibility it is to collect the information, and how the information is to be used in the IEP process. Similarly, the paraprofessionals that are taking students into the community for employment based experiences identified there is not system in place to ensure that students going out into the community are prepared with the preliminary skills required to assist in their success. Paraprofessionals are not teachers, yet through this research, identified the time they lost on teaching prerequisite skills hindered their ability to maximize the community-based accessibility for more students. They indicated that a system to identify a student as ready with all prerequisite skills mastered, would allow them to place more students in community settings.

A significant finding from this research was the miscommunication and lack of a system for communication between teachers and paraprofessionals regarding documentation and
practice. The creation of a system to ensure there is sharing of the flow of information and data between teachers and paraprofessionals will improve practice and increase efficiency. The goals created for a student’s IEP need to be informed by transition related assessment data. Teachers possess the IEP knowledge and paraprofessionals possess the assessment information. The lack of a system to share this information creates a gap and can potentially lead to violations of student IEP goals. Paraprofessionals need to know the community based goals and time requirements set forth in an IEP to ensure they are complying with the document. Consequently, teachers will need information gathered by paraprofessionals to demonstrate progress toward these IEP goals when they comment on progress reports.

Written policies will assist staff members in complying with the requirements in transition mandates. Flowcharts and checklists that staff members can refer to will ensure consistency in practice throughout the organization. Charts that outline a process for student preparedness to access the community will save time and guide teachers in content they need to teach. Checklists for IEP writing, in conjunction with organizational exemplars, will assist teachers in writing IEPs that are post-secondary based and in compliance with Indicator 13. Such checklists will also ensure that common language and practice is consistent throughout the organization and assist leaders in holding staff accountable to transition mandates. Written policy minimizes speculation and provides clear guidelines outlining individual responsibilities.

The level of sophistication of transition will be greatly improved with development of IEP writing that informs the goals for the students and then in turn would dictate the data that needs to be collected. Once this system is improved, individual needs are addressed and task requirements
are clarified through systems and policies, the communication and data collection concerns identified in by the themes could be easily addressed.

While each site and the collaborative identified a lack of resources as one of the main themes impacting their ability to improve transition programming for their students, this may not be accurate. It is true that with unlimited resources, each site could improve and expand their offerings for their students, but if they are not properly documenting these experiences, individual and organizational performance will still not be improved. It is believed that if a system was developed to clarify how the IEP drives the entire transition process, and task requirements were clearly spelled out, organizational performance would be improved.

A final area for improvement in organizational systems and policies is the ability to share resources. Each site in this case study has a community-based component and curricular materials they use in their individual transition practices. One identified concern identified through this research was the access to the community equitably by all sites. Some sites allowed more flexibility in staff members’ ability to make community contacts and provide community based learning sites for students. In addition, some sites have purchased transition related curricular materials and software. The ability to share these resources would increase programming options and experiences for all students within the organization.

The use of technology and professional development could assist in allowing the sites to share resources. A database of community partners that accept students for community based vocational learning experiences could be created and shared among all the sites. The educational organization that served as the site for this case study encompasses a limited geographic location with a finite number of business and organizations to access for student placement. Sharing these
contacts will allow a variety of experiences for all students and increase the types of career options for students to explore. Experiences are to be tied to students’ strengths, interests and preferences based upon assessment. The ability to share community contacts will allow some sites to expand their current community offerings and ensure all students have access to a variety of experiences.

Similar to community experiences, each site has explored various curricular materials and software to improve transition related classroom content. During the course of this research, it was observed that sites had some materials in common. Individual sites and staff members were spending time to learn, plan, and execute the content of the various materials. The ability to share the materials and allow staff members to collaborate with one another regarding the implementation of these materials could enhance offerings at all sites. Staff members could form work groups or conduct trainings for one another on how they use specific materials with their students. This sharing of knowledge and resources could improve efficiency and allow better collaboration between and among the sites.

**Improved ability to share practice.**

During this research analysis, a major finding was the lack of a system to allow sites to share practices. Each site operates in the silo mentality, common to the field of education. Pockets of excellence were identified throughout the research process for this case study. Individual sites and staff members are engaged in a variety of practices that could benefit others within the organization. Participants shared that they had little to no knowledge of what practices were present in the other secondary level sites. A significant finding from this research was the
consistent statement that staff members were not privy to the practices and programming within the organization at other secondary sites.

Improvements in systems and policies in conjunction with professional development will assist in ensuring that all staff members and levels are receiving the same guidance and information. However, the ability to actually observe and share practice between and among the sites and staff members will benefit the organization. A system to allow staff members to visit and collaborate with other sites will help to broaden the pockets of excellence that currently exist. In addition, the nature of the organization often requires staff members and students to move between programs based upon current programmatic and individual needs. Having similar practices and the ability to share resources will assist the organization in becoming a more flexible environment and potentially reduce the need for training when staff and students move among sites. Finally, staff members could learn from one another and minimize the duplication of efforts that each needs to institute to comply with mandates and best practices.

**Implementation of substantiated best practices.**

The field of transition is emerging and providing an ongoing growing research base on practices that improve postschool outcomes for students with special needs. The practices that have been substantiated through research are available for implementation. The findings from this research indicate that some of these practices are emerging at the research site. The knowledge obtained through this research will provide baseline information on the presence of these practices at the individual sites and in the organization. Armed with this information, the organization can utilize what is present and broaden these practices to all four sites. The use of
professional development, systems and policies, and improved organizational knowledge to implement these identified best practices will improve transition programming for students.

The best practices identified in the research could serve as the coordinated set of activities for all students. Progressive implementation of each substantiated practice, coupled with data collection, throughout the organization could supplement the other findings and suggestions. Consistent implementation of research based best practices would complement the systems, policies, and organizational knowledge also identified as areas for improvement.

### Postschool outcome data.

The research base consulted for this case study provides guidance on activities and practices that have been deemed to demonstrate improved postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. While the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is required to provide postschool outcome survey data on a percentage of students that exit special education to the federal government, the organization that was the site for this research is not required to collect individual postschool outcome data on every student that exits. The creation of a simple efficient way to collect postschool outcome data on students that leave the organization will provide further information on the effectiveness of the practices implemented. Students and families were not part of this research. However, they are directly impacted by the findings from this research.

Practices set forth by legislation and suggested in the research are moot if they are not improving the lives of students once they exit public education. As the organization continues to build capacity in transition and improve its practices, it would be helpful to know how this impacts students. Gathering knowledge from students and families after they exit special education will help to identify the practices that are most effective. Requesting specific
information on the status of employment, post-secondary education, and independent living will help to identify areas of strength and weakness in the services offered by the organization. Collecting information from those that received the transition services offered by the organization could help to continually refine programming.

