

Special Education Administrators' Role and Impact in Providing Secondary Transition
Services to Students

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(ABSTRACT)

This study explored the role of special education administrators in coordination of secondary transition services for students with disabilities in Virginia. A survey was designed and administered that examined their perceptions of the effect of (a) work load, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support on level of importance, b) the relationships between levels of importance and involvement, c) the effect of size of the school district and staff support, and d) recommendations for improvement of transition services.

Analysis of the data revealed that special education administrators perceived level of importance for the coordination of transition services is high. Analysis of factors impacting the level of importance revealed eleven transition services that had a positive effect on staff support, size of school district, and full/part time special education administrators. The strongest positive relationships for staff support were the school principal and the special education teacher. The school principal impacted six of the eleven transition services identified, while the special education teacher impacted two of the transition services. Full/part time special education administrators had an impact on research and evaluating best practices, while size influenced two of the variables.

The correlation between levels of importance and involvement revealed significant correlation between 40% of the transition services. Special education administrators reported they were more likely to utilize others to coordinate the highest level of involvement in the coordination of services. Size of the school district had a positive effect on the resources needed for coordination of transition services. Time, financial, and community resources were identified as the greatest need for coordination of services.

Recommendations for improvement of implementation of transition services clustered into eight categories. However, the greatest number of recommendations from respondents were (a) additional staff employed for the specific purpose of coordination and delivery of transition services, (b) increased community resources to establish linkages with agencies and other related services, (c) additional staff development focused on transition programming, and clarification of the new IDEIA 2004 transition requirements, and (d) federal funding for mandated positions, to provide more equity and commitment to citizens with disabilities in Virginia.

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DEDICATION

It is with honor and gratitude that I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved husband, Anthony, who has been encouraging, patient, and understanding, through this process, from beginning to end. He has been the greatest support in making my dream a reality through his unwavering loyalty, faith and love.

To my mom, who prayed for me, and was always confident that I would finish this journey, even through her time of illness, she focused her love on me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

President George W. Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004, P. L. 108-446, into law on December 3, 2004. The provisions of this Act were effective as of July 1, 2005, with the exception of some elements of the definition of “highly qualified teacher” that took effect on December 3, 2004 (Virginia Department of Education, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 2004 defines secondary transition as a coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Transition services are intended to be a coordinated set of activities, provided to the student by the school and other agencies, to promote a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment, and independent living. IDEA 2004 adds a new requirement that transition services are to be based on the student’s “strengths”, as well as their preferences and interests. The addition of “strengths” makes it clear that the development of transition goals should focus on and build upon what the student can do, and not focus on what the student can’t do. In addition, the updated IDEA 2004 mandates that the activities developed as part of transition services must be within a “results-oriented” process as opposed to the earlier requirement for “outcome oriented”. This signals a clear intent to ensure that the process includes activities designed to produce success for the individual. The process must focus on improving the academic and

functional achievement of the student to facilitate movement from school to post school activities.

Under IDEA 2004, schools continue to be responsible for bringing in representatives from other agencies, such as rehabilitative services or post-secondary education, to be a part of the transition planning process. Such agencies may also be responsible for the delivery of services needed by the student. However, should other agencies fail to provide the agreed upon transition services, schools must find alternative ways to meet the transition objectives for the student (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Recent findings indicate that there is a need to improve the participation of outside representatives in transition planning. For example, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors participated in only 13 percent of the development of the Individual Education Program, (IEP). The other representatives, which included postsecondary education representatives, advocates, and consultants participated in only three percent of the development of IEPs (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman 2003).

Previous requirements regarding the age at which transition planning should begin were somewhat ambiguous, requiring some activities to begin at age 14, and others at the age 16. IDEA 2004 established one clear starting age requirement for the start of transition planning. IEP Teams must now include transition planning in the first IEP that will be in effect when the child turns 16 years of age. However, IDEA 2004's federal regulations, finalization of which is expected by the end of 2005, make it clear that IEP Teams are free to begin transition planning at an earlier age if the team determines it appropriate to do so. In many cases, students with learning disabilities can benefit from transition planning

activities that begin in middle school. Various planning includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school, adult-living objectives; and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

The updated IDEA 2004 law raises the level of concern for persons responsible for the implementation of secondary transition services and programs for students with disabilities, and further provides a platform for the spawning of a myriad of “best practices” in the delivery of transition services and transition planning. However, despite federal legislation and mandates, as well as, specific state initiatives, the successful transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities continues to escape educators and currently poses a major problem. Although best practices in transition services were advanced, and transition specialist competencies were delineated, the systematic coordination of the delivery of available services and programs continues to be a major challenge. Secondary and post school outcomes for students with disabilities continue to reflect a dismal report (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000).

Definitions

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 revises the mandate whereby the state requires school divisions to consider whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability when determining whether a child has a learning disability. Now, school divisions are permitted to use a response to a research-based intervention as part of an evaluation process. School divisions may choose to use the discrepancy model, a research-based intervention model, or a different research-

based assessment process. The state may not require school divisions to use the discrepancy model (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

Special Education Administrator is the administrative personnel in a school division whose primary function is to supervise the development and implementation of special education programs and services (Burrello, Lashley, & Van Dyke, 1996).

Secondary Transition Services are coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities. In order to plan effectively, begin no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16 and updated annually. Diploma options and course of study discussions should begin during the eighth or ninth grade (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a standards-driven individualized educational program related to the general curriculum, and should be based upon the long-range educational outcomes of the student. All IEPs in Virginia must contain a present level of performance, goal statements, list of accommodations and/or modifications, and service statements. Short-term objectives or benchmarks are required for goals of students working toward alternate achievement standards. It is permissible to include objectives or benchmarks for other students' IEP goals (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

Independent Living is a status of living wherein, individual responsibility for residential choices and skills, economic decisions, money management, community mobility, citizenship, and involvement in community, are inclusive of activities consistently performed by an individual with limited assistance (Clark & Kolstoe, 1995).

Limitations and Assumptions

One limitation of the study is that the description of the results will be based on self-report perceptions of special education administrators. In addition, although for many years, legislation mandated that transition services be coordinated and provided to students with disabilities; it been defined in the literature from various perspectives that the dropout rate for students with disabilities remains twice that of students without disabilities (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Therefore, the implementation of secondary transition services may be widely varied from school division to school division in rural, urban, and suburban settings.

Problem Statement

Special education administrators have a complex role in coordinating a wide variety of services for students with disabilities. The coordination of secondary transition services is essential to students' post school success. Although legislation was passed, and transition services and linkages were defined, the systematic coordination of transition services continues to be a challenge for special education administrators. Although school districts written plans in place that describe the transition services to be provided for students and families, in many cases the actual implementation of those services is in the form of "lip service" only. There is an urgent need for the development of an effective comprehensive transition service system, wherein, transition planning and services are fully integrated; and agencies, as well as, educators provide information and training on transition services (deFur & Getzel, 2003). In addition, funding should support the hiring

of personnel dedicated to ensuring program implementation and delivery of services. It is imperative that effective transition programming is implemented, and inclusive of developing collaborative relationships among agencies in the community, state, and local levels to provide support for students, and families (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002).

Surveys of adults with disabilities conducted by the National Council on Disability indicated that individuals with disabilities continue to lag far behind individuals without disabilities in employment and other aspects of community engagement (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Over the years, the information regarding student outcomes caused advocates, families, and educators to question both the content and the process of special education programming. The public's recognition and increased focus on the number of youths with disabilities who are not achieving high levels of quality full time employment, independent living, success in postsecondary education, or community engagement resulted in a change in the focus on transition education services.

Growing recognition of the dismal post-school outcomes of many youths with disabilities, combined with recent policy developments, is gradually leading to a more consumer-oriented education, and service delivery paradigm, based on student ability, and self determination, (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004a). This perspective supports, the coordination of transition services is not an add –on activity for students with disabilities when they reach the age of 16; but rather a foundation from which programs and activities are developed, & implemented to ensure student success and attainment of life-long goals.

Purpose

The role of the special education administrator in the coordination of secondary transition services and programs for students with disabilities is significant to the success of students, both in the secondary environment, as well as, post school experiences. There is little known about the systematic approach that may be used by schools or school divisions in the coordination and implementation of transition services and programs that ensure students' access to all appropriate transition services needed for secondary and post school success. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study.

Research Questions

1. How does workload, size of school district, wealth, setting, and staff support effect special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services?
2. Is there a relationship between the levels of importance and involvement in the coordination of transition services?
3. Does the size of the school district and staff support affect the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services?
4. What recommendations do special education administrators for improving the implementation of transition services?

Need for Study

Although the law required that schools provide transition services for students with disabilities since 1990, students with disabilities continue to encounter problems with the transition process as they leave the high school setting with the notion of becoming contributing members of society, through obtaining employment and living independently. In spite of the fact that the overall dropout rates for youth with disabilities significantly declined between the two national longitudinal study cohorts, only the students with mental retardation in the NTLS2 completed school at a higher rate than the previous cohort (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003). However, reports of high dropout rates, low employment, as well as, underemployment and lack of general community participation of students with disabilities continues to be an overwhelming issue of concern when compared with the students graduating high school in the regular education program.

Students with disabilities continue to leave high school without completing their education or transition services at an alarming high rate. In addition, youth and young adults with disabilities continue to experience social adjustment issues with suspensions, expulsions, or job firings being reported as being more frequent than those reported in the National Transitional Longitudinal Study 1 (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003).

The delivery of secondary transition services is critical to the success of students with disabilities attaining their educational goals, successfully completing their high school education, functioning as adults in their communities, and ultimately becoming contributing members of society, which is largely contingent upon administrative support (Anderson & Asselin, 1996; Furney, Azi, & Destefano, 1997). In addition, Anderson and Asselin (1996) noted that the administrative focus on student benefits could have a direct

impact on the delivery of transition services by overcoming the obstacles and consistently making the appropriate adjustments to ensure that transition services reach directly to the individual students.

Service coordination is imperative to the success of transition programming for students with disabilities. Current practices and policies, including differences between youth and adult services delivery systems and the lack of interagency collaboration, complicate service coordination. As students with disabilities move from secondary education to postsecondary education and/or employment, the first challenge they face is the use of different terminology across various settings. The resulting confusion may prevent students and professionals from recognizing service gaps (Research and Training Center on Service Coordination, 2001).

Adult services are available from a myriad of service providers, with no designated coordinating agency, unlike service coordination requirements by the Local Education Agency (LEA). Without interagency partnerships, students and families, as well as adult service workers, may experience difficulty planning and locating funds for needed services and supports; hence the continued emphasis and focus on the rationale and importance of the effective coordination of secondary transition services for students with disabilities. An examination of current practices by secondary education and adult service systems reveals challenges to service coordination that effect students with disabilities and the implementation of secondary transition services and programs.

