Hopes and Hurdles: Parents' Perceptions and Experiences with Transition Planning for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates parents' participation as a necessary component of providing an appropriate education to students with disabilities. Despite these guidelines, parents report challenges with joining and contributing to the individualized education program (IEP) team as equal and valuable educational partners. We used purposeful sampling techniques to interview ten parents about their perceptions, satisfaction, and experiences related to the postsecondary transition planning process for their child. Findings indicated the parents identified hopes and hurdles when planning for their child's postsecondary life. The parents had hopes for individualized transition plans, high expectations, and collaborative practices characterized by mutual respect and open-mindedness during the planning process. Meanwhile, parents also reported hurdles that included experiencing conflict with professionals when advocating for their child, as well as uncertainty and apprehension for their child's future. Each construct is discussed in detail, along with implications for practice and future research.

Keywords: parents, transition planning, intellectual disability

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The most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) requires school districts to provide transition services by the age of 16 to students who receive special education services (IDEA 34 CFR § 300.320(b)(c)). Transition services include coordinated activities designed to enhance academic and functional skill development in order to promote continued opportunity and achievement following high school graduation in accordance with student postsecondary transition goals (IDEA 34 CFR § 300.43(a)). The development of these postsecondary transition goals assists individualized education program (IEP) teams with (a) targeting academic, social, and emotional skills relevant to student postsecondary transition goals during daily instruction, (b) quantifying and evaluating student progress toward postsecondary transition goals, and (c) identifying and accessing school and community-based services and supports that can assist students with attaining their postsecondary transition goals (IDEA 34 CFR § 300.43(a); Mazzotti et al., 2009). Since transition planning links school-based services with students' postsecondary goals and interests, as well as bridges the gap between school and community supports, transition planning plays an important role in facilitating the

success of young adults during life after high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Test et al., 2009).

To ensure transition plans are meaningful for students and their family members, educators are encouraged to customize postsecondary transition planning by including students' strengths, needs, goals, and interests (Neece, Kraemer, & Blacher, 2009). As of the impact of the process on students' futures, this is an important discussion for all IEP team members. Therefore, the IDEA requires that parents and the students are notified and invited to participate in discussions related to these postsecondary planning meetings. Despite these legal provisions aimed to encourage educators to collaborate with parents, research indicates that much of the postsecondary planning for students, specifically the procedural and substantive requirements, are left to the discretion of educators with little feedback from parents (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

Parents' Involvement during Postsecondary Transition Planning
Hayes (2011) describes parents' involvement within the school setting as an essential educational component that can lead to a consistent dialogue between parents and student related to achievement. This is not surprising given that research supports the notion that parents are often the most consistent teaching presence within a child's life (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In fact, researchers describe a correlation between parents' involvement and postsecondary transition planning, leading to successful postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, even when considering factors such as family size and socioeconomic status (SES) (White & Rae, 2016). According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study - 2, a national study on the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities, transition plans that actively involve students and their family members are more likely to facilitate satisfaction with life after high school among individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Papay & Bambara, 2014). In addition, students whose parents expected them to experience postsecondary educational and employment opportunities were more likely to experience these opportunities after high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014). Given that students with ID often experience difficulties with language and communication, parents are identified as key stakeholders who are the most aware and available to communicate their child's strengths, needs, goals, and preferences related to important considerations when planning for the future (Neece et al., 2009).

While parents' involvement is undoubtedly a key component to successful transition planning, this responsibility does not come without parents' concerns and obstacles. Strnadova and Evans (2013) identified the transition to young adulthood as one of the most stressful experiences for family members of children with ID. One major concern is contributed to the termination of special education services covered through IDEA after reaching 21 years of age (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). The large and infamous gap between school resources and community life options after IDEA can be incredibly frustrating and overwhelming for parents (White & Rae, 2016). Some noteworthy parental concerns following IDEA coverage include obtaining education, employment, and community access opportunities for their children. This concern is further heightened with research indicating that students with ID and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are less likely to obtain employment, live independently, or access the community on a regular basis compared to their typically developing peers (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Other

parental concerns include identifying a plan for guardianship and caretaking should the parents become deceased or when the parents are no longer capable of caring for their children due to their own aging health issues (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). Such parental concerns point to the importance of including family members through the transition planning process with the intent to create a plan that can best prepare students and their families for the future.