**Limitations and Future Studies**

Limitations to this study include the small nature of the study, the nature of the organization, and the role of the researcher as an internal person within the organization. In addition, this researcher’s role as the transition specialist for the collaborative and a state endorsed transition specialist may skew the expectations for knowledge and skills on behalf of the participants. The limitations to this study also may assist to inform areas for needed future research.

The first limitation acknowledged from this research is the small nature of the study and the nature of the case study. The case study is used to understand a contemporary phenomenon and contribute to knowledge (Maxwell, 2005). The findings of this case study focused on improving transition services, which according to the research is topic the nation and the field of special education is grappling with at this time (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). While this research focused on one educational organization in a specific geographical location, the findings are potentially generalizable to other educational institutions building capacity in transition services. Other small-scale studies, similar to this study, could provide more and deeper information to secondary level special education professionals attempting to build capacity and comply with legal mandates around secondary transition.
The second limitation to this research is the nature of the educational organization that served as the site for this case study. The study site is not a typical public school system, and as a result has a different leadership structure and mission. In addition, a typical public school system may not have the resources and programmatic offerings the research site possessed, although they are required to meet the same standards. Similar studies facilitated within a traditional public school setting, or another similarly structured special education setting, could supplement the findings of this research and begin to create a research base generalizable to more secondary special education organizations.

The final limitation was the researcher’s role within the study site. Participant responses and observational data may have been affected by the researcher’s leadership role for transition services within the organization. In addition, this researcher is an endorsed Transition Specialist in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and has a deeper knowledge base than general special education practitioners. This deeper understanding of transition knowledge and practice implementation may have set the bar unreasonably high for the participants and sites in this case study.

Findings from this research clearly illustrate the need for more research in implementing transition services aligned with federal mandates at the local level. The legislative and research foundation is present but there is little known of how school systems are utilizing this information to impact practice. The role of a transition specialist within a district and how this impacts knowledge and practice is another area for further study. Future studies might examine the impact of improved pre-service training and the addition of a transition specialist to an educational organization. This research also did not focus on student outcomes or involve them
in the process. Studies involving postschool outcomes and the effectiveness of specific transition programming could further inform the impact of transition practices on student outcomes.

**Conclusion**

This research produced a great deal of data and findings that will serve as baseline information for continued work to improve compliance with transition mandates and policy while infusing knowledge of the change process to improve transition services at the collaborative and four embedded sites. The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Change and Performance has informed this research and demonstrated the importance of the process in addition to content as it relates to change. The literature base referenced for this case study helped provide the content and context for change, and highlighted research supported factors that impact the implementation of change.

This case study was designed to investigate how four individual secondary level special education sites within one educational collaborative are adapting to the federal requirements set forth in IDEA 2004. Through the collaborative and individual performance objectives set forth, this study analyzed the level of attainment and the factors that impact the ability to meet the performance objectives. This case study defined transition practices broadly and examined requirements for documentation and programming set forth in IDEA 2004. The performance objectives defined by the collaborative helped to further define the practices and tasks required to meet the federal mandate.

The research site is utilizing some of the organizational change components in its current attempt to align practice with mandates and best practice research. Continued efforts to move this organization forward and build capacity in transition will require focus on the process of change.
as well as the content. The lack of adequate systems and policies, organizational structure, and focus on individual needs as they relate to specific task requirements arose as the factors impacting the ability to attain performance objectives. The Indicator 13 data identified through the IEP audits demonstrated that the organization is not in compliance with the documentation requirements. The individual sites and the organization as a whole need to reexamine the entire change model and ensure that each component is clearly addressed and clarified, and an organizational plan based upon the process of change is implemented. Most significantly, the IEP process needs to be clearly identified as a key element of the external environment to improve the individual and organizational performance. In addition, interviews and observations suggested that while some pockets of programming excellence existed, they were not informed by the proper documentation. Based upon the major findings from this research, ongoing, small group professional development, individual coaching, clear systems and policies, and exemplar post-secondary based IEPs are the activities that will serve as the next steps in the organization’s mission to align practice with mandates and research.

The staff members that participated in this research all indicated that they are motivated to improve practice, comply with mandates, and ultimately improve opportunities for their students. Based upon the findings gleaned from this research, the organization that served as the research site for this case study is poised to move forward and build capacity in transition services.

Understanding exactly what was occurring assisted in identifying how those responsible to implement the transition initiatives create meaning to change practices in transition that are driven by federal and state policy, along with research based and evidence based best practice. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of organizational change at four secondary
special education sites within an educational collaborative as they implement the mandated transition practices into their programmatic offerings and documentation. Placing this research within the theoretical framework of the Burke-Litwin Model for Organizational Change and Performance helped to understand the processes that drive change within an educational organization and identify the specific places where obstacles were present. This project will assist in developing the supports and professional development required to align transition planning and programming and aid in closing the legislation-research-practice gap. Additionally, it served as a mechanism to bring the organizational practices in transition in accordance with legislative mandates. This case study will contribute to the research in transition planning and programming for secondary level students with disabilities by examining how one educational organization moved through the change process to improve transition related documentation and programming.

**Researcher Reflection**

Nine months have passed since the data collection process for this research took place. Although an unorthodox addition, it was decided to include an update on the impact this study has had on the research site. As this thesis was written, the collaborative continued to function, and the work has continued. This information may assist others that are looking to build capacity in transition services and improve documentation and programming practices.

This information validates the need for qualitative research on small scales designed to improve practice. Implications for practice suggested as a part of this study have begun to come to life in the collaborative and are starting to make a difference. Here are some of the highlights:
• A collaborative wide database of community partners has been created and is able to be shared among the sites. This database was created in and set up through the collaborative’s Google account. Policies and procedures for its use have been created, and training for paraprofessionals has taken place.

• Individual coaching with teachers has begun. The transition specialist meets with teachers to help create IEPs that will pass an Indicator 13 audit. As a result the collaborative has an ever-increasing bank of exemplar IEPs.

• A postschool outcome data form has been created to collect internal postschool outcomes on students that exit the collaborative at five time increments postschool. This was first collected in January of 2015, and will eventually help determine if practices are positively impacting students.

• Small group professional development, led by the transition specialist, in transition related content and the change process is ongoing.

• A proposal for a new online software curriculum for transition has been submitted to the curriculum committee for approval. Part of the proposal included the purchase of this curriculum for Sites Three and Four with monthly scheduled collaboration meetings of the teachers from both sites, facilitated by the transition specialist. These collaboration meetings are to be designed to create supplemental activities and community connections. Site Two has already expressed interest in potentially purchasing this curriculum and participating in these meetings.