Ultimately, collaboration and cooperation among agencies is the key to eliminating service gaps, and causes all the stakeholders to communicate more effectively in planning for successful transition coordination. In addition, the coordination of services increases

efficient use of scarce resources, which supports the delivery of services to the students; therefore, school personnel must be trained to understand different roles and responsibilities in transition planning and services (National Center on Secondary Education Transition, 2004). Further, IDEA 2004 mandates that a statement of needed transition services be an integral part of a student's IEP when the student reaches the age of 16, or earlier if needed. This directive, in itself, speaks directly to compliance by local education agencies to provide students with disabilities a transition plan, which consist of a coordinated set of activities, and experiences that promotes a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment and independent living.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Legislative Background

Since 1983, federal special education policy regarding transition services for students with disabilities expanded significantly. The 1983 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA) authorized spending for transition-focused research and model demonstration grants and contracts (Kohler & Rusch, 1995). The 1990 amendments, while continuing federal support for transition related activities, defined transition services and required students' interests, preferences, and needs be considered in their development. In addition, IDEA required that the Individualized Education Program (IEP), for students ages 16 and older include specific transition components, such as a statement of needed transition services and agency linkages. In one of the most important mandates related to special education, the 1997 amendments expanded the transition requirements regarding a student's IEP to begin including transition service needs related to the student's course of study when the student reaches age 14. This was the first time federal policy communicated that the content of a student's education should be focused on his or her post school aspirations (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

The 1990 and 1997 IDEA amendments also mandated a more participatory approach to education and service planning for individuals with disabilities. IDEA required that students be involved in transition planning and that students' preferences and interests be taken into account when transition services are planned. As conceptualized in the 1990 and 1997 IDEA amendments, transition planning focused on post school outcomes and

consisted of a variety of activities, coordinated in a meaningful way, that informed educational planning and decision making (Kohler & Field, 2003).

IDEA 1997, also required that IEPs show how students with disabilities will address state and local standards, and how they will participate in state assessments, in keeping with standards-based reform. The overall intent of these changes in IDEA was to ensure that students with disabilities will progress toward the same high standards to which other students must achieve and that states' and schools' accountability systems must include students with disabilities. In addition, IDEA 1997, clearly specified that schools must direct attention to outcomes and be responsible for ensuring that a planning process was in place to identify, work toward, and plan for these post-school outcomes. In turn, the effectiveness of these secondary programs were judged by the success of the students in meeting state and local standards, and by their success in post-school life (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000).

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 renewed its commitment to supporting youth with disabilities in making a successful transition from school to adult life. It redefines secondary transition services as a coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process, which is different from the previous requirement of outcome-oriented process. This coordinated set of activities facilitates movement from school to post-school activities through improving academic and functional achievement. Further, a transition plan must be developed, and in effect, when the student is 16 and updated annually. Discussions should also begin during the eighth or ninth grade concerning diploma options and appropriate course of study (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). To accomplish this objective, improvement

must be made in developing collaborative partnerships that include students and families, schools, and multiple agencies at the community, state, and national levels (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Evolution of Transition Services in Virginia

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) identified secondary transition services as a priority in the process of developing its state plan in 2001. A statewide assessment of transition services was conducted through a grant awarded to the Virginia Department of Education. The purpose of the assessment was to create, (a) an overview of the current status of transition services in Virginia, (b) a description of the transition services with recommendations for improvement, (c) an understanding of the professional development needs for consumers and service providers, and (d) recommendations to improve transition services in Virginia (deFur & Getzel, 2003). Through this initiative various projects, partnerships, and collaborative group efforts were developed to address the transition needs of students with disabilities in the state of Virginia.

Virginia established an interagency transition task force, to examine strategies for technical assistance and promotion of transition services across the Commonwealth. The task force consisted of individuals with disabilities, families, human service agencies and educational representatives. An initial statewide study was conducted to determine perceptions of district special education administrators, regarding the degree of implementation of transition services (Anderson & Asselin, 1996). Demographic information was collected about transition coordination and existence of an interagency transition team, which was used for planning and delivery of technical assistance through

Project UNITE (Unified Intercommunity Transition and Empowerment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities). Project UNITE, a federally funded transition systems change grant for Virginia, developed a statewide approach to transition programming that integrated services among educational systems, adult and human service agencies, communities, families, and consumers with disabilities (Anderson & Asselin, 1996). Through Project UNITE, financial incentives were provided to improve local transition programs and services. It is reported that more than fifty localities used these funds for improving transition programming, in addition to hosting annual conferences, which involve service providers, families, and educators in increasing knowledge base through attending workshop sessions on transition training services and planning.

In 1998, Virginia was awarded a grant from the United States Department of Education, which focused on activities to improve special education services for all students in the Commonwealth. Further, three strategic directions were identified; five core goals, and multiple performance indicators to measure the level of progress toward the strategic directions. Graduation, school completion, and higher academic expectations were identified as key goals in the plan. Furthermore, resources and incentives were made available to promote family involvement and support effective transition outcomes (deFur & Getzel, 2003).

In addition, Virginia 's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS), hosted regional workshops for community teams focused on developing transition services for youth with mental health concerns. Since 1989, DMHMRSAS continually updated their policy on transitional services. Interagency cooperation and collaboration on the state and local levels was also stressed. A

statewide initiative referred to as the Transition Outcomes Project was established. This project was developed around identifying specific problems in implementing the transition services requirements, and then develops strategies to address and resolve each problem. The Virginia Higher Education Leadership Partners (HELP) is also a collaborative group of stakeholders and representatives from secondary education, advocacy groups, state agencies, etc. The purpose of this group is to meet and examine transition issues concerning post-high school, and higher education as they relate to students with disabilities. Materials provided include the Virginia's College Guide for Students with Disabilities, and the development of a College Quest program at Virginia Commonwealth University for students with disabilities. Virginia Tech University and George Mason University were also instrumental in providing transition services to students with disabilities who wish to attend college (deFur & Getzel, 2003).

In reflecting on the research and the findings of the study, it is evident that although schools and agencies are involved in the process to some degree, and collaboration exists on some level, there continues to be a need for a solid foundation that sustains an effective transition service system. Therefore, transition planning and services must be fully integrated into the secondary education system, as an essential process in the coordination of transition services for students with disabilities. Although Virginia supports staff development and technical assistance at the state and local levels, transition planning and services are not yet fully integrated into Virginia's agency and education support services.

In addition, deFur & Getzel (2003) indicate significant need for improvement in (a) service provision and activities across the state, (b) dedicated personnel in schools and adult service agencies, (c) wide-spread, systematic, ongoing training for service providers,

educators, and families, (d) employment and independent living skills development and related services, (e) comprehensive transition planning, and (f) more resources, including people, time, and funding.

Secondary Transition Services

To consider special education administrators' leadership role in transition planning and programming, first it is useful to review the fundamental premise of transition services. Despite national and state attention to special education issues, students with disabilities continue to experience problems associated with the transition process (Anderson & Asselin, 1996; Furney et al., 1997). The National Longitudinal Study of Special Education Students (1993), 38% of students left school by dropping out. Employment data from a Harris Survey indicated that 60% of all working-age persons with disabilities were unemployed and that the average earnings of those individuals who were working were 35% less than for workers without disabilities (LHA, 1994). Disappointing levels of educational and occupational attainment of students with disabilities cannot be attributed to one source, however. Lack of interagency planning, staff development, and formal transition services and programs are commonly reported areas of breakdown in transition best practice (Anderson & Asselin, 1996; Baer et al. 1996).

Students with disabilities must move from public education, a relatively coordinated structure of services to which they are entitled, to a fragmented, often confusing array of service providers to which they must demonstrate their eligibility (Blalock, 1996; Wandry & Repetto, 1993). The IDEA first formalized the concept of interagency and community linkages by making it a part of the IEP process requiring that representatives of other agencies providing or paying for services be included in the

planning. An integrative approach to transition efforts been identified as exemplary practice in developing and supporting educational services to assist student in negotiating the maze of post-school opportunities that may facilitate future success (Blalock, 1996).

Role of Special Education Administrator

The role of the special education administrator began in the 1960s when special education programs consisted of services for students with mental retardation and severe disabilities. The administrators who managed these programs were primarily responsible for overseeing general education or federally funded programs (Goor, 1995). Most role descriptions included responsibility for managing a few special classes and coordinating placements in residential settings (Gillung et al., 1992; Goor, 1995). Advocacy groups focused their efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s, which resulted in landmark legislation mandating the provision of a wide array of services for students with disabilities who were previously underserved (Goor, 1995; Sage & Burrello, 1986). As a result, school districts nationwide hired full-time administrators to manage the complexity of the new services (Goor, 1995). The new role included establishing programs, managing budgets, hiring trained personnel, and responding to legal challenges (Goor, 1995; Sage & Burrello. 1986).

Questions arose concerning the efficacy of special services that segregated students from peers in general education in the 1980s and 1990s. This lead to the focus on least restrictive environment (LRE), which emerged as it was intrinsically linked to cooperative efforts between general and special education (Burrello et al., 1996; Goor, 1995; Lipp, 1992). Education also followed the lead of business in some instances, by moving toward a site-based management approach requiring the reorganization of education to involve more individuals in decision-making (Glasser, 1992; Sage & Burrello, 1994).

As the voices of new stakeholders became evident and quite involved in issues concerning special education it brought about a platform for a new definition of the role of special education administrators, to include a transition from the minimum legal compliance to increased emphasis on valuing individuals first and disability second. This movement also brought about the provision of collaborative integrative services to the greatest extent possible and offering quality instructional programs that are linked to desired outcomes (Clark & Kolstoe, 1995; Turnbull et al., 1995). These actions were a reflection of the notion that the current role of special education administrators is comprised of both traditional management tasks to maintain compliance, and leadership competencies to move beyond the status quo. The role is multifaceted as it is based on competencies related to building vision, supporting local school efforts, encouraging the development of collaborative work cultures, and empowering staff by support of new structures for service delivery (Burrello et al., 1996). Simultaneously, the role continues to encompass traditional functions of program management such as budgeting, planning, reporting, and program evaluation (Gillung et al., 1992; Sage & Burrello, 1986, 1994).

Every school system should contain a visible central administrative unit for special education programs and services that is at the same administrative hierarchical level as other major instructional program units. The parameters of regular and special education should be articulated so that children may be afforded equal educational opportunity through the resources of either or both instructional programs. Such articulation should be achieved through sensitive negotiations between the responsible agents of both regular and special education who meet in full parity. To protect the rights of all children to equal educational opportunity, the policymaking bodies of school

systems should include administrators of both regular and special education. Programs to meet the needs of children with exceptionalities are no less important than those designed to meet the needs of other children. The importance of programs to meet human needs should not be judged on the basis of the number of clients the programs are expected to serve (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

Facilitator of Collaboration

Special Education Administrators are also required to facilitate collaboration among various transition service providers within the school and outside agencies. Implementing transition services for students with disabilities needs to occur at different levels (e.g., from pre-school to elementary, from elementary to middle school, from secondary school to work settings). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act also require transition services for secondary students with disabilities. A key component is incorporating a transition component into the student's IEP. When planning and delivering transition services, leaders need to make sure that the services are provided through a results-oriented process and that the student with special needs is involved throughout the transition planning process. In doing so, the administrator can be assured that the student receives transition services that meet his or her individual needs and interests. This area became more critical with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which provides a variety of guarantees for employees with disabilities in the workplace. Special Education Administrators should facilitate staff in serving as an effective bridge between academic and vocational environments for individuals with disabilities (Billingsly, Farley, & Rude, 1993).

In addition, Furman (2000), conducted an analysis of the special education administrator's role, which indicated that the administrator's work includes two functions; management and supervision. The administrator's position consists of direct control over special education services at the district and building level. Advantages of such an organizational system to the district include visible involvement of principals in the special education process and little conflict between principals and director. Disadvantages include the unmet need of teachers for both closer supervision by the special education administrator and stronger advocacy with principals and the unmet need of the director for more direct control of special education services at the building level (Furman, 2000).