Parents' Perceptions and Experiences with Postsecondary Transition Planning
Parents report feeling unheard and uninvolved when it comes to their child's postsecondary transition plan (Hetherington et al., 2010; Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). Research related to parental involvement with postsecondary transition planning calls for additional research to identify parents' priorities during transition planning (Henninger & Taylor, 2014), as well as strategies for strengthening parents' involvement during transition planning (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). The current study attempts to address each of these important issues by investigating parents' experiences (interactions with educators during IEP meetings, specifically, as well as collaboration with educators related to postsecondary transition planning, in general) and perceptions (parents' thoughts, feelings, and reflections related to these experiences) of the postsecondary transition planning process through qualitative interviews. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1: What were the parents' perceptions of the transition planning process for their children with Intellectual Disabilities?

Research Question 2: What were the parents' experiences with the transition planning process for their children with Intellectual Disabilities?

Method

Using qualitative phenomenology, the authors interviewed parents about their level of involvement, perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction with the postsecondary planning process. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling techniques with the intent to identify participants who understood this phenomenon and had personally experienced postsecondary planning meeting practices for their child. All participants were recruited through email. The first author sent an introductory email that explained the purpose of the research to a western state parent training information center and a state level parent support organization for students identified with ID. The email described the criteria for participation in the study and, if interested, requested potential participants to email the first author. Inclusionary criteria for participation included the following: (1) parent of a child who received special education services under the eligibility category of ID, (2) participant's child had to be either currently in high school or had to have graduated from high school prior to this study. Through this recruitment process, ten parents of children identified as having an intellectual disability met the criteria and were selected for the study.

Participants
Eight mothers and two fathers were included in this study. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Study Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Child Pseudonym/ Graduation Year	Child Description
Tabetha	Tony/High School Student	Tony is currently in high school and participates in both a work-study program and general education classes with his peers. Tony hopes to have a college experience following his graduation from high school.
Diane	Denise/High School Student	Denise is currently in high school and is in the process of receiving on-site training in high school for community-based work. Denise would like to work at an ice cream parlor, pizza restaurant, or hospital following her graduation.
Kathy	Kevin/2015	Kevin graduated from high school in 2015. Following his graduation, Kevin volunteered at a local food pantry, worked at a football store during football season, and has taken courses through a postsecondary education program at a local University.
April	Alice/2014	Alice graduated from high school in 2014. Following her graduation, Alice worked as a hostess at a well known restaurant chain, served as an anchor for a local news station, and served as a global messenger for Special Olympics.
Tanya	Tina/2014	Tina graduated from high school in 2014. Following her graduation from high school, Tina volunteered at a local library and clothing store.
Jill	Judy and Joy/2010 and 2007 respectively	Judy and Joy graduated from high school in 2007 and 2010 respectively. Following their graduation from high school, Judy and Joy worked within their local community at a local thrift store and clothing stores. They also engaged in recreational opportunities at a local bowling alley and recreation center.
Gertrude	Gabby/2009	Gabby graduated from high school in 2009. Following her graduation from high school, Gabby took courses at a local University, worked at a beading shop, and opened her own jewelry business.

Rachel	Rylee/2006	Rylee graduated from high school in 2006. Following her graduation from high school, Rylee earned two certificates at a local community college, worked at a well-known retail store and a local thrift store, and served as a self-advocate for individuals with disabilities.
Carl	Cindy/2005	Cindy graduated from high school in 2005. Following her graduation from high school, Cindy worked as a supported employee making jewelry for a local brewery and assisted in manufacturing and assembly at General Electric.
Barry	Betty/2003	Betty graduated from high school in 2003. Following her graduation from high school, Betty worked at a retail store.