• The Interagency Team that the collaborative belongs to has begun to plan and execute platforms for increased family involvement in the transition process. They have produced
a Frequently Asked Questions guide for families and hosted a Transition Fair. The fair invited many adult service providers to present their offerings and answer questions. Over 100 families and students from the collaborative and six local high schools attended. Future events are being planned and a local resource guide is being created.

As the researcher, this journey has changed my professional focus in many ways. The greatest change has come from the concept set forth in the theoretical framework. Prior to this research I was one of those people that believed “Just tell them what is expected and then expect them to do it.” However, after having the privilege of sitting with the 22 participants and hearing their perspectives, I now understand that the process of change is more important than the content. I will never look at my role as a leader in the same manner again. I hope this process remains with me, and whenever I am responsible to lead a change, I will refer to my Burke-Litwin model and ensure that each component is considered with input from those most directly impacted by the change.

The fact that a sense of excitement has been established throughout the collaborative in part due to my leadership is exhilarating. I truly work with some of the best people in the business. Their trust in my ability coupled with the level of honesty they expressed during this process was humbling. I feel committed and energized to continue this work on behalf of the staff, students and organization that I have the privilege to represent.

These changes that have occurred as a direct result of this study are also fueling the level of motivation within the organization. While most study participants demonstrated high levels of motivation at the onset of this research, it continues to grow as they see their suggestions and input come to life.
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Massachusetts requires that beginning when the eligible student is 14 for the IEP developed that year, the school district must plan for the student’s need for transition services and the school district must document this discussion annually. This form is to be maintained with the IEP and revisited each year.

**Student:**

**Date form completed:**

**Anticipated date of graduation:**

**Anticipated date of 688 referral, if applicable:**

**SASID:**

**Age:**

**Current IEP dates from:**

**to:**

**POST-SECONDARY VISION**

Write the student’s **POST-SECONDARY VISION** in the box below. In collaboration with the family, consider the student’s preferences and interests, and the desired outcomes for post-secondary education/training, employment, and adult living. This section should correspond with the vision statement on IEP 1.

**DISABILITY RELATED NEEDS**

Write the skills (disability related) that require IEP goals and/or related services in the box below. Consider all skills (disability related) necessary for the student to achieve his/her post-secondary vision.
ACTION PLAN

The ACTION PLAN should outline how the student can develop self-determination skills and be prepared both academically and functionally to transition to post-school activities in order to achieve his/her post-secondary vision. Indicate how Special Education/General Education, family members, adult service providers or others in the community will help the student develop the necessary skills. Disabiliy related needs must also be stated on page 1.
Develop the ACTION PLAN needed to achieve the POST-SECONDARY VISION by outlining the skills the student needs to develop and the courses, training, and activities in which the student will participate. Include information on who will help the student implement specific steps listed below in the Action Plan.

- **Instruction:** Is there a course of study or specific courses needed that will help the student reach his/her post-secondary vision? Consider the learning opportunities or skills that the student may need. This could include specific general education courses and/or special education instruction, career and technical education, and/or preparation for post-secondary outcomes such as vocational training or community college.

- **Employment:** Are there employment opportunities and/or specific skills that will help the student reach his/her post-secondary vision? Consider options such as part-time employment, supported job placement, service learning projects, participation in work experience program, job shadowing, internships, practice in resume writing/interviewing skills, the use of a one-stop resource center and job specific skills in areas such as customer service, technology, etc.

- **Community Experiences/ Post School Adult Living:** Are there certain types of community and/or adult living experiences that will help the student reach his/her post-secondary vision? Consider options such as participation in community based experiences, learning how to independently access community resources, building social relationships, managing money, understanding health care needs, utilizing transportation options and organizational skills.
## Appendix B

### Indicator 13 Checklist - DESE

**Post-secondary Transition Planning Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>____________________________</th>
<th>SASID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____________________________</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
<td>LEA Code</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____________________________</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Disability</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
<td>Level of Need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Transition Planning Form (28M/9)

- Is there evidence that the student has a completed Transition Planning Form (28M/9)?
  - Date Form Last Completed: ____________________________

### Postsecondary Requirements in the IEP and/or TPF

[34 CFR 300.320(b) and (c)] [20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Beginning at age 14, does the student's IEP and/or Transition Planning Form include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Appropriate measurable postsecondary vision/goal(s) that are based on an age-appropriate transition assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> IEP 1 - Key Evaluation Results Summary, Assessment Info, TPF pg 1 assessment info as described</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Appropriate measurable postsecondary vision/goal(s) that are updated annually?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> Dated IEP 1 - Vision Statement, TPF, Assessment Info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Transition services*, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> Transition Planning Form, page 2; Transcript, IEP 5 - Service Delivery Grid, IEP 8 – Additional Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Measurable annual skill-based IEP goals related to the student’s transition services* needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> IEP 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and/or 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IEP Team Meeting Student Invitation

[34 CFR 300.321(b)] [20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(B)]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there evidence that:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services* are to be discussed?</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> N-3A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the agreement of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority?</td>
<td><strong>Evidence such as:</strong> N-3A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Transition Specialist Competencies

Guidelines for the Transition Specialist Endorsement

October 2013
I. Context and Purpose:
All students, including students with disabilities, “deserve a world-class education that prepares them for postsecondary opportunities, career training options, economically viable careers, and healthy, productive lives.” However, without appropriate, individualized transition planning and services, students with disabilities are falling behind their non-disabled peers in reaching that goal.

Too many students with disabilities are unprepared to live and work independently when they exit high school. Currently, according to the US Department of Labor, only 25% of 20-24 year olds with disabilities are employed, compared with 60% of their non-disabled peers. Nearly half of all disabled adults who are employed have an income of less than $15,000 per year. In 2012, data shows only 68.6% of Massachusetts students with disabilities graduated on time with their peers, compared to 84.7% for non-disabled students and the dropout rate for students with disabilities was almost twice as high as the rate for non-disabled students. The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education acknowledged that, “One reason for these outcomes is that educators are inadequately prepared to provide the transition services required under IDEA.”

As the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Taskforce on Integrating College and Career Readiness recognized, “every child deserves an education that nurtures their dreams and lays out a navigable pathway to accomplish them. It is no longer viable for our businesses or our educators to underinvest in career readiness education; we have a responsibility to provide our children with a well-rounded education that prepares them not just to begin post-secondary education, but to access viable, living-wage, family supporting careers, and lifelong prosperity.” Further, research has found integrated competitive employment during high school to be a strong predictor of integrated competitive employment in adulthood.