Another study was conducted, which included a questionnaire listing 43 tasks of the perceived role of the special education administrator, and involved 247 special education directors, superintendents of schools, and principals of schools with special education teachers. An analysis of the data suggested that the identifiable factor was one associated with the facilitator trainer dimension of the role, even though each of the three groups of respondents saw it as the least important. A policy planner factor also emerged from task items originally associated with other constructs (advocacy, program management, and monitoring—evaluation.) Policy planning was viewed as most important by directors and principals and second most important by superintendents. Superintendents considered the legal rights guarantor factor as the most important, which directors and principals ranked it second (Anastasio & Sage, 2000).

The lack of a clear role definition for the special education administrators resulted in an interpretation of the position as that of a facilitator, planner, and legal rights guarantor for exceptional children (Berry & Sistrunk, 2000).

The emphasis on decentralization continues to major implications for both building level administrators and the role of the division-level special education administrators (Sage, 1996). An administrative approach that is “school-site specific” may maintain authority for monitoring and policy making as central office functions, but may release responsibility for the design and implementation of programming to individual school- site authorities. As a result, the role of special education administrators at the district level may shift to one that encourages responsibility and participation in serving all students well, and provides technical assistance to principals and their staffs in the development of programming.

While leadership competencies are balanced with traditional management functions that include planning and budgeting, they also demonstrate the need to move beyond the role as traditionally defined. Individuals responsible for administering special education services must aspire to competence in a variety of domains that embrace both technical aspects of management and transformative leadership skills. As special education continues to evolve, the role of special education administrators will also change. Successful leadership in special education was described as a balancing act, requiring special education administrators to become advocates for the best possible services, which supports empowering staff, acknowledging the needs of parents, and collaborating with other administrators (Stodden & Jones, 2002; Goor, 1995).

In focusing on the special education administrator as a facilitator for collaboration and systems linkages at all levels, transition planning and services must be carefully considered. Several factors stand as barriers to effective collaboration, including (a) lack of shared knowledge and vision by students, parents, and school and agency staff, (b) lack

of shared information across school and community agencies, and coordinated assessment and planning processes, to support integrated transition planning (Benz, Johnson, Mikkelsen, & Lindstrom, 1995); (c) lack of meaningful roles for students and parents in the transition decision-making process (Furney, 1997); (d) lack of meaningful information on anticipated post-school services (Johnson & Sharpe, 2000); (e) lack of state and local interagency linkages, and (f) lack of coordinated eligibility requirements and funding for agency services (Luecking & Crane, 2002). However, research suggests that systems can work more effectively together when these factors are addressed and linkages are established between all the stakeholders. Collaborative approaches bring together community agencies to focus their collective expertise and combined resources to improve the quality of transition planning for students with disabilities. This sharing of resources, knowledge, skills, and data requires planned and thoughtful collaboration among all participants (Mooney & Crane, 2002; Hart, Zimbrich, & Whelley, 2002).

Special Education Administrators and Work load

The role of the special education administrator as it relates to work load, is defined as the employment capacity as full time or part time. Additionally, the challenges faced with the delivery of tasks, decisions, special education personnel, training, and interactive involvement in the coordination of transition services impacts on the level of involvement and success in implementing programs and services.

The role of the special education administrator evolved from one of child advocate to one of compliance monitor and legal counsel since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. Following the passage of this landmark legislation, diligent administrators sought to develop programs in public schools where few had

existed (Gerber, 1996). Until recently, the special education administrator was the individual primarily responsible for advocating and ensuring both legal compliance and the implementation of instructional strategies and other program services that would benefit students with disabilities. The special education administrator must be an effective communicator, proficient manager, astute politician, and strategic planner, advocating for the best possible services, empowering staff, acknowledging the needs of parents, and collaborating with other administrators (Goor, 1995).

Special Education Administrators and Staff Support

It become an imperative for special education administrators to work even more closely with others in the school district, as well as, outside the district to ensure the delivery of transition services to students with disabilities. The others who may provide support in the delivery of transition services may include, but is not limited to, district-level transition specialists, school based transition coordinators, special education teachers, or principals. The special education administrator must utilize various combinations of personnel to address the issues of successful transition programming. A variety of issues exist with providing transition services; including lack of vocational training and poor linkages between schools and service providers, been consistently reported by students, parents, and others (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Special education administrators are now at a crossroads in the field. Among the challenges faced by special education administrators, is promoting collaboration between general and special education teachers and administrators, to assure that high quality education programs and services are accessible to all students (Lashley and Boscardin, 2003). It become an imperative for special education administrators to work even more

closely with building principals and related administrative staff, including central office curriculum directors and school-based guidance counselors. Developing a close working relationship will support the articulation and knowledge of the law, as well as, research-based interventions that make the curriculum and related services accessible to students with disabilities (Boscardin, 2004). Further, findings from the research indicate there is a need for the promotion of improved levels of collaboration between general education and special education. General education classroom teachers, work-study coordinators, career and technical education instructors, and high school counselors all play an important role in supporting a student's preparation for transition (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Special Education Administrators and Setting

The manner in which the role of the special education administrator is implemented may be different from one school district to another, depending on the setting of the school district; whether it is urban, suburban, or rural could determine methods used to coordinate transition services. Barriers to effective transition for students in rural special education programs continue to be an issue for students with disabilities (Fisher, 1995). Among those that been noted in the research are (a) geographic barriers to special education delivery (Fisher, 1995; Montgomery, 1995; Porterfield, 1984; Wienke, 1994), (b) lack of jobs in rural areas (Theobald, 1996), and (c) national shortages of qualified special education personnel, particularly in rural areas (Bull & Rupard, 1995; Link, 1988; Tompkins, 1996). Efforts addressed this need through various grant initiatives, to provide additional training for rural special education administrators and staff for the acquisition of additional resources (Green & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003).

Several solutions were proposed to address the issue of limited resources, including the use of traditional and non-traditional business representatives, recruiters, and human resources personnel to acquaint students and their families with employment possibilities (Clark & McDonnell, 1994). Services may be available, but at a distance. Services may also be available if steps are taken to ensure that students followed through with the requirements of being considered for a job, as in ensuring the name been placed on a waiting list. Services may be available, if progress is being made in the acquisition of basic daily living skills. Finally, services may be available if educators can match a student's needs with an employer's needs along with arrangements for transportation, or if job coaching opportunities are made available to students (Coombe, 1993).

Challenges for Coordinating Services

The Council of Administrators of Special Education, (CASE), is the professional organization representing local special education directors; and The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, (NASDSE) represents the state directors of special education. Both of these organizations solicited information from their members to ascertain the issues that challenge implementation of IDEA 2004, which is inclusive of the secondary transition requirements, and the new No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). NCLBA seeks to make fundamental changes in public education by challenging federal, state, and local education officials to reevaluate the way it expects all students to reach proficiency on state assessments. Students must demonstrate they possess knowledge of the subject matter in accordance with state standards. Achieving the goal of having all students proficient is a formidable challenge for all states, districts, schools, and students. However, special education administrators in rural areas may face additional challenges,

primarily related to the small size of rural school districts and their geographic isolation. Since rural school districts comprise anywhere from 10-25% of the local districts, in the country, these districts represent a significant number of students, parents, administrators, and communities, which is a large enough population to cause substantial impact on the overall success of a state (Purcell, East, and Rude, 2005).

The methods utilized to obtain feedback from CASE and NASDSE memberships regarding these issues were varied. CASE hosted an online survey for two months, and 178 respondents provided feedback regarding services in local school districts in rural areas. NASDSE took a more general approach and posed targeted questions regarding NCLBA issues to its state members. Both local and state special education administrators were concerned about the implementation of NCLBA in addition to the mandated requirements of IDEA 2004 (Purcell, East, and Rude, 2005).

Local special education administrators, (73.7%), cited resources as the factor that impacted their success in implementation of services for students with disabilities. When asked what resource the district needed above all of the others, 46.9% listed additional funding. In addition, local directors were asked if additional funding were available, would the resources needed be available. Thirty-two percent of the respondents said the resources they needed would be available if they had the funding; however, nearly 10% said they would not be available and 55% said only partially available. The comments section clearly showed that personnel including special education teachers, paraeducators, and to a great extent, related service providers would not be available even if the district had the money to fill the positions. Rural special education administrators perceive this to be a major problem for their districts. Achievement of Adequate Yearly Progress, (AYP) and

the definition of highly qualified personnel were also of major concern. Further, providing services through various programming was listed as a challenge and area of concern for low-incidence areas, small school divisions, low populated school districts, and school districts in rural settings (Purcell, East, and Rude, 2005).

Perspectives of challenges that confront the special education administrator include the specialties among members of the educational community and the wide individual variance among learners that require specialized attention (Crockett, 2002). The effective provision of specialized instruction relies on collaboration between building level leaders and special education leaders (Swan, 1998). In most instances, school-level administrators are the designated instructional supervisors for all teachers within their building, regardless of the types of students served or the classroom settings in which they are taught (Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon, 2001).

A survey of Virginia's special education administrators reported 52% of building principals held sole responsibility for supervising and evaluating special education teachers. An additional 40% of principals were reported as sharing these responsibilities, with special education administrators (19%), assistant principals (11%), or combinations of others. In describing challenges and issues of concern for providing support and coordination of related services, special education administrators, (31%) listed lack of time as the major issue. The second most frequent issue noted by special education administrators (26%), was school administrators' lack of knowledge about special education. The study revealed that although building-level leaders may be ill prepared for their instructional support roles in special education, special education administrators were often unavailable (Bays, 2001b). Results from this report and other research, indicate that

there is a heavy reliance on the school-level administrator for direct supervision of special education services (Crockett, 2002).

There are additional challenges that the special education administrator faces in the coordination and implementation of transition services relating to their role. A study conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office identified the problems reported by various stakeholders in the transition process. Special education administrators and teachers report absence of linkages between school systems and service providers. Lack of, or limited resources to provide work-based experiences for students, work load in providing other required services, and students' lack of self-advocacy training, are barriers to the successful transition of students. In addition, researchers report lack of vocational education and community work experience and parents found that lack of information and support made it difficult to navigate the transition period; while government officials focused on the more tangible issue of transportation for students with disabilities (US General Accounting Office, 2003).

Responsibility for administering special education programs should be clearly defined so that accountability for service effectiveness can be maintained. In the administration of the special education system, it must be clarified (a) who is to be responsible for various functions and decisions and (b) what procedures can be developed to provide adequate protection of the individual child's rights. When services that are essential to the improvement of a child's condition are rendered under several administrative auspices, as is so often the case with children and youth with exceptionalities, which agent or agency is to be responsible for providing which aspects of

treatment needs to be clearly defined at every level to produce the most effective outcomes for the child (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

Staff Development and Training

Successful transition can only occur if personnel are knowledgeable about “best practices” that relate to transition planning and implementation (Severson et al., 1994). Coordinating staff development opportunities for consistent staff involvement in experiences to increase their knowledge of effective transition planning and service delivery is pertinent to success. Staff development activities could greatly enhance competencies that are grounded in the skills of communication, consultation, collaboration, and increased knowledge of agencies and strategies for systems change (Anderson & Asselin, 1996; deFur & Taymans, 1995). Further, approaches such as cross training, train-the-trainer, team building, and others involving building collaborative relationships between state and local agencies are pertinent to the improvement of the coordination of transition services. Involvement of school district personnel, institutions of higher education, parent centers, and consumer and advocacy organizations must be solicited, encouraged, and supported to get involved (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

Another issue that impacts effective delivery of transition services are special education teacher-training programs, which are responsible for preparing professionals for teaching critical secondary transition skills, however, programs are beginning to acknowledge the need to adjust curriculum to address these issues (Taymans & deFur, 1994). Staff development activities should encourage professional growth through opportunities to apply, practice, and reflect on skills that are presented (Bassett, Patton, White, Blalock, & Smith, 1997). It is imperative that leaders in special education

systematically plan for cooperation and allocation of staff and time to support a structured training in-service process (Anderson & Asselin, 1996).

