

Module 4 Running Project Part 2

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SPED 856: Transition Education and Services

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June 25, 2021

Module 4 Running Project Part 1

Topeka Public School Unified 501 school district is where I am currently employed and the district I am using for this report. It is in an urban community that serves 13,430 students with 33 schools and 2,471 staff. Out of the 13,430 students, 72% receive free and reduced lunches. In special education, there are 2,800 students or 20% of students in special education services. Students' race/ethnicity composition is 38% white, 32% Hispanic, 17% African American, and 13% other. Finally, there are 3,132 students enrolled in College and Career Ready Program in the 2020-2021 school year.

My job in Topeka Public Schools is as an Elementary Special Education teacher. I work with fifteen second-grade students, composed of seven girls and eight boys. The racial/ethnic composition of my students is one Native American student, two African American students, one Hispanic student, and eleven white students. For the needs of my students, I have three students with autism, a student with epilepsy, a student who is emotionally disturbed, and the other ten students are labeled as developmentally delayed. For related services, ten of my students receive speech services, four receive occupational therapy, three receive social work services, and only one receives physical therapy. For academic services, twelve students receive reading pull-out services, nine students receive math pull-out services, and three students receive writing pull-out services. My job description as an Adaptive Special Education teacher as defined by Topeka Public Schools is to design IEPs with the IEP team, provide direct instruction and services based on student IEPs, create a conducive classroom environment, encourage positive classroom behavior, write lesson plans in line with student goals, regularly assess student progress, provide classroom management, attend and contribute to weekly staff collaborations, follow all special

education policies, laws, and rules, regularly communicate with parents, have flexible availability for students and parents, and complete all necessary special education paperwork.

In transition services, Topeka Public schools perform best in the domain of Transition Focused Curriculum and Instruction. This domain received an overall score of 3.71. There are multiple classes available for resource/intensive instruction. Programs are in place to teach independent living skills, such as cooking, grooming, and personal finance classes. Additional strength in this domain is that programs are in place to teach career development. There are classes for career exploration and development and courses for specific careers. The weakness I identify in this domain is that independent living skills are unavailable sooner. I know that many of my students would benefit from a grooming class earlier, as I have to take separate time to teach them to properly wash their hands and get the dirt out of their fingernails. The other weakness is fewer classes for interpersonal skills and more for recreational skills.

The following two domains scored similarly, but the Transition Planning domain performed better. The Transition Planning domain scored a 3.13, primarily achieved in all areas, but was more decisive in one area. In the 501 district, transition services and course of study are identified to assist the students in meeting post-secondary goals and were highly rated. There are multiple courses available to help students develop career, social, and independent living skills to choose from to build their course of study. The other strength in this domain is that transition planning begins when a student is 14, but some teachers start earlier, but all special education teachers do not do this. For this reason, I did not rate this area as a 4. It is crucial to start this process early to develop self-awareness. When a student can complete a task independently, from washing their hands to solving a math problem, this will help them gain confidence in

themselves and develop their self-awareness, which will help them as they begin the transition process. A weakness in this domain would be approaches used during transition planning to support family culture. This area is weak, as not much cultural reciprocity development is in place or obtained by all teachers. More professional development in supporting family culture would increase the performance of this area. The second weakness in this domain is the student-centered approach. Not all teachers use the same format of MAPS or Personal Future Planning, but rather their systems they have found. Also, not all students are willing to put in the work for MAPS for their transition planning, and parents are also not readily involved. It varies by family, as some students are involved while others are not. More development for student involvement would help improve this area.

The following domain, Systems Level Infrastructure, scored the same 3.13. It scored best in procedures in place for facilitating inclusion into general education. Students with disabilities can be involved in clubs, sports, and classes. Inclusion is pushed for in our district as much as possible. Staff and parents want students with disabilities in the classroom as much as possible. We have IIC rooms for students with higher needs, but they still spend a good deal of time in their general education classrooms. Another strength in this domain is drop-out prevention programs. Alternative and online schools are available to students struggling with the traditional school environment. There are also programs for students in transition with homelessness to help keep them in school. The Topeka Center for Advanced Learning and Careers (TCALC) focuses on having students on a career track that provides job experience or college credits. There is also an alternative school to provide intensive support to students. An area of weakness in this domain is that classroom teachers do not always know how to

accommodate or adapt work for students with disabilities; the special education teachers only do it. This area could improve with more guidance from special education staff and professional development courses. This leads to the other weakness of professional development. Professional development is provided to staff, but not always in the areas of need, such as cultural reciprocity. Once there is more curriculum developed on cultural reciprocity, more professional development will be provided in that area.

The final four domains scored the same overall score of 3.00 but performed differently in reality. Of the four, Interagency Collaboration and Community Service edged out the other domains. The interagency Collaboration is strong in Topeka Public Schools as there is a huge partnership with Evergy (Weststar). USD 501 is home to the Kanza Education and Science Park. This park connects students to Evergy education station and Stormont Vail's Cotton-O'Neil medical complex. This gives students an outlet for two different strong workforces in Topeka. There is also strong interagency collaboration and community service through TCALC, with multiple pathways available and more business partnerships developing. A weakness in this domain is accurate information about community services provided to schools and families. Transition planning information is not readily available on the Topeka Public Schools District and high school websites. Information on paper is provided, but having multiple means of information can better inform parents and students.