Special education law requires specific procedures to prepare youth with disabilities to transition to life after high school. With the reauthorization of IDEA, Congress found that “improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities,” and emphasized that one of the purposes of IDEA has been “to ensure that all children

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3 The ADA, Twenty years later, Kessler Family Foundation/National Organization on Disability (July 2010) P. 91
4 Five-year graduation rates increase for students with disabilities in Massachusetts. The 2011 five-year cohort graduation rate for Massachusetts public high schools shows a rate of graduation for students with disabilities at 70.8% compared to 86.3% of nondisabled students. Although gains are being made, gaps in graduation rates for students with disabilities remain a concern. Additional improvement activities are described at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/spp/
5 In 2012, the dropout rate for all students was 6.9% and the dropout rate for students with disabilities was 12.8%. Additional improvement activities are described at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/spp/
6 Presidents Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2005)
7 From Cradle to Career: Educating our Students for Lifelong Success - Recommendations from the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness, MA ESE, http://www.doe.mass.edu/doe/docs/2012-06/Item1_report.pdf
8 Test, Mazzotti, Mustain, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009.
9 IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)
10 IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)

*DESE does not endorse any of the vendors or websites listed and acknowledges this is not an exhaustive list. The vendors are included as possible sources of information and potential resources to provide demonstrations of many different types of AAC devices for teacher training programs.
with disabilities have available to them a free and 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 [emphasis added].” Transition must address the needs of all students with disabilities, include considerations specific to various disability types and provide a continuum of services that are responsive to varying degrees of disability. Additionally in Massachusetts, state law and policy specifically requires school districts to address the complex communication, social, and behavioral needs of students on the autism spectrum, and this requirement extends to the transition process.

Acknowledging the critical role of educators to effectively address transition, the Massachusetts legislature enacted An Act Relative to Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education, Employment and Independent Living to provide educators with the opportunity to acquire specific knowledge and skills necessary to address the transition needs of youth with disabilities. The purpose of the Massachusetts transition specialist guidelines is to strengthen the preparation of educators working with youth with disabilities ages 14-22. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is issuing these guidelines to support implementation of the new Transition Specialist Endorsement.

II. Guidelines to Develop a Transition Specialist Endorsement Course of Study:
The Transition Specialist Endorsement regulations, 603 CMR 7.14(4), set forth requirements including a prerequisite license and experience, field-based experiences, and subject matter knowledge competencies for Transition Specialists that include a thorough understanding of (a) the foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services, (b) individual transition assessment and system evaluation, (c) transition systems and supports, and (d) effective collaboration. These Guidelines provide further detail on these subject matter competencies and required field-based experience and are intended to represent the content of four or five master’s level courses, as one option for designing a program.

Note: Sample field-based assignments are included in each substantive area of study as examples of meaningful field-based experience but are not required as written.

Prerequisite license and experience
Transition Specialist Endorsement candidates must have a minimum of two years of experience under one of the following licenses 603 CMR 7.14(4)(a)(1)&(2):

- An Initial or Professional license as a Teacher of Students with Moderate Disabilities, Teacher of Students with Severe Disabilities, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, School Guidance Counselor, or School Social Worker/School Adjustment Counselor.

11 IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)
12 Massachusetts disability categories are defined by the Code of Massachusetts Regulations 603 CMR 28.02 at http://www.doe.mass.edu/sawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=02#start
13 Autism IEP Act - MGL Ch.718 sec.3

*DESE does not endorse any of the vendors or websites listed and acknowledges this is not an exhaustive list. The vendors are included as possible sources of information and potential resources to provide demonstrations of many different types of AAC devices for teacher training programs.
- A license as a Rehabilitation Counselor (as described in 262 CMR 4.00 Requirements for Licensure as a Rehabilitation Counselor), or certification as a Rehabilitation Counselor as determined by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC).

**Field-based experience**

- Completion of a 150 hour field-based experience that includes providing transition services for transition-aged students with disabilities with IEPs, in collaboration with their families, community members, and other relevant professionals. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(c)

The need for special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors to gain practical experience in working with transition-age students and to understand the transition process from school to work and adult life is an integral component of the Transition Specialist Endorsement. Diverse and varied field-based experiences build upon the knowledge and skills acquired in the coursework, and provide the range of practical experience necessary to learn about local school/district college and career readiness initiatives, other agencies and community-based systems critical to the transition planning process.

Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement are required to complete 150 hours of field-based experience involving active participation with transition-aged students with disabilities, their families, school faculty, community members and other relevant professionals. It must also involve active participation with students at different phases of transition (14-18 & 18-22) and with varying degrees and types of disability in order to gain practical experience working with a wide range of students.

A minimum of 100 hours of the field-based experience shall be completed within a Massachusetts public school, approved private special education school, educational collaborative, or a in a school setting that is supervised by a professional who holds one of the above prerequisite licenses and has experience in secondary transition. At least 50 hours of the remaining field-based experience must be completed in a community based setting working with transition age youth in order to gain experience assisting youth transition from school to adult life.

**Transition Specialist Endorsement field-based experiences should be organized, coordinated and assessed by the Sponsoring Organization.** A plan for providing candidates field-based experiences must be included by the Sponsoring Organization in the program submission and approved by ESE. The 150 hours of field-based experience must include multiple experiences in the school and community, include students with varying degrees and types of disability, and cover a range of time periods within the school year. Each field-based experience must be of sufficient duration to provide for the development of meaningful connections with school/district staff, human service agencies, community service agencies, higher education, employers, and/or work force development organizations. These experiences must be comprehensive, including a variety of classrooms, employment sites, and community-based experiences. In the case of candidates who are currently employed in a MA school or district, the Sponsoring Organization may accept equivalent field-based experiences at the school and/or district in which the candidate is employed to satisfy the minimum 100 school-based field hours.

**Subject Matter Knowledge requirements for the Transition Specialist Endorsement**

1. **The foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services**

   *Foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services, including but not limited to: state and federal legislation; inclusive models, research, best practice, community*
based education and post-school options; and knowledge of transition planning and service delivery for all students with Individualized Education Programs, including culturally and linguistically diverse youth. 603 CMR 7.14(d)(1)

In order to be effective in assisting students with disabilities to be prepared for adult life, candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must understand the foundations and implementation of transition education by demonstrating a range of up-to-date, evidence-based transition practices, including practices that support college career readiness standards, i.e. MA Curriculum Frameworks aligned with the Common Core, and an understanding of complex adult services systems. Educators also need to understand the unique challenges that students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face in attempting to pursue satisfactory postsecondary outcomes.