Special education administrators are ultimately responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities receive high-quality transition services that meet students' individual needs, interests, and preferences (Asselin & Clark, 1993; Flexer, Baer, Simmons, & Shell, 1997; Kohler, 1997). Administrators must take the leadership role in developing and articulating the vision, philosophy, policy, planning, and resource development related to transition initiatives.

Summary of Literature Review

The role of the special education administrator requires a specific focus on providing leadership to establish direction, align people, as well as, motivate and inspire others in the delivery of transition services. Strong leadership is vital to ensuring effective instruction and services for students with special needs. While administrators must clearly be involved in building and improving services to students with disabilities, all who are involved with special education students, need to share in this responsibility. Special education professionals need to reflect on their role in providing services by working to create inclusive communities and schools that are committed to all students (Johnson, 1996). The unique challenge of individuals responsible for special education is to serve the needs of students who are exceptional, while integrating within the larger system and advocating for reforms that will better meet the needs of all students (Furney et al, 1997).

Special education administrators must monitor transition practices for compliance; however, creating a culture and climate for support of the coordination of transition services is essential to the committed involvement of various key stakeholders in the

delivery of transition services to students, which also enhances support within the school division. Effective communication to teachers, transition specialists, school boards, teacher organizations, and citizen groups at every opportunity, is imperative in providing leadership in transition programming for students with disabilities (Asselin, Todd, & deFur, 1998; Clark & Kolstoe, 1995; Sage & Burrello, 1986, Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). Special education administrators must clarify their roles as they evolve within a dynamic system of often-contradictory demands; however maintaining the understanding that the current perception that exist, as identified in the literature, is the ultimate responsibility and accountability for the coordination of transition services, lies with the special education administrator. In addition, ensuring that the services reach the students is ultimately the responsibility of the special education administrator.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The major purpose of this study is to (a) examine special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services and the effect of workload, size of school district, wealth, setting, and staff support; (b) examine the relationship between the level of importance and involvement in the coordination of transition services; and (c) examine perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services, as it relates to size of the school district and staff support; and (d) examine the recommendations made by special education administrators for improvement of transition services. Data will be collected from division-level special education administrators in Virginia, using a survey design that employs a questionnaire. The methodology and procedures used to investigate the research questions are presented in this chapter.

Participants

Division-level special education administrators/directors with the responsibility for special education services in all (132) public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia comprise the population. A directory providing the names, addresses, and email addresses of the directors of special education for each school division was obtained from the Virginia Department of Education. A cover letter was developed to send to participants informing them of the purpose of the survey, how the data will be used, and surety of confidentiality.

Instrumentation

The broad purpose of this study was to explore the special education administrators' role and impact in providing secondary transition services to students with disabilities. Survey methodology was selected for data collection because it can be used to systematically obtain and explore substantial information from a relatively large population (Babbie, 2004). The development of the survey was based on the specific transition services delineated in the Needs Assessment of Local Transition Services For Youth and Young Adults With Disabilities (Asselin, Todd, & deFur, 1998). Transition specialist competencies derived from the research on effective transition practices the CEC's knowledge and skills standards were also used as a resource (CEC, 1998). In addition, incorporation of a review of related studies, as well as, the transition requirements of IDEA provided information that was useful in developing the survey instrument.

The survey reflects three sections: Part I contain questions to obtain demographic information for describing the respondents. Part II contains a listing of specific transition services, requesting a response indicating the special education administrators' level of importance and involvement as it relates to the coordination of transition services. Part III consist of one question, which is designed to gain information specific to the special education administrators' perception of resources needed for the coordination of transition services, as it relates to time, financial resources, human resources, and community resources. In addition, one open-ended question is included, which requests special education administrators' recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services. Ultimately, the revised survey, inclusive of the recommended revisions posed by

the pilot study panel, reflects a survey questionnaire consisting of 31 questions. The survey is presented on one sheet of 8 ½ x 14 paper, printed on both sides. Each main section of the survey is highlighted in yellow for positive visual effect and ease of response.

Questions in Part I, items 1-5, are designed to obtain background information to describe the respondents in terms of employment capacity of full or part time special education administrator or director, student enrollment for the school division, and whether the division is considered urban, suburban, or rural. Respondents are asked to provide information regarding amount of time spent on delivery of transition services and identify who is primary responsibility for coordination of transition services for students in the school division.

Part II, delineates specific tasks assigned for providing transition services are included to assess respondents' level of importance for each task by checking high, medium, or low for each task listed. In addition, respondents indicate the level of responsibility for coordination of each task by checking full responsibility, facilitate others, or not provided. The tasks for providing transition services are grouped into three categories, which include (a) coordinate transition services in IEP process with agencies, parents, and providers; (b) staff/community awareness and training; and (c) transition program development.

Part III contains one question, which is designed to gain information specific to the special education administrators' perception of factors that influence the priority level of importance in providing the coordination of transition services. Four different options are listed for participants' response, by rank ordering on a scale of 1-4, with (1) being the highest. Factors available for participants' response, includes availability of time,

availability of financial resources, availability of human resources, or availability of community resources. Respondents are requested to choose the option of greatest influence on the priority level of importance in providing coordination of specific transition services.

Pilot Study

A panel consisting of four special education administrators reviewed the survey. The panel was asked to review the instrument and provide feedback regarding issues of construct validity and presentation. Recommendations were made regarding clarity of directions and language, length, comprehensiveness of the topic, and presentation. The ratings and recommendations were considered in making the appropriate revisions.

Data Analysis

Data collected from Parts I, II, and III of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the variables in all three sections. A multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the impact of workload, size of school division, wealth of school division, and amount of staff support in urban, suburban and rural school divisions on the special education administrators' role in coordination of transition services. The selection of the multiple regression analysis seeks the equation representing the impact of two or more variables on a single dependent variable Babbie, (2004). The level of importance and the level of responsibility for coordination of transition services were explored using a correlation analysis to examine all possible relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The current study investigated the complex role of division-level special education administrators as it relates to the coordination of secondary transition services for students. The major purpose of this study included: (a) examination of work load, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support effect on special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services, (b) exploration of the relationship between the levels of importance and involvement of the special education administrator in the coordination of transition services, (c) examination of the effect of the size of the school district and staff support, on the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services, and (d) description of special education administrators' recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services.

Description of Population

The target sample population consisted of special education administrators in public school districts throughout the state of Virginia. This sample was selected due to the role and responsibility of the special education administrator or director, for coordinating the transition services provided to students. The survey was mailed to 132 school districts in the Commonwealth, and 77 surveys were returned. The survey questionnaire included nine multiple-choice items to gather descriptive information on the assignment of the special education administrator as full time or part time, reflecting the workload of the respondent. In addition, respondents were requested to provide information reflecting the percentage of time spent coordinating transition services, the number of other staff

assigned responsibility for coordination of transition services, number of years of experience as a special education administrator, and level of educational attainment. Frequency counts and percentages of demographic data collected are presented in Table 1. Of the 77 surveys, returned (91%) were completed by full time special education administrators.

A majority of the respondents (32.9%) had 0-5 years of experience as a special education administrator and (73.4%) of all respondents had master's degrees.

Table 2 presents the frequency report for the demographics of the school districts represented by the special education administrators' population. The size of the school district was defined by the enrollment, and the wealth of the school district was described using the composite index, which is representative of the district's local ability to pay for education. The composite index report for 2004 -2006 biennium, retrieved from Virginia Department of Education, was used for this purpose. The vast majority (68.4%) of the respondents in the population were from a rural setting. In addition, 36.7% of the population were from very small school districts, (1,000 – 2,999); while 35.4% represent small to somewhat average size school districts with enrollment of (3,000 -6,999). Ultimately, these two groups make up 72.1% of the total population. The largest percentage of participants, 44.2%, report a composite index range of (0.3001 – 0.4599). However, 35.1% are in the (0.1962 – 0.3000) range, which is quite poor, and may present a challenge for many of these school districts in providing equitable educational opportunities. Table 3 presents the frequency report of the percentage of time special education administrators spent on coordinating transition services, as well as, amount of additional staff support that responsibility for coordination of transition services. The

largest number, 48.1%, of respondents report 0 – 5% as the amount of time spent on coordination of transition services; which is a very limited amount of time focused on this effort. Further, 29.1% report spending 6 – 10% of their time on coordination of services; which ultimately equates to 77.2% of the population that spent only 0 – 10% of their time coordinating transition services. In focusing on the amount of additional staff support that responsibility for coordination of services, over half, 59.5%, report the special education teacher. In addition, 43% report the school based transition coordinator, and 39.2% report the district-level transition coordinator as having responsibility for coordination of transition services. The principal was reported as the additional support staff by 8.9% of the population.

Table 1

Demographics of Special Education Administrators Population

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Workload		
Full Time	72	91.1
Part Time	5	6.3
Years of Experience		
0 -5	26	32.9
6 -10	23	29.1
11-15	10	12.7
16-20	9	11.4
21 & over	9	11.4
Educational Level		
Bachelor's	2	2.5
Masters	58	73.4
Doctoral	16	20.3

Table 2

Demographics of Special Education Administrators' School District

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Size		
1,000 – 2,999	29	36.7
3,000 – 6,999	28	35.4
7,000 – 12,999	8	10.1
13,000 – 20,999	6	7.6
21,000 & over	4	5.1
Composite Index/Wealth		
0.1962 – 0.3000	27	35.1
0.3001 – 0.4599	34	44.2
0.4600 – 0.6599	9	11.7
0.6600 – 0.8000	5	6.5
Setting		
Urban	12	15.2
Suburban	10	12.7
Rural	54	68.4

Table 3

Time Spent and Additional Staff Support for Coordination of Transition Services

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5%	38	48.1
6 -10%	23	29.1
11 – 15%	9	11.4
16 - 20%	3	3.8
21 – 25%	2	2.5
26% - higher	1	1.3
 Additional Staff Support		
School Transition Coordinator	34	43.0
Special Education Teacher	47	59.5
Principal	7	8.9
District Transition Coordinator	31	39.2

Survey Questionnaire

The development of the survey was based on the specific transition services delineated in the Needs Assessment of Local Transition Services For Youth and Young Adults With Disabilities (Asselin, Todd, & deFur, 1998). Transition specialist competencies derived from the research on effective transition practices the CEC's knowledge and skills standards were also used as a resource (CEC, 1998). In addition, incorporation of a review of related studies, as well as, the transition requirements of IDEA provided information that was useful in developing the survey instrument.

The initial survey developed consisted of six pages, which included 73 questions for response. However, after a closer review of the survey and analysis of the questions and the time required respondents to complete the survey, revisions were made. The revisions included a review of questions that may yield the same response and collapsing those questions into one question. An analysis of questions that were relevant to the coordination of transition services versus the delivery of services was conducted to include only those questions that were relevant to the services the special education administrator would coordinate. This process yielded extensive changes to the survey questionnaire. The survey was revised which reflected three sections: Part I contain questions to obtain demographic information for describing the sample. Part II contains a listing of specific transition services, requesting a response indicating the special education administrators' level of importance and involvement as it relates to the coordination of transition services. Part III consist of one question, which is designed to gain information specific to the special education administrators' perception of resources needed for the coordination of transition services, as it relates to time, financial resources, human resources, and

community resources. In addition, one open-ended question is included, which requests special education administrators' recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services. Ultimately, the revision of the survey, inclusive of the recommended revisions posed by the pilot study panel, reflects a survey questionnaire consisting of 31 questions. The survey is presented on one sheet of 8 ½ x 14 paper, front and back. Each main section of the survey is highlighted in yellow for positive visual effect and ease of response. The survey is included in Appendix A.