Interviews

The first author conducted all interviews over the phone. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their experiences as members of their child's postsecondary transition planning team. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (participants were allowed to read the transcribed interviews) in order to accurately portray participant thoughts, perceptions, and experiences related to the postsecondary transition planning process. An interview protocol was used as a guide; however, the interviews were open ended and participants were encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts beyond that of the interview protocol. A semi-structured interview approach was used with the intent to maintain relevance to the research topic, while simultaneously allowing the true voice of the participant to be included during the interview process. Phone calls ranged in duration from 25 to 80 minutes (please see Appendix A for the interview protocol).

Data Analysis

Coding procedures included line-by-line open coding with the qualitative software program Nvivo. Using line-by-line coding procedures, the authors were able to analyze all components of the interview transcripts, paying close attention to the identification of concepts, terms, and ideas prevalent throughout each interview transcript. The first step in the coding process was reading each transcript line-by-line and giving each emerging theme a specific code. Next, emerging themes within each interview transcript were grouped with themes from different interview transcripts based on key terms, ideas, and philosophies. Finally, themes that universally represented participant responses through individual interviews were identified and expanded upon within the findings section of this research study.

Trustworthiness

Using peer debriefing, the interviews were read by both authors and analyzed using the aforementioned coding procedures to ensure the themes that emerged from these interviews accurately represented the experiences and perceptions of parents interviewed as part of this research study (Creswell, 2007). Codes, categories, themes, and quotations were discussed between the two raters with any disagreements discussed until mutual agreement occurred. There was agreement across the codes, themes, and quotations. The authors conducted a member check that involved emailing the themes that emerged during the coding procedures to each interview participant. The goal of this member check was to ensure the themes identified by the authors accurately represented information shared by participants during their interviews (Reilly, 2013). Seven of our ten participants responded and verified that the themes identified by the authors accurately reflected their experiences and perceptions during the transition planning process.

Findings

Findings revealed the parents' perceptions and experiences with postsecondary planning fell under two major themes referred to as hopes and hurdles. Within the hopes theme, parents spoke about the value they held and promoted that their child receives an individualized transition plan and high expectations when preparing for the future. Conversely, while advocating for these hopes, the parents spoke about experiencing hurdles by way of low expectations, challenges or disagreements during transition planning, uncertainty, and apprehension about their child's future. These themes are described in detail in the following section.

Parents' Hopes for the Future
Throughout the interviews, parents conveyed a sense of hope they held regarding their child's future throughout the transition planning process. Such hope for the future included the desire for their child to experience a high quality of life as a young adult. Specifically, all parents hoped their child would receive an individualized transition plan that would lead to achieving postsecondary employment or education outcomes. Relatedly, the parents also described the importance of school teams maintaining high expectations for their child as they prepared to transition into postsecondary life.

Individualized transition plans. One key underlying message related to the parents' hopes for their child's postsecondary transition opportunities was the importance of individualization. Parents hoped their children's strengths, interests, and personal goals would guide the development of their postsecondary transition plans. They also hoped their children's postsecondary transition plans would support their children with achieving their full potential and, in the process, maximizing their quality of life as young adults. For example, while sharing her experiences advocating for postsecondary educational opportunities for her son, Kevin, Kathy stated, "I know he has Down syndrome, this is not something I'm ignoring. I'm asking what supports are available. They are not willing to go there." Kathy's frustration stemmed from her perception that Kevin's disability label, rather than personal abilities and interests, was the determining factor in the transition goal that was suggested by members of his postsecondary transition planning team. Parents' responses related to their child's individualized postsecondary transition plans are categorized below based on the post-school outcomes that guided the transition planning process.

Postsecondary employment. Parents consistently emphasized the importance and need for employment opportunities to enhance their child's self-esteem, access to the local community, and overall personal happiness and quality of life. For example, Barry shared that he was "thrilled" when his daughter, Betty, was able to obtain an employment position at a well-known retail store. Barry stated, "What's the purpose of a school program? It's to train a child to be in the community, and that means a home of your own and a job you can be proud of." Likewise, Rachel expressed her satisfaction with both the quality of her daughter, Rylee's, employment opportunity following high school graduation, as well as the number of employment hours her daughter received. Regarding Rylee's employment position at a local thrift store, Rachel explained, "She works 16 hours a week at the [thrift store]. That's a good amount for her. We're very happy with that arrangement." April discussed the joy and satisfaction she and her daughter, Alice, shared upon both receiving positive feedback from Alice's employer and realizing Alice was becoming increasingly independent in the workplace. Recalling conversations with her daughter's job coach and employers, April said, "Again, the job coach is telling us, I mean she rarely comes anymore, but all the feedback she gets is very positive."