Transition Specialists who understand the foundations of transition education will demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills:

Knowledge:
- The historical foundations of the transition movement
- State and Federal transition-related legislation and policies, and implications for providing transition services at the local level, including but not limited to: policy issues related to Social Security benefits and work incentives, workforce laws and regulations, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- Knowledge of self-determination principles and self-advocacy skills
- Understand the skills necessary for postsecondary success, including but not limited to time management, planning and prioritizing, study skills, social skills, healthcare skills, and safety in school and community environments
- The Massachusetts definition of College and Career Readiness\(^{14}\) and other state and national college and career readiness initiatives
- Evidence-based transition practices (e.g. person-centered planning, collaborative teaming, community-building, resource mapping) including whole school college and career readiness practices
- Understanding of complex adult services systems (e.g., higher education, vocational rehabilitation, SSI and Medicaid, developmental disability services, workforce development, benefits specialists, and community rehabilitation providers)
- The rights and responsibilities of the student and family in the transition process
- Fundamental issues that influence secondary transition, including but not limited to: healthcare or mental health challenges, foster care placement, involvement in the justice system, socio-economic challenges, cultural and linguistic diversity, residency status, guardianship, and issues faced by students who are at risk of dropping out of school
- Understanding of various models for the role of Transition Specialists, including nationally accepted standards for experienced professionals in special education

Skills:
- Plan, develop, implement, evaluate and promote culturally responsive transition services for youth with a wide range of abilities and disabilities
- Promote self-determination and self-advocacy skill building

\(^{14}\) See the MA ESE Office of College and Career Readiness website located at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/)
- Facilitate resource mapping and program goal-setting to create district and community policies and agreements that will support transition-aged youth
- Facilitate training, professional development and technical assistance to colleagues and families related to transition law and practices
- Develop and disseminate transition information to transition-aged students and their families, including those in out-of-district placements
- Develop effective outreach strategies to reach underserved youth and families and coordinate the translation of all transition materials into appropriate languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample field-based assignments:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Design/provide professional development and technical assistance to colleagues regarding federal and state transition requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepare culturally responsive student and family guides and checklists regarding district transition procedures and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct resource mapping of all available college and career readiness resources for district’s students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disseminate transition guide or checklist and resource list to students in out-of-district placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepare and deliver presentation for the district special education Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meeting(s) to inform parents of transition rights and requirements, as well as district transition policies and programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitate person-centered planning with students and assist them to present their postsecondary goals at IEP meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. **Individual transition assessment and system evaluation**

**Individual transition assessment and system evaluation**. Including conducting, interpreting, and overseeing individualized formal and informal transition assessments to ascertain interests, strengths, preferences, aptitudes and needs related to competitive employment, education, training, and independent living; developing individualized appropriate measurable postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals based on the individualized transition assessment results; and transition service delivery. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(2)

Assessment of student interests, strengths, preferences and needs is essential in order to provide appropriate, individualized and meaningful transition services to students. Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate, thorough knowledge of a range of up-to-date, robust, and student-centered assessment methods as well as practical application of that knowledge in providing individualized transition assessments that will lead to the inclusion of appropriate, measurable, annually updated postsecondary goals, annual IEP goals related to the student’s transition service needs and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals in the IEP. Assessment data must address the skills, abilities and corresponding supports necessary to address educational, employment, independent living needs, and the social, communication and functional skills that can impact success for all students with disabilities.

Transition specialists will demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills regarding assessment and system evaluation:

*DESE does not endorse any of the vendors or websites listed and acknowledges this is not an exhaustive list. The vendors are included as possible sources of information and potential resources to provide demonstrations of many different types of AAC devices for teacher training programs.*
Knowledge:

- Legal requirements and rationale for conducting comprehensive, individualized, ongoing formal and informal secondary transition assessments
- Familiarity with a variety of culturally responsive formal and informal secondary transition assessment instruments for students aged 14-22 to ascertain interests, strengths, preferences, aptitudes and needs related to integrated competitive employment, postsecondary education/training, independent living, and community participation
- Role of assistive technology and individualized accommodations in the assessment process
- Knowledge of self-determination and self-advocacy assessment tools
- Strategies for recruiting and engaging a team in individualized transition assessment, including the student, family, school personnel, and community agencies
- Use of assessment data to determine the interests, skills, abilities and corresponding supports necessary to address educational, competitive employment, independent living, and community participation needs, including social, communication and functional skills (including work ethic and professionalism, effective communication and interpersonal skills, and other employer identified soft skills)
- Content and process to develop annually updated, individualized, appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals, and transition services, based on the individualized transition assessment results

Skills:

- Administer a variety of culturally responsive formal and informal tools, including assistive technology where appropriate, to assess students’ individual strengths, preferences, interests and needs directly related to: academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation, including but not limited to social skills, functional behavior, and self-determination abilities and self-advocacy skills
- Conduct and manage transition assessment activities across domains of self-determination, academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation
- Include students in assessment planning, interpretation, and analysis activities to promote self-awareness, self-determination, and self-regulation
- Interpret results of assessments, provide educationally relevant recommendations and develop individualized, measurable postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals based upon assessment results
- Integrate information from transition assessments into students’ Transition Planning Form and IEP, and also to the Summary of Performance
- Report results in appropriate language and terms to facilitate student and family understanding
- Create work-based learning plans and individual learning plans based on appropriate assessments

Sample field-based assignments:

- Oversee person-centered planning process for transition-aged students.
- Assist special education teachers to coordinate/implement transition assessments for students that include both formal and informal methods and culturally responsive

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16 The Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan is further described at [http://www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm](http://www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm)

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### 3. How to develop transition systems and supports

*How to develop transition systems and supports which include best practices in postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment (including supported employment), independent living, and community participation including, but not limited to, implementation of social skills training, positive behavioral supports, assistive technology as related to transition goals, and development of self-determination skills across all settings. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(3)*

Transition systems and supports involve the provision of services to students in order to prepare them for life after high school. Transition systems and supports must be comprehensive in order to effectively address the unique needs, strengths, interests and preferences of a range of students with disabilities. Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate a solid understanding of the following knowledge and skills related to the development of appropriate transition systems and supports:

**Knowledge:**
- Understanding of the Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness
- Understanding of best practices and methods to evaluate existing transition-related services and systems including but not limited to disability specific considerations and vulnerable populations e.g. students with autism, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disabilities; students involved in the foster care or justice system; and students facing economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers.
- The rationale for and elements of self-determination as the foundation of successful postsecondary outcomes including self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-monitoring, self-advocacy and the philosophy of 'dignity of risk'
- Methods to develop evidence-based transition-specific materials and curricula that promote self-determination and self-advocacy, are aligned with MA Curriculum Frameworks/Common Core Standards and include soft skills development across secondary and postsecondary settings
- Awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of commercially available transition-specific curriculum/training methods and materials
- Knowledge of postsecondary learning options, admission and disability documentation requirements, the role of ADA, 504, and Disability Services in higher education and the range of supports and accommodations available to all students with disabilities, including students with autism and intellectual disabilities
- Vocational education and career preparation methods, models, and curricula including career development, job development, facilitating natural positive supports on the job, job placement

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and training, models of supported employment and awareness of social and interpersonal skills identified by employers that promote job retention
- The role of adult agencies and support personnel including but not limited to the MA Rehabilitation Commission, independent living programs, and Personal Care Attendants, and knowledge of community-based recreation and leisure opportunities
- Knowledge of how to use positive behavioral supports in work, college and community settings
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, the range of devices, and related best practices
- Awareness of age of majority options and family resources, including decision-making alternatives and guardianship.