Pilot Study

A four-member panel of randomly selected special education administrators reviewed the survey questionnaire to determine construct and content validity. The panel consisted of special education administrators, two from rural public school districts in Virginia, one from an urban setting, and one from a suburban setting. The panel was provided a brief overview of the study and written directions for review, feedback, and suggested revisions to the survey. Participants in the pilot study were contacted via telephone ten days prior to receiving the written request and copy of the survey questionnaire. The written request was sent electronically, via internet email on December 1, 2005, wherein, panel members were requested to email their responses by December 20, 2005. Each panel member was asked to take approximately twenty-five minutes to review the attached survey and provide feedback as to the quality of the following constructs. The constructs include, clarity of directions, ease of response to items included, alignment of transition services included or not included, time required to complete the survey, information to consider for adding or deleting, presentation and format of the survey, and any additional feedback that may be helpful in the revision of the survey instrument. Each member of the panel provided valuable feedback that was used in the revision of the survey questionnaire.

Panel members were requested to assess the survey questionnaire by rating each construct on a scale of 1- 5, with 5 being the highest rating, and 1 being the lowest. A summary of responses is included in Appendix B. In addition, panel members were asked to provide additional specific feedback that may be helpful in the revision of the survey instrument. A summary of responses is included in Appendix C .

Based on the feedback from the pilot study, revisions were made to the survey questionnaire, which included changing the layout from landscape to portrait, clarifying the terminology and abbreviations used in transition services statements, and further merging of statements requesting the same information; which reduced the survey questionnaire to only thirty-one questions. In addition, the survey was formatted on a longer sheet of paper, 8 ½ x 14, which enabled the spacing of survey items to be expanded, and reduced the number of pages to one sheet, printed on both sides, with thirty-one items retained in the final form of the survey.

Procedures

The survey was initially mailed to special education administrators in all (132) public school districts in Virginia. Within two weeks of the first mailing, 28 (21%) of the surveys had been returned. Three follow-up contacts were conducted. The first follow-up was a second mailing to non-respondents as a gentle reminder, and a second copy of the survey was included for their convenience. In response to the first follow-up, 21 additional responses (16%) were received the following week. A second follow-up contact via electronic emailing, and thirdly, random sample phone calls to non-respondents, four weeks after the initial mailing led to 28 more surveys, for an overall response rate of 58% (n= 77). Of the 77 surveys returned, two reflected missing data. One was returned with a note stating that the respondent was new to the position and had not been provided the opportunity to gain information relative to the coordination of transition

services for students in that school district. The second was returned with inappropriate multiple responses to specific items in Part II of the survey. Two cases had missing data, which had a minimal effect on data analysis.

Findings for Research Questions

The study explored four research questions: (a) Extent to which work load, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support effect special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services; (b) Relationship between the levels of importance and involvement in the coordination of transition services; (c) Extent to which the size of the school district and staff support effect the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services; and (d) Recommendations from special education administrators for improving the implementation of transition services.

Factors Impacting Levels of Importance

For the purpose of this study, a description of the factors impacting levels of importance, and analysis of relationships between factors and importance levels is discussed. Workload was defined as the special education administrators' employment assignment of full or part time. Size of the school district was defined as the enrollment specified by the participants' response to question three in part one of the survey questionnaire. Wealth was defined by the composite index, which is the school districts' local ability to pay for the education of its students. The listing of the composite index for each school district was retrieved from the Virginia Department of Education website. The composite index for the 2004 – 2006 bienniums, for each school district was utilized. The identification of the school districts' composite index is reflected in part one, question four, of the survey questionnaire. Setting addresses whether a school district is located in an urban, suburban, or rural environment. Respondents were asked to respond the description of their school

district's setting. Staff support was described as others in the school districts that responsibility for coordination of transition services, other than the special education administrator. The survey also specified that the respondents were to check all that applied. There were four options listed for response, which included; (a) school based transition coordinator, (b) special education teacher, (c) principal, and (d) district level transition coordinator.

To determine the extent to which workload, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support effect special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services, the respondents were asked to respond to twenty survey questions using a Likert scale. The scale was developed to determine the respondents' level of importance placed on the coordination of transition services by using a 5-point scale ranging from low to high with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Table 4 presents the frequency of participants' responses by each level of importance variable. Participants assessed all twenty of the importance variables at a high level, more than they assessed them at the medium and low range.

Special education administrators assessed the high level of importance on 13 of 20 variables for coordination of transition services. These identified variables represented 75% of the responses by the population. The following importance variables were included : (1) collaborate with supportive employment and community agencies; (2) provide staff development for teachers and other staff; (3) attend special education department/team meetings to share information; (4) assist in identification of transition goals and objectives; (5) coordinate meetings between other agencies with students and parents; (6) follow-up on referrals for transition services; (7) initiate referrals for transition services; (8) write cooperative agreements with adult service agencies; (9) identify and analyze required assessments; (10) research and evaluate best practices and administer innovative programs; (11) conduct inservices with parents and respond to

requests/concerns; and (12) disseminate information to school and community groups via meetings, conferences, and memos.

Over half of special education administrators, rated all the variables, as high level of importance. The results indicate that the perceived level of importance for the coordination of transition services by special education administrators is high.

Relationships Between Factors and Importance Levels

The multiple regression procedure was run to determine if there is a positive relationship ($p < .05$) between work load, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support as it relates to the level of importance in coordinating transition services. Table 3 presents the results of the regression model for factors impacting the level of importance special education administrators place on the coordination of transition services. There were eleven variables that reflected a positive relationship on size, workload, and staff support; which is delineated through the special education teacher and the principal, as others who responsibility for coordination of transition services. However, there is a very strong positive relationship ($p = .001$) between the principal and conducting needs assessments for existing programs and identifying gaps in programming. In addition, there is a strong positive relationship ($.003$) between the principal and disseminating information to school and community groups via meetings, conferences, and memos. In addition, Table 3 presents the results as the involvement of the principal being highly significant in the coordination of transition services. This is reflective of the special education administrators' perception of the importance and positive impact of the principal's involvement as it relates to school improvement updates, staff development, inservices with parents, career assessment training disseminating information, and conducting needs assessments for existing programs and identify gaps in programming. This speaks to the leadership role of the principal and involvement

in the process to provide opportunities and experiences that enable students to be successful, in the transition process. The principal was the most significant support staff person in coordination of transition services, which was supported by the impact on six of the eleven variables that emerged as having a positive relationship. It is imperative that the role of school principals be transformed to better support positive outcomes for students with disabilities. The challenge for administrators will be to redefine the leadership mission, transforming the dual system of general and special education administration into a distributed system of leadership that collaboratively embraces the acquisition of knowledge through evidence-based practices that will foster systematic district-wide improvement for students with learning disabilities (Crockett, 2002).

There was a positive relationship reflected in the analysis for the special education teacher as a support staff person for two of the variables. Provide school improvement committees with current updates and information on transition services (0.046), and provide career assessment training (0.046). Special education teachers play an integral role as a service provider involved in the overall transition planning and programming for students with disabilities. The special education teacher is recognized throughout the literature as being an essential part of the process in helping students develop their skills and abilities. In addition, they provide support that enhance students abilities to access information and opportunities on which they can build their future (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998).

The data also reflect that there is a positive relationship between the size of the school district and two of the variables. Size of the school district had a significant positive relationship for conduct inservices with parents and responding to requests & concerns (0.031), as well as, attends special education department/team meetings to share information (0.031).

Further, there is a positive relationship between workload of the special education administrator and one variable, being, research and evaluate best practices (0.023). Transition planning is viewed as a fundamental basis of education that guides the development of all educational programs for students with disabilities. It is not an “add on” activity, rather a comprehensive education and service delivery approach based on best practices, that addresses students’ abilities, options, and self-determination for success after high school (Kohler & Rusch, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003). Lastly, the regression analysis yielded no effect or relationship for wealth and setting.

Table 4

Frequency of Responses for Level of Importance

Variables	High		Medium		Low	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Initiate referrals	64	81	11	13.9	1	1.3
Identify assessments	61	77.2	11	13.9	3	3.8
Coordinate meetings between agencies	66	83.5	8	10.1	1	1.3
Participate in IEP meetings	58	73.5	16	20.3	2	2.5
Write cooperative agreements	63	79.7	10	12.7	2	2.5
Follow-up referrals	65	82.2	10	12.7	1	1.3
Identification of goals	67	84.8	9	11.4	0	0
School improvement committee updates	46	58.2	20	25.3	11	13.9
Staff development	69	87.3	7	8.9	1	1.3
Inservices with parents	60	76	15	19	2	2.5
Career assessment training	55	69.6	14	17.7	6	7.6
Disseminate information	60	75.9	14	17.7	3	3.8
Attend regional meetings	54	68.3	20	25.3	3	3.8
Attend department meetings	68	86	8	10.1	1	1.3
Network with businesses	55	69.6	14	17.7	2	2.5
Collaborate with agencies	72	91.1	3	3.8	0	0
Conduct needs assessments	63	79.7	12	15.2	0	0
Development and administer grants	53	67.1	14	17.7	6	7.6
Research and evaluate best practices	61	77.2	13	16.5	2	2.5
Follow-up of graduates	51	64.5	15	19.0	8	10.1

Table 5

Regression Model for Factors Impacting Level of Importance

Variables	Size	Work Load	Special Ed Teacher	Principal	R ²
Initiate referrals	0.075	-	-	-	0.043
Identification of goals	0.354	-	-	-	0.058
School improvement committee updates	-	-	0.046 *	0.018 *	0.108
Staff development	0.053	-	-	0.029 *	0.115
In-services with parents	0.031*	-	-	0.017 *	0.137
Career assessment training	-	-	0.046 *	0.018 *	0.108
Disseminate information	-	-	-	0.003 *	0.108
Attend regional meetings	0.1	-	-	-	0.037
Attend department meetings	0.031 *	-	-	-	0.137
Conduct needs assessments	-	-	-	0.001 *	0.127
Research and evaluate best practices	-	0.023*	-	-	0.069

** Factors that were not significant are not included in this table.

Level of Importance and Involvement

To determine if there was a relationship between the levels of importance and involvement in the coordination of transition services the Pearson Correlation test was run to test the significance of the Pearson's r as a useful descriptor of the degree of linear association between the respondents perceived levels of importance and involvement in coordination of transition services. Table 4 presents the results of twenty of the variables included in the survey questionnaire. The results revealed eight variables that were strongly correlated. Five of these variables a strong positive relationship (.000), which includes, (a) providing school improvement committees with current updates and information on transition services, (b) conducting inservices with parents and responding to requests and concerns, (c) disseminating information to school and community groups via meetings, conferences, and memos, (d) attend special education department or team meetings to share information, and (e) conducting needs assessments for existing programs and identifying gaps in programming. Furthermore, three of the eight variables reflected a strong correlation in, (.012) providing career assessment training, (.001) developing and administer grants and other funding sources, (.001) research and evaluate best practices and administer innovative programs.