While paid employment was described as a high priority for some families, it was not a necessary prerequisite to meaningful employment opportunities for all parents. Some parents stressed the importance in obtaining individualized employment opportunities, whether they were paid employment or not. For example, Jill, while discussing Judy and Joy's participation in a volunteer (non-paid) transition program, shared, "They really look forward to going. If you have a day that you are doing something productive and you absolutely look forward to it every

single day, what better life could that be?" Tanya valued the willingness of educators working with her daughter, Tina, to investigate volunteer opportunities for Tina correlating with her strengths and interests. She explained, "My daughter is very fashionista. She likes clothes and make-up and hair. They were always trying to see what she was good at and I loved the fact that they tried to listen to me."

While some of these parents associated employment with both paid and unpaid working positions within their local communities, individualized and meaningful employment opportunities remained the key universal component of parents' hopes for the future. For example, Tanya recalled being asked whether she wanted her daughter, Tina, to have employment opportunities following her graduation from high school. Because she had perceptions of a limited consideration of potential employment opportunities for her daughter, Tanya said, "I don't want her cleaning tables. She can do more. She can do more than that."

Postsecondary education. Parents emphasized the importance of postsecondary education opportunities related to inclusion and social interaction. Kathy explained that she viewed college as the next logical step for her son, Kevin, following high school graduation. Kathy shared, "His [child's] older siblings and all the people in his grade, that's what you do [go to college]. People who'd been his friends who'd graduated, all they do is talk about college and the SAT and things like that." When asked what her son, Tony's, transition goal was, Tabetha stated, "Having a college experience. He has a very significant cognitive disability, but he wants to have the social experience and the learning of as much as possible of college."

Some parents also viewed college as an opportunity for their children to pursue leisure and employment interests as well as enhance their independence skills and access to the local community. Gertrude shared:

> *She [Gabby] took public speaking, entrepreneurship. She took some disability studies classes, women's studies, race and gender, some self-advocacy classes. She took performing arts classes, dance, music, belly dance. She took Zumba dancing. She took art classes. Just a long list of classes that she participated in, and she did it with peer support, so she had age-appropriate support in class.*

Gertrude credited Gabby's college experience in facilitating her daughter's employment success. Gabby is now self-employed and runs her own jewelry business. Rachel viewed college as an opportunity for her daughter, Rylee, to both directly pursue her interests as well as indirectly develop life skills that would generalize across a variety of real-world settings and situations. Rachel stated, "She [Rylee] was interested in theater at the time, so we wanted her to have the ability to pursue that. We also wanted her to increase her independence skills."

According to April, the benefits of postsecondary educational experiences for her daughter, Alice, were not confined to the college or university setting. April shared, "Her [Alice] goal is to get a certification in group fitness so that she can do it all on her own at this point." In addition to the self-confidence gained through completing fitness courses, taking fitness courses with her trainer allowed Alice to both model and support peers and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

High expectations. Parents discussed a wide range of transition goals for their children related to employment, education, community access, and independent living opportunities following high school graduation. Among these areas, the desire for high expectations was a universal need shared among all parents. While reflecting on the progress of her daughters, Judy and Joy, Jill shared:

> You think you know your kid and you think they can't...you don't think they'll be able to do certain things. Then, all of a sudden, they just do it and you're like, oh my, I didn't know you could do that!

April emphasized the importance of everyone, parents and educators included, maintaining high expectations for her daughter given the extremely high expectations her daughter had for herself. For example, April shared the story of Alice setting the goal of training for and completing a triathlon. April explained that witnessing Alice achieve this goal further emphasized the importance of maintaining high expectations for all students, regardless of disability labels.

Barry described the joy and surprise he felt as he watched his daughter, Betty, become more independent than he ever thought possible and move into her own apartment. Barry shared:

> [Betty] moved into her own apartment and it has been successful beyond our expectations. We learned that we underestimated our daughter's ability to understand her world, to make decisions and to continue learning. If you ask our daughter what she is most proud of she will tell you, 'I live in my own apartment!'