Skills:
- Develop a coordinated set of individualized activities aligned with students’ assessments, postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals
- Apply techniques to help students develop a course of study related to their postsecondary education and career interests and plan to build related necessary skills
- Implement a variety of methods and strategies to support the full participation of students with disabilities in college and career awareness, exploration and immersion activities as identified in the MA Career Development Education Guide and Glossary.16
- Perform job matching, job carving, and job placement including identifying supports in community-based work training environments and facilitating students’ self-advocacy for accommodations within work and community environments
- Connect students with adult service, community providers, and vocational rehabilitation services as part of student career plans
- Use the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP)17 to support competitive employment
- Develop community-based independent living activities and provide community-based instruction
- Connect students and families to community resources and provide assistance regarding effectively hiring, supervising, and utilizing PCAs
- Implement culturally responsive social or soft skills training in a range of postsecondary settings as they relate to students postsecondary goals in employment, education, independent living and community participation.
- Train students on use of educational and assistive web-based tools and technology designed to improve functional skills and independence in college, jobs, and community
- Assist students in understanding the relationship between their individual strengths and desires and their future goals, identifying accommodations, and provide opportunities to make choices, set goals, and self-advocate
- Manage transition services and activities across domains of self-determination, academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation

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16 The MA Career Development Education Guide and Glossary is located at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/cde-guide/glossary.pdf?search=%22MA%22](http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/cde-guide/glossary.pdf?search=%22MA%22)
17 See the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan located at [http://www.skilllibrary.com/wbl.htm](http://www.skilllibrary.com/wbl.htm)

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Sample field-based assignments:

- Conduct market analysis of community employment opportunities for youth
- Recruit business partners for interagency transition team
- Prepare school and transition staff to support students in community (college, jobs, travel) using best practices in coaching, peer, and/or natural support
- Provide training and technical assistance to colleagues on the integration of self determination and self advocacy strategies and opportunities into school and community settings
- Oversee training and implementation of independent learning plans for all students to ensure appropriate course of study in preparation for post-school goals
- Facilitate positive behavior assessment for students with disabilities as they relate to transition goals and activities, and develop related action plans
- Coordinate professional development workshop on universal design and assistive technology to support transition-age youth in education, employment, and community settings
- Provide information to students and families about post-secondary education options and guidance regarding appropriate course of studies during high school to meet their postsecondary learning goals and support students through the process of applying for, enrolling, and completing a post-secondary course

4. Effective collaboration with all stakeholders

Collaboration including strategies for active participation of students and families in IEP development, transition education and services, and support networks; development of partnerships with employers, institutes of higher education, public agencies, and community service agencies; and provision of technical assistance and professional development to school personnel. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(4)

According to the national technical assistance and information center funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, “Today, the focused and committed efforts of a wide range of agencies are essential to establishing and maintaining the quality programs and practices need to help youth achieve positive school and post-school results... Formal service coordination among collaborating entities is... now understood to be crucial to the transition success of many youth with disabilities...” 30 Organizations and agencies must work cooperatively and have clarity concerning their own and each other’s responsibilities. Effective transition programs include a great deal of collaboration with families, community resources, employers, institutes of higher education, adult service providers, and amongst school personnel.

Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills regarding collaboration:


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Knowledge:
- Methods for increasing student leadership in transition planning, student and family knowledge and engagement related to transition, including IEP development, transition education and services, self-determination, support networks, referral to adult service agencies, benefits planning, health benefits, and social security
- Techniques for identifying and linking appropriate learning environments to increase cooperative transition service delivery through whole-school initiatives, interagency agreements, braided funding, and partnerships with employers, institutes of higher education, public agencies, and community service agencies
- Systems improvement, conflict management and consensus building methods, and recognition of the impact of language, diversity, culture, and religion on transition

Skills:
- Initiate/participate in transition-focused interagency coordinating bodies
- Match community resources with student needs and help students and families establish a support network
- Develop and manage collaborative partnerships with school/district college and career readiness staff, human service agencies, community service agencies, higher education, employers, and work force development organizations, making referrals as needed
- Build cooperative systems that promote student self-determination and self-advocacy skill building
- Develop coordinated interagency strategies to collect, share, and use students’ information, ensuring confidentiality and consent of students and families
- Facilitate trainings, professional development, technical assistance and information dissemination related to transition laws, practices, and establishing support networks e.g. adult services, post-school options, integrated employment options, self-determination, guardianship and other transition related issues
- Initiate opportunities and learning experiences in employment and community settings, including working with employers to negotiate job customization and accommodations to meet students’ individual needs
- Provide educators, guidance staff, community agency personnel, employers, and other community partners with disability awareness training and information in collaboration with students and family members e.g. universal access and design, auxiliary aids for youth with disabilities, reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, funding streams, employer tax incentives, and other pertinent topics
- Coordinate individualized student guidance regarding appropriate course of studies during high school to meet postsecondary academic, vocational and community/adult living goals and match local area college and career readiness initiatives, employment opportunities, and community resources with student needs
Appendix D

Letter of Consent from the Executive Director

Signed Informed Consent to Conduct Research

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Lisa Leigh Fournier, Doctoral Candidate & Principal Researcher,  
Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator

Title of Project: Building Capacity in Transition Services: Moving an Educational Organization Forward

November 25, 2013

Dear Dr. (Name omitted to protect anonymity of research site),

As I begin to prepare for my doctoral research project, it is necessary for me secure a site for my case study. I have selected your organization as a research site. This letter will serve to give you an overview of the goals, needs and requirements of the members of the organization during this process. Your informed consent is required to allow access to documents, sites and employees.