Although not significant, ($p < .05$), conducting follow-up of student graduates approached significance (.054) and should be carefully considered when identifying variables that are correlated. In addition, 25% report that follow-up of graduates is not provided, which is now required in Virginia through an annual report. Sixteen percent report they do not participate in development and administering grants, which is a viable means to acquire more funding in support of coordination of transition services. Additionally, (.082) identify and analyze assessments, (.098)

collaborating with supportive employment and community agencies, and (.079) assisting in identification of transition goals and objections reflected p values which approached significance ($p < .05$) as well. The level of significance of the remaining variables ranged from (0.125) to (0.862).

Table 6

Pearson Correlation between Levels of Importance and Involvement

Variables	Correlation	P value
Initiate referrals	0.045	0.700
Identify assessments	0.203	0.082
Coordinate meetings between agencies	0.020	0.862
Participate in IEP meeting	0.093	0.423
Write cooperative agreements	0.181	0.125
Follow-up referrals	-0.083	0.477
Identification of goals	0.203	0.079
School improvement committee updates	0.573	.000 *
Staff development	0.096	0.411
Inservices with parents	0.391	0.000 *
Career assessment training	0.294	0.012 *
Disseminate information	0.443	.000 *
Attend regional meetings	0.147	0.203
Attend department meetings	0.446	.000 *
Network with businesses	0.171	0.155
Collaborate with agencies	0.193	0.098
Conduct needs assessments	0.411	.000 *
Develop and administer grants	0.377	0.001 *
Research and evaluate best practices	0.366	0.001
Follow-up of graduates	0.228	0.054

* p < .05

Table 7 presents the frequency of responses for level of involvement, as it relates to each of the twenty variables for involvement, as reflected on the survey questionnaire. Each participant was asked to respond to the twenty transition services coordinated by the special education administrator. Individuals placed a check mark by the response that was most descriptive of their level of involvement. The options for response were; (a) full responsibility, meaning the special education administrator full responsibility for the coordination of the service; (b) facilitate others, which means they are primarily assisting someone else who is actually at the level of delivery of service, and (c) not provided, meaning the service is not provided for students in their respective school districts.

Over half of the special education administrators reported full responsibility for (a) writing cooperative agreements with adult service agencies; (b) providing staff development for teachers and other staff; and (c) disseminating information to school and community groups. The majority of respondents also revealed they were more likely to facilitate others to provide transition services.

Special education administrators were more involved in disseminating information and linking with outside agencies, whereas they facilitated others to provide direction for transition services for students, families, or other service providers.

Although the Pearson correlation test between levels of importance and involvement, reflect a negative correlation coefficient (-0.083) for follow-up on referrals to the agencies, in Table 7, the frequency report reflects 74.7% of the respondents to facilitate others, although not significant at the alpha level of ($p < .05$).

Special education administrators reported that they were more likely to facilitate others to assist in identification of transition goals and objectives (79.7%), participate in IEP meetings

(77.2%), identify and analyze required assessments (77.2%), follow-up on referrals to agencies (74.7%), provide career assessment training (74.7%), coordinate meetings between other agencies with students and parents (70.9%) and collaborate with supportive employment and community agencies (69.6%). The remaining responses also yield frequency percentages ranging from 44.3% to 67.1%. There were a few large numbers of responses to involvement as not provided. However, the three variables with the highest response indicating these services were not provided, included (a) conduct follow-up of student graduates (21.3%), (b) provide school improvement committees with current updates and information on transition services (21.5%), (c) develop and administer grants and other funding sources (16.5%).

These results indicate that special education administrators utilize others to coordinate the highest level of involvement in the coordination of transition services. Although special education administrators ideally perceive that transition services are highly important and the delivery of these services is essential to students' post-school success; the results show that they do not report a high level of involvement in coordinating the transition services. Therefore, a systematic structure for the delivery of transition services is not consistently accessible to students. Without the active involvement of the special education administrator to ensure the consistent coordination of services for students with disabilities, we chance the actual delivery of transition services ever reaching the student or their families.

Table 7

Frequency of Responses for Level of Involvement

Variables	Full Responsibility		Facilitate Others		Not Provided	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Initiate referrals	3	3.8	65	82.3	8	10.1
Identify assessments	7	8.9	61	77.2	8	10.1
Coordinate meetings between agencies	10	12.7	56	70.9	10	12.7
Participate in IEP meetings	8	10.1	61	77.2	7	8.9
Write cooperative agreements	52	65.8	21	26.6	2	2.5
Follow-up referrals	6	7.6	59	74.7	10	12.7
Identification of goals	6	7.6	63	79.7	7	8.9
School improvement committee updates	21	26.6	36	45.6	17	21.5
Staff development	38	48.1	36	45.6	1	1.3
Inservices with parents	19	24.1	49	62.0	7	8.9
Career assessment training	3	3.8	59	74.7	10	12.7
Disseminate information	35	44.3	35	44.3	4	5.1
Attend regional meetings	23	29.1	49	62.0	4	5.1
Attend department meetings	28	35.4	44	55.7	4	5.1
Network with businesses	10	12.7	53	67.1	9	11.4
Collaborate with agencies	15	19.0	55	69.6	5	6.3
Conduct needs assessments	24	30.4	43	54.4	8	10.1
Development and administer grants	13	16.5	22	27.8	13	16.5
Research and evaluate best practices	27	34.2	40	50.6	8	10.1
Follow-up of graduates	4	5.1	49	62.0	20	25.3

Impact of Resources on Coordination of Transition Services

To determine the effect of staff support and size of the school district on the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services, the multiple regression test was applied. The determination of the relationship between the predictor variables and the dependent variables was sought. The impact of time, financial resources, community resources, and human resources on the coordination of transition services, as it relates to size and staff support was explored. Size of the district is defined by the school district’s enrollment. The survey listed options of enrollment for size of school district as (a) 1,000 -2,999, (b) 3,000 - 6,999, (c) 7,000 – 12,999, (d) 13,000 – 20,999, and (e) 21,000 and over. Staff support, is described as the other staff in the school district who responsibility for coordination of transition services other than the special education administrator.

Table 8 reflects the results of the test for regression. Time (.013), financial resources (.027), and community resources (.046) were significant as it relates to size of the school district. There were no significant repressors for human resources. Staff support reflected no significant impact on any of the resources, however, given the majority of the population in this study were in a rural setting, the size of the school district impacted on the resources needed for coordination of transition services.

Table 8
Impact of Resources on Coordination of Transition Services

Variables	Time		Financial		Community		Human	
	R ²	P	R ²	P	R ²	P	R ²	P
Size	.083	.013 *	.063	.027 *	.052	.046 *	-	-
Staff Support	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Recommendations for Improvement of Transition Services

An open-ended question was included in the survey, which requested respondents to provide recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services. All responses were compiled in a list form and grouped category response. Responses, which were repeated by other respondents, were listed only once. Table 9 is a descriptive listing representing the overall recommendations made by special education administrators for improving the implementation of transition services. There are nine categories represented in the table as is aligned with the grouping for participants' responses.

Categories were labeled as to the number of participants repeating similar recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services as reflected by the number indicated in parenthesis. Personnel and additional human resources were mentioned 75 times, which is viewed as an important category for focus in improving transition services. In addition, there were 62 recommendations for improvement in the community resources category, and 45 suggested improvements assigned to the staff development category. Forty statements by respondents represented recommended improvements in the school division category. Many respondents listed statements for improvements that represented more than one category. However, the greatest numbers of recommendations were represented through the request for additional personnel; or specific personnel assigned the responsibility for implementation of the overall transition process. Further, the recommendations specifically expressed a need for personnel at the school or division level, in order to ensure the consistent delivery and coordination of transition services.

Table 9

Recommendations for Improving the Implementation of Transition Services

Comment Category	Examples of Comments
Personnel and Additional Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff who is dedicated to focus on transition issues, without other job responsibilities (10) ▪ Full time, school based, transition coordinator (26) ▪ State mandated & funded school based transition coordinator (10) ▪ District level transition coordinator (18) ▪ Provide administrative assistant to work with special education administrator (10) ▪ Dedicated staff to attend meetings to learn more about available services in central Virginia (1)
Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop new opportunities for work and leisure upon departure from high school (1) ▪ Community resources that will assist in providing independent work/living skills (5) ▪ We very limited to none resources for school-work opportunities (8) ▪ We are a small city, & we do not the community agencies to assist in providing transition services (20) ▪ We need help identifying agencies in our community that can help, also inservice on how to develop transition program (7) ▪ Resources very limited in rural school divisions (20) ▪ Mandated cooperation by adult services (1)

Comment Category	Examples of Comments
Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DRS provides most services, which is very helpful (4) ▪ Develop a community awareness program (5) ▪ Identify local agencies & establish linkages (4) ▪ Community outreach (1) ▪ Develop school forum/groups to go out and bring in parents & community representatives in (1)
Parent Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DRS been very helpful in providing services to involve parents & students in the transition process (5) ▪ Development of parent, local businesses, and teacher committees to locate job training options (4) ▪ Get parents involved for long-term success (8)
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More state training with practical application for special education teachers without a transition coordinator (7) ▪ I'm just learning about transition services but I'll be attending conferences & training (1) ▪ Staff development to make everyone aware of the importance of transition services (19) ▪ More inservice training on total transition process for special & general educators (8) ▪ Clarification of new IDEA transition requirements (8) ▪ Actively assess needs of staff and students (2)

Comment Category	Examples of Comments
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VDOE needs to provide regional inservice for special education teachers, guidance staff, and general education teachers, as well as, principals (15) ▪ There is a general lack of understanding about transition, therefore, inform, educate, and participate
School Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Software needed to collect and manage data for providing student services (3) ▪ School representation on local community and agency boards (6) ▪ Develop district-wide unified transition planning process (18) ▪ School division needs to explore gaps through data for continuous improvement & to ensure better success (3) ▪ School division should invest in allocating staff and resources for transition (25)
Networking and Collaborating with Local, Regional, and State Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional Transition Council, inclusive of DRS, T/TAC and vocational resources helped ▪ Connect with existing Transition Forums (1) ▪ More networking at the regional level (12) ▪ Post-secondary educational institutions more involved in the process (7) ▪ Conduct needs assessment to identify gaps, then collaborate with business community, collect data on post graduates, and expound on career centers (1) ▪ Periodic meetings to collaborate with others (5)

Comment Category	Examples of Comments
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The state and federal government should fund all positions that are mandated to provide more equity for delivery of transition services (29) ▪ More funding to outside agencies to provide sufficient staff (4) ▪ Funding needed to increase staff(15) ▪ Funding for community operated services, job programs, group homes, etc. (3)
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State government need to make a real commitment to our citizens with disabilities. Virginia is ranked 49th out of 50 in postsecondary services. (1) ▪ Despite changes in federal law to remove age 14, transition services and planning should begin at the elementary level. (3)

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

In this chapter, research findings will be summarized and discussed as related to other work in the field on the role of the special education administrator in providing secondary transition services to students with disabilities.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

The role of the special education administrator is a key factor in the coordination of secondary transition services for students with disabilities. The operational definition for the special education administrator is described as personnel in a school division whose primary function is to supervise the development and implementation of special education programs and services (Burrello, Lashley, & Van Dyke, 1996). As legislation continues to address the needs of students with disabilities, the challenges to the role of administrator of special education continues to increase. In addition, as those services require involvement of other stakeholders, the role of the special education administrator takes on a different form and becomes one of promoting collaboration between students, parents, principals, and teachers, as well as, other agencies, community, local , and state resources.