The next domain is Transition Assessments, with a score of 3. Strengths in this domain are assessments for which each student evaluates specific transition needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. Teachers use the assessments to develop a plan and course of study to best help students. Their goals are also written based on the assessment results. Weakness in

this domain transition assessment results are shared in a meaningful way. When parents or students are less involved, results can be shared through email or papers sent home. Information can be provided to parents, but that does not mean that it is seen. The transition assessment process is ongoing in another area of weakness. Some teachers assess every month, every quarter, and some every semester. The inconsistency among teachers is not fair to students, as they do not all receive the same transition process.

The next domain is Student Involvement, with another score of 3. Strengths in this domain are opportunities for students to learn about specific post-secondary options and opportunities to make real-life decisions. This circles back to the transition-focused curriculum, as multiple classes for particular careers are available to students in different formats (at TCALC, at school, and on the job). This also lets students make real-life decisions if they choose which format they want to try or which career path they want to go down. Weakness in this domain is parents being provided with information and decision-making skills. Parents are provided with information and support, but parents do not always take it. Also, access to this information and support was not easy for me to find on the Topeka Public Schools website, so it is unavailable to parents on that platform. There is also no set decision-making skills curriculum so that students will have different outcomes based on their teacher's curriculum.

The last domain that needs the most improvement is Family Involvement. Family involvement has a high correlation with student success. According to a study conducted in 1991 that interviewed 284 postsecondary students with learning disabilities, "statistical tests reveal that students (a) with high math ability, (b) who were employed during high school, and (c) whose parents actively participated in their education were more likely to experience

employment success after high school” (Fourquarean, Meisgeier, Swank, & Williams, 1991).

Family active involvement in student education leads to more success after school. With how effective family involvement is, it is essential to improve this domain. It scored a three as all of the areas of this domain are provided, but that does not mean that parents receive all. This area needs the most improvement as developing parental communication is often lacking in teacher education. “The preparation and retention of special education intern teachers who are imperiled due to fiscal realities, limited resources, inadequate preparation programs, and increased workloads” (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). In education programs, we learn how to teach students but not to work with parents. The strength in this area is the flexible time and interpreters being available for meetings. There are multiple interpreters in our district, and most teachers offer flexible meeting times. While completing this assessment, I found the most significant weakness to be a lack of information about transition services for parents on the Topeka Public Schools website.

There was more information about transition services for students who are homeless, not for students transitioning from school to careers. Teachers can provide their resources to parents and suggest sites like I’m Determined, but it should be more easily accessible for families. “The force of families has long been recognized by the inclusion of parent involvement as a basic principle of IDEA (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015) and as a core component of every prominent transition framework (e.g., Kohler & Field, 2003; Test, Smith, & Carter, 2014)” (Bluestein, Carter, McMilan, 2016). But how can we involve parents if we do not provide accessible ways to involve and inform them? More information is better than not enough information. “Improving the post-school outcomes of young people with disabilities requires careful consideration and

clear understanding of parents’ perspectives on employment-related goals” (Bluestein, Carter, McMilan, 2016). Once Topeka Public Schools provides families with a clear understanding of the transition process, this domain would improve and help all areas of the transition process.

Literature Table

Study (APA Citation)	Research Purpose	Key Findings
Hirano, K. A., Rowe, D., Lindstrom, L., & Chan, P. (2018). Systemic Barriers to Family Involvement in Transition Planning for Youth with Disabilities: A Qualitative Metasynthesis. <i>Journal of Child and Family Studies</i> , 27(11), 3440–3456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1189-y	This article investigates the barriers to parental involvement in transition planning and preparation. The “study used an interpretive approach to synthesize the findings from studies reported in 22 manuscripts conducted by 66 researchers involving interviews with 405 parents.”	The research found nine barriers families face to school transition planning involvement (stress and lack of resources, lack of cultural capital, racism and discrimination, lack of empowerment, poor programing, low expectations, low post-school options, lack of caregiver value, and parents and students having difficulty navigating the system with disabilities).
Bulotsky-Shearer, R. J., Bouza, J., Bichay, K., Fernandez, V. A., & Gaona Hernandez, P. (2016). Extending the Validity of the Family Involvement Questionnaire-Short Form For Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families from Low-Income Backgrounds. <i>Psychology in the Schools</i> , 53(9), 911–925. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21953	This article examined ethnically, and linguistically diverse low-income families enrolled in an urban Head Start program. Parents completed a Family Involvement Questionnaire–Short Form (FIQ-SF).	The research found that “evidence was supported through correlations with direct assessments of children's academic skills and parent-reported satisfaction with school contact.” There was also a trend that parents with less formal education reported lower home involvement and lower parent-teacher communication,