Rachel used the analogy of "taking a stab in the dark" to describe her experiences advocating for a competitive employment goal in her daughter, Rylee's, transition plan. Rachel shared, "We weren't sure where she was going, what her skill level would allow her to do, what facilities were available to her at the time." Rachel credited employment skill instruction included as part of Rachel's transition plan for helping her obtain a job at a well-known retail store following high school graduation.

Inclusive opportunities within the school and local communities. One prominent area of high expectations for parents' hopes for the future was school-based inclusion, both in the high school setting and beyond. For example, Denise praised the use of peer supports to facilitate inclusive opportunities within the school setting for her daughter, Diane. Denise reported that, in the past, Diane was infrequently provided with inclusive opportunities due to a staff shortage and the belief that she required a teacher aide to accompany her in class. Denise recalled her joy upon hearing from a teacher at Diane's new school, "No, I don't think she needs an aide." Denise explained that, given support from Diane's peers, Diane was able to be successful in an inclusive classroom setting, as well as build and maintain friendships with a larger number of her peers. Inclusion within the school setting is often a goal of students with ID as well as their parents. One mother, April, said:

> My child has is the youngest of four and it was very important for her to be included in the typical classroom. She almost advocated for herself on that where they wanted ...

typically a person with her diagnosis would be a little bit more involved in classrooms that didn't have a lot of integration. She wanted to be included in a typical classroom.

Kathy explained her perception that, due to her son, Kevin's disability label of ID, college was not considered a realistic outcome. In fact, when Kathy sought support from Kevin's teachers and administrators in registering and preparing for the ACT, she perceived a large amount of resistance. After working hard to ensure Kevin had the opportunity to take the ACT, Kathy reported, "For a week he came home saying, 'Mommy, I took the ACT for college.' He was so happy. He was so excited. He actually got a double-digit score." Tabetha, while describing her son, Tony's, success in the general education classroom and goal of having a college experience, stated, "Presume confidence in the kids and have the highest expectations that are imaginable, that's my philosophy."

Some parents stressed the importance of inclusive opportunities within the local community settings as crucial components of maintaining high expectations for their children. One parent, Barry explained, "The old days of putting people in group homes, and earlier, literally warehouses, that day is fortunately on the moral trash heap of history. Our children have a right to be in the community." Tabetha explained the benefits of inclusion related to self-esteem and social interaction by sharing:

> *So that's why we have the young mentors that his [Tony's] peers see as really cool people, so they're kind of magnets, and then that makes him [Tony] have a higher status in his community just because he has these cool people with him.*

April explained the idea of high expectations for young adults with disabilities by emphasizing the importance of, "allowing people to dream. Having a template to say, if you do this and this, then these maybe are future opportunities for you." Whether it is employment, postsecondary education, or inclusion, maintaining high expectations for students with ID was a concept prevalent throughout interviews conducted as part of this research study.

Hurdles Experienced by Parents During Postsecondary Transition Planning
In addition to expressing hope for the future, parents also encountered hurdles as they navigated through their children's postsecondary transition planning experiences. As parents expressed their hopes for the future, they sometimes found that educators had different visions for their children related to their lives after high school. These parents shared that although they had become accustomed to the special education services and supports their children had received for most of their lives, they faced the reality of losing these services and supports upon their children's graduation from high school. Three prominent hurdles experienced by the participants during postsecondary transition planning included: (a) low expectations, (b) disagreements during transition planning, and (c) uncertainty and apprehension about the future.

Low expectations. Unfortunately, some of the parents did not believe their children were held to the same high expectations as that of their peers without a disability. Kathy shared her perception of this discrepancy:

When you have gifted students, people are all about their maximum potential. You have to let them hit their maximum potential. When you get these kids [kids with a disability] that's not a phrase you hear at all. I don't think that's right.