This study is grounded and sustained through legislation, research in secondary transition services, and the role of the special education administrator in coordinating transition services for students with disabilities. IDEA 2004 defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities, provided to the student by the school and other agencies, to promote a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment, and independent living. Further, a new requirement states that transition services are to be based on student's strengths, as well as, their preferences and interests. Activities must be within a results-oriented process, which is different

from the previous requirement of an outcome-oriented process. The new legislation is clear in its intent to enhance the activities of the process to be more focused on the success of individual students.

Although there is little known about the systematic approach that may be used by schools or school divisions in the coordination and implementation of transition services and programs the researchers state that there is a need to improve the participation of outside representatives in transition planning (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003). Further, special education administrators report that when resources are available, their success in coordinating transition services for students with disabilities is significantly improved (Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005).

In addition, special education administrators must assure that high quality education programs and services are accessible to students with disabilities, and the facilitation of collaboration between the appropriate school representatives, agencies, and other related service providers is a critical part of the process (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

This study investigated the complex role of division-level special education administrators and coordination of secondary transition services for students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of work load, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support on special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services. Further, the relationship between the levels of importance and involvement of the special education administrator in the coordination of transition services were explored. In addition, the effects of size of the school district and staff support, on the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services were examined. A description of special education administrators' recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services is also included.

A survey questionnaire was developed based upon a comprehensive review of the literature and the transition mandate as indicated in IDEA 2004. The specific transition services delineated in the Needs Assessment of Local Transition Services for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities guided the structure and organization of the survey. The survey was developed and organized into three parts, consistent with the research on the areas of focus in effective coordination of transition and transition programming. Part one of the survey consisted of nine questions, which gathered information to describe the population. Questions included addressed work load, school district's enrollment, composite index determined the wealth of the school division, and setting determined the geographic/demographic representation as urban, suburban, or rural. The remaining questions in part one concerned the percentage of time spent on coordinating transition services, staff support in coordination of services, years of experience, and education level of the special education administrator. Part two of the survey was divided into three sections, which required a response for the levels of importance and involvement, as it related to the coordination of specific transition services. Transition services were organized into three groups, as supported in the research, which included, (a) coordinating transition services in the IEP process with agencies, parents, and providers, (b) staff/community awareness and training, and (c) transition program development (Asselin, Todd-Allen, & deFur, 1998). Transition specialist competencies derived from the research on effective transition practices the CEC's knowledge and skills standards were used as a resource (CEC, 1998). The mail survey was sent to all special education administrators (132), in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Fifty-eight percent, (n = 77), of the surveys were returned in useable form.

The coordination of secondary transition services and programs for students with disabilities is significant to student success, both in the secondary environment, as well as, post school experiences. The findings of this study are consistent with the research, in that, special education administrators in rural school districts reported lack of resources as one the strongest drawbacks to providing transition services involving coordination of services with agencies, and community resources.

Findings for the Research Questions

The survey provided data used to address the four research questions:

1. How does workload, size of the school district, wealth, setting, and staff support effect special education administrators' perceived level of importance in coordinating transition services?
2. Is there a relationship between the levels of importance and involvement in the coordination of transition services?
3. Does the size of the school district and staff support effect the perceived resources needed for coordination of transition services?
4. What recommendations do special education administrators for improving the implementation of transition services?

Factors Affecting Levels of Importance

To determine the effect of workload, size of school district, wealth, setting, and staff support on special education administrators' perceived level of importance, in coordination of transition services, the multiple regression analysis was applied. The results of the frequency report presents the cumulative data on special education administrators' responses to the level of importance they place on the coordination of the twenty transition services. The special education administrators assessed all twenty of the transition services at the high level of importance. This supports the notion that special education administrators perceive that providing secondary transition services is an important need, and that they are aware of the importance of providing these services to ensure student success in meeting their desired goals and objectives during high school and post high school. Anastasio and Sage (2000) also reported on high commitment to the importance of providing secondary transition services by special education administrators in their research (Anastasio, & Sage, 2000).

An examination of factors impacting the level of importance revealed eleven transition services displayed a positive effect on staff support, size of the school district, and workload. More specifically, significant services include (a) conducting needs assessments for existing programs, (b) disseminating information to school and community groups, (c) inservices with parents, (d) providing school current information on transition services, (e) offering career assessment training, and (f) providing staff development for teachers and staff.

The strongest effect and most significant positive relationship for staff support was for the principal. Bays (2001) who found that the principal's involvement in the process was integral to the success of the students supported the role of the building principal as an essential part in coordinating transition services. Boscardin's (2004) research on special education administrators

reveal that they must work more closely with building principals and related administrative staff to make the curriculum and related services accessible to students with disabilities (Boscardin, 2004).

The responses of the special education administrators indicate their perception of the importance and positive impact of the principals' involvement in the coordination of transition services. In addition, the results speak to the importance of the leadership role of the principal, and involvement in the process to provide opportunities and experiences, which enable students to be successful in the transition process as indicated in the literature (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003 & Boscardin, 2004).

The special education teachers' involvement as support staff was also viewed as essential in providing transition information updates, and career assessment training. Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) found that career-related work experiences and completion of student-identified transition goals directed by the special education teacher, were strongly associated with graduation and employment, thus, having a positive influence on students with disabilities (Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff, 2000). The special education teacher is recognized throughout the literature as being an essential part of the process in helping students develop their skills and abilities. In addition, they provide support that enhance students abilities to access information and opportunities on which they can build their future (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998). In addition, size of the school district was a significant factor in providing two of the transition services, including inservices with parents and attending special education department meetings.

Workload of full time special education administrators, emphasize their involvement and time in coordinating transition services on research and evaluating best practices. As we reflect on the workload, over half of the special education administrators reported full responsibility for

writing cooperative agreements with adult service agencies, providing staff development for teachers and other staff, and disseminating information to school and community groups. The majority of special education administrators also revealed they were more likely to facilitate others to provide transition services. Hudson (1998) reported the majority of special education administrators spending less than 25% of their own time on transition services, and nearly half 44%, spent less than 5% of their time. Special education administrators involve others to coordinate transition services. However, there is a need to focus on the areas wherein, although ranked as high levels of importance for transition services, special education administrators indicated limited involvement in conducting follow-up, providing information on transition services, developing grants and finding external funding.

Relationship Between Levels of Importance and Involvement

The second research question seeks to determine if there was a relationship between perceived levels of importance and involvement in coordination of transition services. Eight transition services were significantly correlated. Four of the transition services were concerned with disseminating information to schools, parents, community groups, and IEP teams. Assessment services, training, evaluation, and program development were others (Gloss, Reiss, & Hackett, 2000). Meaningful parent, family, and community involvement and participation must be an integral part of the process in communication with the stakeholders. Youth and family involvement are important in making service systems and professionals aware of their needs (Gloss, Reiss, & Hackett, 2000). While the value of family involvement is well understood, the current system does not make it easy for families to be effective partners in the transition process. Multiple service programs form a confusing, fragmented, and inconsistent system (General Accounting Office, 1995). In addition, the National Center on Secondary

Education and Transition (2002) report that providing information and establishing creative methods to evaluate effectiveness of program development and coordination of transition services is essential. Effective transition planning and service depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services, and other human service and community agencies (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Hudson (1998) explored the management and leadership dimensions of the role of division-level special education administrators in providing secondary transition services, however (Hudson, 1998). As in this research, Hudson found a significant difference between special education administrators' perceived ideal role and their real role. Transition-related tasks were rated higher in importance than the actual performance. Similarly, in this study, special education administrators rated implementation and coordination of transition services the highest level of importance, yet they indicated limited direct contact coordinating transition services themselves. Special education administrators were more likely to facilitate others to provide transition services. More importantly, the principal and the special education teacher tended to coordinate transition services, which is supported in the research where Gronn, (2000); Leithwood, Steinbach, & Ryan (1997); Polite, (1993); Wallace, (2002) focused on school restructuring and distribution of leadership tasks and activities related to special education. They found that distributed leadership models might alter the process for determining district and school goals and involve staff assuming various leadership roles. The discussion of this change may be at odds with the legal requirements of IDEA. Further, Boscardin,(2004); Lashley & Boscardin, (2003) found that special education administrators were being asked to work more closely with building principals and related administrative staff and special education teachers for implementation of special education programming and planning. In addition, Coyne,

Kame'enui, & Simmons, (2003) report that not only the role of the special education administrator changed with time, but the role of the secondary principal changed to becoming the gatekeeper in the coordination and delivery of services to students with disabilities at the building level. Principals redefined their role in ways that promote positive results for students with disabilities (Coyne, Kame'enui & Simmons, 2003).

The Effect of Resources on Transition Services

The effect of staff support and size of the school district were explored to determine the impact of time, financial resources, community resources, and human resources. The size of the school district did impact availability of time, financial resources, and community resources. The population in this study was predominately rural, which supported a U.S. General Accounting Office Study (2003) identifying the challenges rural areas face in providing transition services. In addition, Kraemer and Blacher (2001) reported in their study of 52 California families that both rural and suburban schools were addressing transition, the limited resources, and providing a variety of approaches. Limited community resources continue to be a barrier in providing services to students. In order to establish cooperative work agreements and link with agencies to provide services, the resources must be available in the community (Green & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003).

Special Education Administrators' Recommendations

Special education administrators were asked to provide recommendations for improving the implementation of transition services, through an open-ended question. All responses were compiled in a list form and grouped category response. The majority of respondents' recommendations provided support for additional personnel and additional human resources, community resources, funding, and staff development. Although many special education

administrators listed recommendations for more than one category, the greatest numbers of recommendations were represented through the request for additional personnel dedicated to providing coordination of transition services.

These clusters of the categories for improving the coordination of transition services are reflected throughout the literature, however specific discussion and emphasis on what is needed to improve transition services in rural school districts is consistent with the findings of this study (Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005; Bays, 2001b; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Purcell, East & Rude (2005) found that the challenges for providing an adequate supply of related services personnel in rural schools are great and must not be overlooked as programs and resources are provided to increase the teacher supply. These personnel are extremely important to the success of students with disabilities, yet almost impossible to find in rural America. In addition, as adequate resources are sought, local special education administrators report difficulties in identifying qualified supplemental service providers to meet the needs in rural areas. Further, rural districts may not have choice options for parents when distance, transportation, or availability is barriers. Funding was also presented as a challenge, however, even if funding was available, administrators report that the resources may not be available. These barriers, along with the recent requirements of NCLBA, and mandates for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), are a major concern of state and local special education administrators. As reported on the CASE on-line survey (Purcell, 2004), more than 57% of the respondents stated NCLBA had focused their efforts on the achievement gap, 48.6% stated their students' test scores/achievement had improved (Purcell, 2004).

Limitations

Interpretation and generalization of the findings of this study should be considered with caution, based on the demographics of the population for this study. The vast majority of the participants were from small rural settings, with a low wealth composite index. Therefore, the results may be somewhat skewed to represent only one perspective. Another limitation is the survey design provided duplicate counts for staff support, thereby the role of the building principal's level of involvement for successful transition may be overemphasized.

Recommendations

Special education administrators must clarify their roles as they evolve within a dynamic system of often-contradictory demands; however, maintaining the understanding that the current perception that exist, is the ultimate responsibility and accountability for the coordination of transition services, lies with the special education administrator. In addition, ensuring that the services reach the students is ultimately the responsibility of the special education administrator.