The primary goals of this case study are to investigate the current transition related practices at the four secondary level sites, and propose recommendations to align the sites with best practice, legislative mandates, and one another. Specifically, the goals are (a) examine the current documentation practices as they relate to IEP writing, (b) determine the presence of the eight substantiated practices within each site, (c) identify the differences in practices between the programs, (d) identify the perceived obstacles present in each site, and, (e) determine supports required to align the sites with best practice and one another.

Each participant will be briefed on this research prior to signing an individual, voluntary, and informed consent form. They will not be directly compensated for their participation, but may benefit from the resulting training that arises from this case study.

As part of the informed consent process, it is important to clarify the following parameters of the research:

◊ Participation by the organization is completely voluntary, and the executive director retains the right to opt of this study on behalf of the organization at any time.
◊ Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time.
◊ Participants will not be provided remuneration for their participation.
It is anticipated that participation for individuals and the organization, may result in indirect benefits. They will be allowed to openly share their experiences and perceptions of current transition related practices. As a result, they will be allowed direct comment relating to future needs and potential professional development opportunities.

Confidentiality as it relates to students will be absolute. The organization, sites, and participants will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for all reporting purposes. Although absolute confidentiality, at the local level, may not be guaranteed, all efforts to protect the identity of participants will be maintained throughout the data collection and reporting process.

Participants will be informed their participation or lack of, will in no way effect their employment. This research is not intended for evaluative purposes. It is strictly for information gathering, and will not violate any union contract evaluative procedures outlined.

As the Executive Director, I am seeking your consent to the following:

**Document Review:** Allowed access to the IEP database to review IEPs signed and deemed “Active” between January 2, 2013 and June 30, 2013. I will review the Individualized Education Plan’s at the four secondary level sites to complete the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Indicator 13 checklist. No identifying information will be required as part of this process. Data will be analyzed in a general way, using a “yes” or “no” reporting manner as prescribed by the DESE Indicator 13 form. The goal of this step is to determine the level of transition compliance in the IEP. Since this document drives the entire educational process for students, and has legislative guidelines for its proper alignment, this will be the first step in the data collection process. This is anticipated to take place during the winter of 2014. IEP identifying information will remain anonymous to me with the participation of K.N., or through consent through an “Opt Out” process with parent, and where applicable, student’s consent.

**Interview:** Interviews will take place individually. Teacher/Leaders and principals of the four secondary level sites will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview throughout this study. In addition, teachers and select paraprofessionals in the four secondary level sites will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview. Interviews will be conducted between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., or at another time that is convenient to the participants and does not interfere with their direct responsibilities to students and site. It is anticipated these interviews will take place in the spring of 2014. Participants will also be asked to participate in member checking. Validation of interview transcripts, analysis and interpretation, will be requested from participants. The time required for this critical validation step, will not interfere in participant responsibilities to students or site. It is anticipated this will occur during the spring/summer of 2014.
Observation: Casual, direct observations lasting 60 minutes in duration will occur at each of the four research sites. Observations will produce no disruption to the flow of the educational experience for students, or the workday for employees.

Should you have any questions or concerns about participation in this research, please contact me at: fournier.l@huskey.neu.edu or 508-509-1808. You may also contact Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator, at t.sanders@neu.edu.

Should you have any questions pertaining to your rights throughout this research, you may contact Nan. C. Regina, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. She may also be reached at n.regina@neu.edu or 617-373-4588. This contact may remain anonymous.

By providing your signature below, you are indicating your permission for your organization to be used as the research site for this case study:

__________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature                                          Date

__________________________________________
Participant’s Printed Name

Lisa L. Fournier
Researcher’s Printed Name
Appendix E

Signed Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name:  Lisa Leigh Fournier, Doctoral Candidate & Principal Researcher,
Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator

Title of Project: Building Capacity in Transition Services: Moving an Educational
Organization Forward

December 1, 2013

Dear Prospective Participant:

I will be conducting a research study as part of the requirements to earn a Doctorate in Education from Northeastern University. I am planning to complete a case study on the transition practices at our four secondary level sites. The goal is to align practice with current legislative mandates and best practice between and among the sites. Specifically, the goals are (a) examine the current documentation practices as they relate to IEP writing, (b) determine the presence of the eight substantiated practices within each site, (c) identify the differences in practices between the programs, (d) identify the perceived obstacles present in each site, and, (e) determine supports required to align the sites with best practice and one another.

As part of the informed consent process, it is important to clarify the following parameters of the research:

◊ Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may opt out at any time.
◊ Participants will not be provided remuneration for their participation.
◊ It is anticipated that participation for individuals and sites, may result in indirect benefits. You will be allowed to openly share your experiences and perceptions of current transition related practices. As a result, you will be allowed direct comment relating to future needs and potential professional development opportunities.
◊ The organization, sites and participants will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for all reporting purposes. Although absolute confidentiality, at the local level, may not be guaranteed, all efforts to protect your identity will be maintained throughout the data collection and reporting process.
◊ Your participation, or lack thereof, will in no way effect your employment. This research is not intended for evaluative purposes. It is strictly for information gathering, and will not violate and Union contract evaluative procedures outlined.
◊ A transcript of your individual or focus group interview will be provided to you for review. This process, called “member checking”, helps to validate the transcripts, analysis, and interpretation. Any comments will be documented and incorporated into the final Doctoral Project Report (DPR).
All digital recordings, notes, and transcripts of interviews will be securely maintained in a locked file cabinet within my residence and destroyed at the completion of the study. As the study is designed, I do not anticipate any harm or risk to you as a participant.

As a study participant, I am seeking your consent for the following:

- **Interview:** Interviews will take place both individually and in focus group form. Teacher/Leaders and principals of the four sites will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview throughout this study. Teachers and paraprofessionals in the four secondary level sites will be asked to participate in one semi-structured focus group interview. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., or at another time that is convenient and does not interfere with your direct responsibilities to students or program site. It is anticipated these interviews will take place in the spring of 2013.

- **Member Checking:** Participants will also be asked to participate in member checking. Validation of interview transcripts, analysis and interpretation, will be requested from participants. The time required for this critical validation step will not interfere with your responsibilities to students or program site, and will be kept to a minimum. It is anticipated this will occur during the spring/summer of 2013.

Should you have any questions or concerns about participation in this research, please contact me at: fournier.l@huskey.neu.edu or 508-509-1808. You may also contact Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator, at t.sanders@neu.edu.

Should you have any questions pertaining to your rights throughout this research, you may contact Nan. C. Regina, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. She may also be reached at n.regina@neu.edu or 617-373-4588. This contact may remain anonymous.