Defur, S. H., Todd-Allen, M., & Getzel, E. E. (2001). Parent Participation in the Transition Planning Process. <i>Career Development for Exceptional Individuals</i> , 24(1), 19–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/088572880102400103	The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of families' experiences in transition planning. This study looked at family relationships with transition team personnel and the implications for methods that enhance the participation of families in transition planning.	Research found that parents “identified the quality of the relationship they had with service providers as the key factor that affected the family's involvement in transition planning.”
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Website Abstracts

APA Citation	Website Description (target audience, focus, description of resources, and links)
Virginia Department of Education. (2021, April 25). <i>Families</i> . I'm Determined. https://imdetermined.org/families/ .	I'm Determined is a website funded by the Virginia Department of Education to help youth educators and families develop self-determination skills in students to create their transition plans. There are multiple resources available to parents to use regardless of state. There are parent training guides, problem-solving skills videos and activities, and parent paths to success videos and activities. https://imdetermined.org/resource/transition-guide-postsecondary-education-training/ https://imdetermined.org/resource/problem-solving/ https://imdetermined.org/resource/parent-path-to-success/

<i>Working with Culturally Diverse Families.</i> PACER Center - Champions for Children with Disabilities. (n.d.). https://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/.	Pacer Center is a resource for students, families, and teachers. It offers support in engaging with culturally diverse families to increase their involvement in student transition services. Resources include research articles, tools for parents, videos, and parent information in multiple languages. https://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/research-literature.asp https://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/resources-for-parents.asp https://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/national-practice-guides.asp
<i>The University of Kansas. (2021, March 1). Resources - Self-Determination. Self Determination.</i> https://selfdetermination.ku.edu/homepage/resources/.	The Self-Determination website offers resources for parents, students, and educators. They also provide some resources in Spanish and English. This website can support parent involvement by providing transition planning information to parents. https://selfdetermination.ku.edu/homepage/resources/

Summary of Findings

I found three articles related to family involvement. The first article, Systemic Barriers to Family Involvement in Transition Planning for Youth with Disabilities: A Qualitative Meta-synthesis looked at families' barriers to transition planning. The barriers were stress and lack of resources, lack of cultural capital, racism and discrimination, lack of empowerment, poor programming, low expectations, low post-school options, lack of caregiver value, and families having difficulty navigating the system with disabilities (Hirano, Rowe, Lindstrom, & Chan, 2018). By identifying these flaws in transition planning, educators can prevent these barriers from keeping parents from being involved in the planning. Educators can also fix these areas to

make them better for parents. Stress cannot always be planned and resolved, but providing multiple resources through multiple means can help parents be more involved. Also, providing high expectations, multiple post-school options, and empowerment will help transition plans be effective for students. The second article, *Extending the Validity of the Family Involvement Questionnaire-Short Form for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families from Low-Income Backgrounds*, looks at parent involvement during the ages of 6. It is essential to see how involved parents are in a child's education at an early age. Then educators can look to see how to keep involvement or increase involvement. The third article, *Parent Participation in the Transition Planning Process* looks at how significant parental involvement is to student achievement and how it is essential in the transition process. Research found that parents "identified the quality of the relationship they had with service providers as the key factor that affected the family's involvement in transition planning" (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). Having a positive relationship with parents leads to more parental involvement. It also looks at the barriers to parental involvement, providing more ways for educators to prevent these sectors from being barriers.

The three websites I found were I'm Determined, the Pacer Center and Self-Determination. The I'm Determined website has multiple resources for families to help support them during the transition process. This website relates to family involvement as it provides resources to parents to help increase participation by providing more information about transition services. The parent guide to success is a valuable resource for parents to understand the transition process. The Pacer Center offers multiple resources on engaging culturally diverse families. More information on how to involve culturally diverse families can lead to more

successful family involvement. Resources include the parent and educator perspective and research articles involving culturally diverse families. The Self Determination website offers ways to help students increase their sense of self. The resources can help increase parental involvement by providing them with information on how to best help and empower their children during the transition planning process.

I would use the information I learned to increase my knowledge of culturally diverse families and ways to increase family involvement. The 2018 article looks at families' barriers in the transition process. By identifying these barriers, I can ensure that my colleagues are strong in these areas to increase parental involvement. I would use the second article to see trends in diverse families' participation at an early age. Since I am an elementary teacher, I need to increase parent involvement to continue when students move on to middle and high school. The sooner parents are involved and are able to help their child transition from head start, to elementary, to middle school to high school, the better transition planning for careers will be. I would use the third article to increase my relationships with parents to lead to more parental involvement. The websites would be good tools for parents to use and to help me work with parents. I would share the I'm Determined website with parents to help them understand the transition planning process. I would use the Pacer Center website to provide resources in other languages and research to effectively work with diverse families. I would share the resources from the Self-Determination website in paper form with parents to help their children develop self-determination skills. These are tools that I could use for myself to increase parental involvement and share with colleagues and administrators to increase parental involvement in the whole school and district.

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