As the role of the special education administrator continues to evolve, in coordination of transition services, it is imperative that staff development opportunities be provided regarding mandated requirement to provide transition services for students. Special education administrators should provide the leadership in staff development for teachers and other staff, as well as, identifying overall program goals for the implementation of transition services. Although funding, personnel, and limited community resources may present themselves as barriers, creative means must be sought to offer transition services for students.

Administrators must not only monitor transition practices for compliance, but are also called to create a climate of support within the division. Leadership efforts to help students with disabilities must be communicated to teachers, transition specialists, school boards, teacher

organizations, and citizen groups at every opportunity. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the special education administrator to ensure that transition services are made available, and provided to students. Staff should not only be made aware of this requirement, but also supported in the implementation of transition programming and planning.

Under IDEA 2004, schools continue to be responsible for bringing in representatives from other agencies, such as rehabilitative services or post- secondary education, to be a part of the transition planning process. Such agencies may also be responsible for the delivery of services needed by the student. However, should other agencies fail to provide the agreed upon transition services, schools must find alternative ways to meet the transition objectives for the student (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study and the recommendations made by special education administrators, it is evident that there is a need for clear articulation of the requirement for coordination and delivery of transition services. In addition, special education administrators' full understanding of required services included in transition planning and programming is needed. A study focused on secondary principals and special education teachers perceptions of the role of the special education administrator, may add to the research.

Further, a more in-depth study utilizing interpretive interviewing techniques, through a case study method may gain more knowledge of special education administrators' perception of their role and actual responsibility in the coordination of transition services. In addition, valuable feedback, and a more personable account of perception of their levels of involvement and importance in coordination of transition services may be beneficial in adding to the research.

Conclusion

This study reflects that although the perception of the special education administrator is that the coordination of transition services for students is of high importance; in actuality, the consistent coordination and delivery of services are questionable. The results of this study also implicate that services identified as “not provided” by the special education administrator, may not be provided by any other staff in the school district; thereby, students may not be receiving or benefiting from those services. In addition, there were three transition services with the highest response indicating these services were not provided, included (a) conduct follow-up of student graduates (b) provide school improvement committees with current updates and information on transition services and (c) develop and administer grants and other funding sources.

In essence, 25% report that follow-up of graduates is not provided, which is now required in Virginia through annual reports to the state. In addition, 16% report they do not participate in development and administering grants, which is a viable means to acquire more funding in support of coordination of transition services. Additionally, special education administrators report identifying and analyzing assessments, collaborating with supportive employment and community agencies, and assisting in identification of transition goals and objections as not provided. These present themselves as areas of concern when assessing the consistency in the effective coordination of transition services.

It is also evident that the need for personnel assigned specifically for transition planning and programming is of high importance. That position may be in the person of the transition coordinator, whether school based or district based. This is even of greater need in rural, small school districts with limited financial and community resources. Many school divisions are

currently faced with issues of funding for educating its children. Providing transition services, although a great need, may present a challenge when the resources are not available.

Although the updated IDEA 2004 law raises the level of concern for persons responsible for the implementation of secondary transition services and programs for students with disabilities, the successful transition of students from school to post-school activities continues to escape educators. In spite of best practices in transition services being advanced, and transition specialist competencies been delineated, the systematic coordination of the delivery of available services and programs continues to be a major challenge.

In conclusion, the federal government mandates school districts to provide transition services; however, the government does not provide the funding for the personnel or the services. Therefore, local districts must search or create opportunities for students to receive the needed transition services, which could mean the difference between a successful adult life and becoming a contributing member to society or a burden on society.

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Appendix A

Correspondence to Special Education Administrators

Post Card

Cover letter

Survey Questionnaire

(Postcard sent prior to mailing survey.)

(Personalize in manuscript)

My name is Alvera J. Parrish and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The focus of my dissertation research is special education administrators' role and impact in providing secondary transition services to students. In two weeks you will receive a survey on this topic. I would greatly appreciate you sharing your expertise by completing the survey when you receive it.

Thank you in advance for supporting this research effort.

Alvera J. Parrish
18264 Christanna Highway
Lawrenceville, VA 23868
aparrish@vt.edu
(434)-848-0370-H or (434)-634-0127-W

February 1, 2006

Dear Special Education Administrator/Director :

A demanding responsibility for many special education administrators is the implementation and coordination of secondary transition services, to assist students with disabilities as they leave school to go out into the community and become productive, contributing members of society.

I, Alvera J. Parrish, am a doctoral candidate at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and I am conducting a study to investigate the special education administrators' role and impact in providing secondary transition services to students. This survey research is designed to collect information regarding (a) factors influencing the coordination of transition services as it relates to work load, size of school division, by enrollment, and wealth of school division in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

We would like to your help in this study, because of your role and responsibility for coordination of transition services. This survey is being distributed to all Special Education Administrators throughout Virginia. All information will be kept anonymous and confidential. Your name will never be recorded on your survey. It is important that each survey be completed and returned.

The questions on the survey are designed to obtain information from the individual who responsibility for Special Education services. Your candid responses to the questions will be very helpful in collecting the information necessary to complete this study.

I realize this is a busy time of year, however your response will provide valuable information that will help to improve the coordination of secondary transition services. Please take a few minutes to complete the "Special Education Administrators' Role in Coordinating Secondary Transition Services" questionnaire. The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and we request that it be placed in the stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed, and returned by March 3, 2006.

We recognize that your time is valuable, therefore, as a special appreciation for your help & time; I enclosed a gift card for your enjoyment.

If you any questions or you would like to receive a copy of the final results of this study please contact me at 434-848-0370, or at aparrish@vt.edu.

Please accept my humble gratitude for your assistance with this important research.

Sincerely,
Alvera J. Parrish, Doctoral Candidate

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS' ROLE IN COORDINATING SECONDARY
TRANSITION SERVICES**

PART I. Transition services are intended to be a coordinated set of activities, provided to the student by the school and sometimes other agencies, to promote a successful transition from high school to further education or employment, and independent living.

Please respond to the following:

1. Special Education Administrator/Director <input type="checkbox"/> Full Time <input type="checkbox"/> Part Time	2. School District _____	3. School District's 2005-2006 Student Enrollment <input type="checkbox"/> 1,000 – 2,999 <input type="checkbox"/> 3,000 – 6,999 <input type="checkbox"/> 7,000 – 12,999 <input type="checkbox"/> 13,000 – 20,999 <input type="checkbox"/> 21,000 & over	4. Composite Index _____	5. Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural
6. What percentage of time do you spend coordinating Transition Services? <input type="checkbox"/> 0 – 5% <input type="checkbox"/> 6 – 10% <input type="checkbox"/> 11 – 15% <input type="checkbox"/> 16 – 20% <input type="checkbox"/> 21 – 25% <input type="checkbox"/> 26% or higher				
7. Are there others in the school district that responsibility for coordination of transition services for students, other than yourself? (Check all that apply.) <input type="checkbox"/> School Based Transition Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Principal <input type="checkbox"/> District Level Transition Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher				
8. Number of years of experience as Special Education Administrator: <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 <input type="checkbox"/> 21 and over				
9. Level of educational attainment: (check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate				

PART II.

This part of the survey lists possible transition services delivered to students with disabilities in secondary education. In your current role as special education administrator, consider what you believe is important to transition service coordination and your level of involvement in coordinating specific services.

Directions: Circle the number that best indicates IMPORTANCE level ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Place a (✓) in the column that best indicates your level of involvement in coordinating transition services as **Not Provided, Facilitate Others, or Full Responsibility.**

TRANSITION SERVICES		IMPORTANCE					LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT		
A. COORDINATE TRANSITION SERVICES IN IEP PROCESS WITH AGENCIES, PARENTS, AND PROVIDERS.		Low High					Not Provided	Facilitate Others	Full Responsibility
1.	Initiate referrals for transition services	1	2	3	4	5			
2.	Identify and analyze required assessments	1	2	3	4	5			
3.	Coordinate meetings between other agencies with students and parents	1	2	3	4	5			
4.	Participate in IEP meetings.	1	2	3	4	5			
5.	Write cooperative agreements with adult service agencies	1	2	3	4	5			
6.	Follow-up on referrals to the agencies	1	2	3	4	5			
7.	Assist in identification of transition goals and objectives	1	2	3	4	5			
B. STAFF/COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND TRAINING		Low High					Not Provided	Facilitate Others	Full Responsibility
8.	Provide school improvement committees with current updates & information on transition services	1	2	3	4	5			
9.	Provide staff development for teachers and other staff	1	2	3	4	5			
10.	Conduct in-services with parents and respond to requests/concerns	1	2	3	4	5			
11.	Provide career assessment training	1	2	3	4	5			
12.	Disseminate information to school and community groups via meetings, conferences, and memos	1	2	3	4	5			
13.	Attend regional or state transition meetings	1	2	3	4	5			
14.	Attend special education department/team meetings to share information	1	2	3	4	5			
15.	Network with local businesses	1	2	3	4	5			
C. TRANSITION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT		Low High					Not Provided	Facilitate Others	Full Responsibility
16.	Collaborate with supportive employment and community agencies	1	2	3	4	5			
17.	Conduct needs assessment for existing programs and identify gaps in programming	1	2	3	4	5			
18.	Develop and administer grants and other funding sources	1	2	3	4	5			
19.	Research and evaluate best practices and administer innovative programs	1	2	3	4	5			
20.	Conduct follow-up of student graduates	1	2	3	4	5			

PART III.

Directions: Please rank order your response using 1–4, with (1) being the highest, for the following question.

21. Which factors the greatest influence on the priority level of importance you provide in the

A. _____ time	B. _____ financial resources	C. _____ human resources	D. _____ community resources
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coordination of transition services? Availability of:

22. How can the implementation of transition services be improved?

Upon completion, please return in the self-addressed envelope provided.

Thank you for your time!
Alvera J. Parrish
18264 Christanna Highway
Lawrenceville, VA 23868

Appendix B

Pilot Study Summary of Responses

Constructs ↓	Panel Member A	Panel Member B	Panel Member C	Panel Member D
Clarity of directions	5	5	5	5
Ease of response	5	5	5	4
Alignment of transition services included or not included	5	5	4	5
Time required to complete survey	5	5	5	5
Information consider adding, deleting, or changing	5	5	4	3
Presentation & Format of survey	5	5	5	5

Appendix C

Summary of Feedback for Pilot Study Revisions

Panel Member A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Directions are very clear. *Part I, #7- change “” to “”. *The survey is user friendly. *Very good survey overall.
Panel Member B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Very good instrument, easy enough to complete. Reading through the list of transition services, really caused me to reflect on the coordination and delivery of services in my school district & areas where we need to improve. *Good area of study, very timely.
Panel Member C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Your survey is great. *Part II, I would consider a portrait layout instead of the landscape. *Part II, item #5, does co-op refer to the word cooperative or a work experience? *Part II, item #8, clarify the relationship between school improvement committees & transition. *Part II, item #18, I suggest changing identify to (write or develop), and administer grants. *Part III, no suggestions. Thanks for the open ended question.
Panel Member D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *I really liked the yellow highlighted areas which focused my attention to the question posed and reinforcement of the scale for answers. *It took me approximately 18 minutes to complete the survey, which I thought was good timing. *Keep in mind there are rural divisions doing an outstanding job in pooling resources for facilitating transition opportunities, while larger divisions more resources and higher composite index but institute less transition opportunities...just a thought. *I liked the open-ended question, and the opportunity to express ways of improving transition services & not feel confined to the direction of your study.