**By providing you signature below, you are indicating your permission for your organization to be used as the research site for this case study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Participant’s Printed Name</th>
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**Lisa L. Fournier**  
Researcher’s Printed Name
Appendix F

Opt-Out Consent to Participate in Research

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Lisa Leigh Fournier, Doctoral Candidate & Principal Researcher, Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator

Title of Project: Building Capacity in transition Services: Moving an Educational Organization Forward

January 5, 2014

Dear Prospective Participant:

I will be conducting a research study as part of the requirements to earn a Doctorate in Education from Northeastern University. I am planning to complete a case study on the transition practices at our four secondary level sites. The goal is to align practice with current legislative mandates and best practice between and among the sites. Specifically, the goals are (a) examine the current documentation practices as they relate to IEP writing, (b) determine the presence of the eight substantiated practices within each site, (c) identify the differences in practices between the programs, (d) identify the perceived obstacles present in each site, and, (e) determine supports required to align the sites with best practice and one another.

As part of my research, I wish to check a select number of student IEPs against the Indicator 13 checklist. This checklist is a mandatory reporting form that the Commonwealth Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to complete on all IEPs and report to the Federal Department of Education. This checklist asks a series of “yes” and “no” questions relating to the presence of transition services in the IEP. I have attached the checklist for you review.

While I am an employee of (name omitted to protect the anonymity of the research site), and have access to all IEPs generated within the organization, they have not been originally created for research purposes, and therefore consent to use the information must be obtained.

This is an “opt-out” consent. By signing this form, you indicate to study researchers that you DO NOT wish to have your IEP used as part of this study. Please return by February 3, 2014.

As part of the informed consent process, it is important to clarify the following parameters of the research:

♦ Participation in this study is completely voluntary.
♦ Complete confidentiality will be honored; your identifying information is not required as part of this checklist.
Your participation, or lack thereof, will in no way effect services provided to your child.

Should you have any questions or concerns about participation in this research, please contact me at: fournier.l@huskey.neu.edu or 508-509-1808. You may also contact Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator, at t.sanders@neu.edu.

Should you have any questions pertaining to your rights throughout this research, you may contact Nan. C. Regina, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. She may also be reached at n.regina@neu.edu or 617-373-4588. This contact may remain anonymous.

By providing you signature below, you are indicating that you **DO NOT** wish to have your IEP as part of this study:

__________________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature                              Date

______________________________________________
Participant’s Printed Name

_Lisa L. Fournier_
Researcher’s Printed Name
Appendix G

Observation Protocol

Description of the physical setting:

Description of participants:

Observable transition related activities:

Observable transition related data collection:

General symbolic factors:
Appendix H

Teacher-Leader/Principal Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Lisa L. Fournier

Date: ______________ Interviewee Site and Pseudonym: _______________

Time of Interview: __________________________

Introduction: Briefly review the project, research question and informed consent.

1. Please describe your role related to transition services and implementation.

2. Please describe your understanding and perception of external factors, i.e., IDEA 2004, DESE and SCEC policy regarding transition.

3. Describe the role you take in providing guidance and creating the compliance of your staff to meet transition mandated task requirements.

4. Organizational culture has been described “as the way we do things around here.” This might include rules that are both spoken and unspoken. How would you describe the culture at your site?

5. How would you describe the culture of your site as it relates to the larger organization? As it relates to transition requirements and practices?

6. Organizational climate can be described as the working relationships people have to get their daily job done. How does your site’s current work climate and culture promote transition requirements and practices?

7. What needs do you have to guide your staff in the current mission and policies as they relate to transition documentation and planning process for students?
8. Are there factors that you feel make it challenging to implement transition requirements in documentation and programming at your site?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your role in the transition requirements for secondary level special education students at your site?

Thank you for your participation.

Notes or observations during the interview
Appendix I

Teacher Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Lisa L. Fournier

Date: __________  Interviewee Site and Pseudonym:___________________

Time of Interview: ____________________

Introduction: Briefly review the project, research question and informed consent.

1. Please describe your role as it relates to transition.

2. Please describe your understanding and perception about IDEA 2004, DESE, and SCEC policy regarding transition.

3. Please describe your perceived task requirements relating to transition documentation and planning for students.

4. Please describe your perception of your role in the transition documentation and programming requirements for your students.

5. What has been most helpful and motivating to you in your understanding and implementation of your role in the transition process? Has anything deterred your motivation?

6. How do you receive direction and guidance regarding your responsibilities in transition documentation and programming for your students?

7. Organizational culture has been described “as the way we do things around here.” This might include rules that are both spoken and unspoken. How would you describe the culture at your site?
8. How would you describe the culture of your site as it relates to the larger organization? As it relates to transition requirements and practices?

9. Please describe how you promote understanding and engagement by the paraprofessional staff with the transition process.

10. Describe how you assist your paraprofessionals in the collection of transition related data for use in IEPs and progress reporting. What challenges do you perceive are present in the current stream of data collection?

11. Organizational climate can be described as the working relationships people have to get their daily job done. How does your site’s current work climate promote or hinder transition requirements and practices?

12. Are there factors that you feel make it challenging to implement transition requirements in documentation and programming at your site? What do you feel your individual needs are in relation to these requirements?

13. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your role in the transition requirements for secondary level special education students at your site?

Thank you for your participation.

Notes or observations during the interview:
Appendix J
Paraprofessional Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Lisa L. Fournier
Date: ______________ Interviewee Site and Pseudonym: ____________________
Time of Interview: ____________________

Introduction: Briefly review the project, research question and informed consent.

1. Please describe your role as it relates to transition.

2. Please describe your understanding and perception about IDEA 2004, DESE, and SCEC policy regarding transition.

3. Please describe your perceived task requirements relating to transition documentation and planning for students.

4. Please describe your perception of your role in the transition documentation and programming requirements for your students.

5. What has been most helpful and motivating to you in your understanding and implementation of your role in the transition process? Has anything deterred your motivation?

6. How do you receive direction and guidance regarding your responsibilities in transition data collection and activities?

7. Organizational culture has been described “as the way we do things around here.” This might include rules that are both spoken and unspoken. How would you describe the culture at your site?

8. How would you describe the culture of your site as it relates to the larger organization? As it relates to transition requirements and practices?
9. Organizational climate can be described as the working relationships people have to get their daily job done. How does your site’s current work climate promote transition requirements and practices?

10. Are there factors that you feel make it challenging to implement transition requirements in documentation and programming at your site? What do you feel your individual needs are in relation to these requirements?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your role in the transition requirements for secondary level special education students at your site?

Thank you for your participation.

Notes or observations during the interview:
Appendix K

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Lisa Fournier successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants.”

Date of completion: 01/08/2013

Certification Number: 1071940
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