Barry expressed similar sentiments when discussing his experiences while advocating for an employment outcome for his daughter, Betty, during postsecondary transition planning meetings:

We need to get over the stigma that our kids are too stupid to do a good job. They actually tend to be very conscientious employees, because they're so grateful for a job. We've got to get past this thing where 70-80% of people with an intellectual disability are unemployed. It keeps them out of the community. It also keeps them in poverty.

April was extremely satisfied with her daughter, Alice's transition outcome; however, she also explained some concerns regarding the low expectations surrounding some of Alice's peers with disabilities:

We saw other kids who, just speaking in the general sense, whose ability level was probably much higher but was never really encouraged to dream big. To think that, 'What would you really like to do?' It's really bittersweet to see those kids not having jobs yet. Not really even wanting a job. I think that that is so sad because I think that creates a culture of depression and a ho hum and I'm not worthy. I'm not good. I think we are created to be contributors in a society and I think that builds that self-worth piece.

Barry summarizes the importance of high expectations and strength-based transition planning, as opposed to low expectations and deficit-based transition planning, by stating, "If we want to create the best possible lives for our children, we focus on their capabilities not their disability."

Conflict during transition planning. Parents described experiencing conflict with educators during postsecondary transition planning meetings. Surprisingly, two parents described these disagreements as respectful, and even beneficial, components of their children's transition planning meetings. Meanwhile, other parents characterized these disagreements as including working with educators who were close-minded and even disrespectful. Each of these types of experiences, negative and positive, are shared in the subsequent section.

Negative perceptions of conflict. Unfortunately, most parents perceived disagreements with members of their child's transition planning team as unhealthy and disrespectful. Kathy explained:

We first brought it up [postsecondary education and competitive employment goals] in middle school. They just physically, the staff would push themselves away from the table. Push back from the table. Look up at the ceiling, roll their eyes. Look at each other. Take a deep breath and then say something rude.

Kathy compared advocating for her son, Kevin, during these meetings to "going into battle." She also shared that, after attending IEP meetings, her neighbors and church members would say to her, "They don't like you very much, do they?" Diane described her view of transition planning

as "confrontational," rather than a collaborative process. Regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting, she shared, "I know that from a lot of schools that you really have to push that issue if you want your child with special needs to be in regular classes. You really have to fight with them."

Relatedly, some parents felt that their perspective, and the perspective of their child, were not valued or even recognized by educators during the postsecondary transition planning meetings. April emphasized the need to communicate her daughter, Alice's transition goals and preferences. April explained, "Well, and I think it came down to if they [educators] weren't really listening to her [Alice] we needed to speak for her, because she [Alice] was speaking to us." Other parents also shared the sentiment that their child's postsecondary plans were predetermined without the consideration of parental and student input. Tanya explained:

> It's like you don't tell someone that doesn't have a disability that, but you tell someone with a disability that they'd reached their potential. I think they will always learn and I think you need challenge them. I think, yes, they have a disability, and yeah, they're not going to learn at a rate, but never give up on them. Challenge and challenge. They're going to be frustrated and they're going to be mad, but it's going to help them in the long run.

Positive perceptions of conflict. Although most parents described negative perceptions of disagreements during transition planning, two parents interviewed had more favorable perceptions of these disagreements. Gertrude described disagreements during transition planning as "healthy and beneficial" for her daughter, Gabby's, transition planning. Gertrude explained that, within her school district, Gabby was the second student with ID that she knew of who had attended college. Since postsecondary educational outcomes among students with ID were relatively new to educators within Gabby's transition planning team, Gertrude explained her overall perception of this disagreement with these educators by saying:

> When you're trying something new, sometimes there's resistance, there's barriers, but I'm grateful for those, because I feel like that was just part of the process and we learned from that, we became stronger. If there were objections, we can't really overcome objections unless we know what the objections are. There were objections and there was criticism and that, and I guess at the time it was difficult, some of that, but I think that that made us stronger, and that we learned from all of that. I think everything was out in the open.

Rather than perceiving these disagreements as a hindrance during transition planning, Gertrude perceived educator disagreements as positive since they stemmed from a genuine concern for what was best for her daughter. She further explained, "Try to seek out what the resistance and the objections are, because if it's just all behind closed doors, nobody's talking about it, you can't really overcome it." She felt that if all members of transition planning teams prioritize the best interests of the student as well as respect one another during disagreements, these disagreements might serve as opportunities for growth rather than barriers to student success following high school graduation.

Meanwhile, Tabetha described disagreements with educators as a "give-and-take relationship" that required compromise in order to act in the best interest of students. Tabetha explained:

> There's got to be a balance. You don't just demand everything. You've got to put some trust into what they believe is best, and they spend a lot of time with him, ...our teacher's good, so we compromise and she compromises, and we feel like we have a nice balance.

Tabetha felt as if compromise was a healthy and necessary prerequisite to effective transition planning on behalf of her son. She also added, "You don't want to be the mad mommy where they're just like, 'Oh here that person comes again.'" Tabetha explained her willingness to compromise as a function of her trust in the educators who "spend a lot of time" with her son.

Uncertainty and apprehension about the future. All participants shared uncertainty and apprehension related to their child's transition planning meetings and life after high school graduation. When discussing his daughter, Cindy's, transition to life after high school, Carl said, "Once you get to be an adult, you are sort of kicked out in to the world." Barry shared, "I think ultimately the parents are the greatest single determiner in your child's future." This perceived responsibility appeared to lead to an internal dilemma for these parents when considering the act of advocating for the most effective and appropriate services to prepare their child for young adulthood. Barry described this dilemma when deciding between inclusion in the general education curriculum or specialized instruction related to employment:

> There's always been the debate among parents with a disabled child. Is focus on practical life skills for employment the best thing in for your child in high school, or being in a mainstream classroom and having that socialization with her peers? That's a debate that has been there maybe for as long as I've been aware of it. I don't think it's ever going to get solved.

Other parents expressed the challenge of balancing the need to act as advocates for their child, while simultaneously encouraging and accepting independence and autonomy. April, unsure of Alice's desire to pursue college following high school graduation, explained:

> We had to come to grips with maybe we don't think she's ready for all this but her future might be, you know? We are the ones limiting her yet we're telling them not to limit her. We need to get on board a little bit and just see the vision too.

Rachel highlighted the struggle to balance setting achievable transition goals while, at the same time, avoiding "settling for the status quo" when advocating on behalf of her daughter, Rylee, during the transition planning process. Despite this internal struggle, Rachel felt responsible to empower her daughter, Rylee, to self-advocate for her benefit as well as the benefit of other young adults with ID. Rachel explained of Rylee:

> She's a self-advocate in her idea. It's our idea that she should be seen and heard, because it's never going to get better for people with disabilities unless people in the community see people with disabilities working and doing things. We want you to know [Rylee]. We want you to see what she can do.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

This study was designed to add to the literature by offering an in-depth investigation of parents of young adults who have either moved through the postsecondary process entirely or are in the process of this experience. Although dozens of studies highlight parents' experiences with the IEP process (Mueller, 2017; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014), only a handful of studies exist specific to parents' perceptions and experiences with postsecondary planning. Given the difference between an IEP and an IEP that includes postsecondary planning, this study is worthy of attention. Findings from this study illustrate parents' hopes for the future that include individualized transition plans with high expectations that emphasize student education and employment while maximizing inclusive opportunities within the school and community. These parents' high expectations were realized through the development of transition plans that focused on student strengths and abilities. Meanwhile, the parents also discussed experiencing both external and internal hurdles when attempting to achieve these hopes, including disagreements with educators and uncertainty and apprehension about a future without the services and supports their children had received for most of their lives.

Maintain High Expectations for all Students
Parents in this study emphasized a discrepancy between the postsecondary expectations educators had for their child, and educator expectations for children without ID. Perceptions of "low expectations" for students with ID are supported in current research on the topic (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). For example, students with ID are more likely to have postsecondary goals related to supported or sheltered employment than students receiving special education services under any other eligibility category (Grigal et al., 2011). In addition, postsecondary educational goals related to attendance at two-year or four-year colleges and universities are less frequent compared to students under all other special education eligibility categories (Grigal et al., 2011). Consequently, students with ID are less likely than their peers who receive special education services under any other eligibility category to participate in postsecondary education programs or obtain competitive employment following high school graduation (Grigal et al., 2011). In the absence of high expectations, low achievement often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). Martinez et al. (2012) state that educators often present "preselected" and "realistic" student outcomes prior to engaging in transition planning with parents and students. These pre-selected outcomes based on low expectations can lead to teachers creating a classroom environment and facilitating instruction that do not emphasize high achievement standards for their students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Teachers' expectations also influence students' motivation in the classroom setting (Woolley, Strutchens, Gilbert, & Martin, 2010). To truly increase student opportunity and achievement after high school, educators must expect success from their students. This will increase the rigor and relevance of classroom education, as well as model a commitment to success for students with ID.

Individualized Transition Planning
All parents interviewed as part of this study desired their child's individual strengths and interests, as well as goals and hopes for the future, to navigate their child's transition planning process. In other words, parents wanted educators to prioritize their child's individuality over the

status quo or the typical transition recommendations for students with ID as perceived by parents. This finding is unsurprising since, regardless of whether or not a student receives special education services in high school, the desire to pursue goals and interests in life after high school is a universal experience among students transitioning to life after high school.

One method for individualizing could be achieved through planning alternatives tomorrows with hope (PATH). While transition planning for students with ID is typically led and facilitated by educators (Shogren & Plotner, 2012), PATH is a student-driven approach that prioritizes the unique strengths, interests, goals, and hopes of individual students and parents during the transition planning process (Armstrong & Dorsett, 2015; Walton & Dennison, 2015). Students themselves select team members, including family members, educators, and related service providers (Armstrong & Dorsett, 2015). While PATH is implemented differently for each individual student, general components of this process include (a) using student goals and hopes for the future to guide the transition process, (b) identifying short-term and long-term benchmarks linked to the student's transition goals, (c) identifying opportunities for skill development that will help facilitate attainment of transition goals, and (d) coordinating with school and community-based service providers to help facilitate student success (Walton & Dennison, 2015). Since students themselves are actively facilitating their transition plan for life after high school, the PATH process represents a promising approach for emphasizing the "individualized" component of IEPs.

Addressing Conflict During Educational Planning
Conflict is inevitable in special education. After all, parents and educators will not always agree on everything and are likely to have differences of opinion related to the best courses of action for students to take following their high school graduation. Despite differing opinions between educators and parents of children with disabilities, the approach to the resolution of these disagreements often seems to be the root of the problem. Parents in this study described disagreements with educators as both helpful and unhelpful during their children's transition planning meetings. For a small number of parents, disagreements helped the parents and educators better understand one another's perspective so they could identify and address potential obstacles to student transition outcomes they had not previously considered. Meanwhile, the majority of the parents characterized educators as disrespectful and close-minded during transition planning, and consequently viewed conflict as a hindrance to transition planning meetings.

When considering the issue of conflict, educators are encouraged to examine the way they respond to parents' preferences and concerns during transition planning. Acknowledging and empathizing with parents' uncertainty and apprehension during the transition process is also important to fully understand and encourage parental involvement in this process. Knowing the value in parental participation, it would also behoove educators to take time to meet with family members and actively solicit parents' beliefs and hopes about their child. Further, exploration of alternative dispute resolution practices, such as facilitated IEP meetings, could be helpful (Mueller, 2009). Research indicates facilitated IEP (FIEP) meetings can be used for both conflict prevention and resolution due to the collaborative nature of the process and procedural tools that allow active team discussion (Mueller, 2017). Core components of the procedural aspects of FIEP meetings include: (a) pre-meeting with families, (b) establishing and following a meeting

agenda, (c) using meeting norms, (d) utilizing a parking lot for off-topic issues, and (e) visual charting for graphic support during team discussion and problem solving (Mueller & Vick, 2017). Meanwhile, collaborative components of the FIEP meeting include: (a) meaningful facilitation, (b) keeping the focus on the student, and (c) encouraging active parental participation through consensus building (Authors, in press).

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the nature and scope of this study, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population. There are two limitations worth noting. First, participants were all located within the same Midwestern state, thereby representing experiences from only one region in the US. Second, this was an investigation of parents' perceptions and experiences with transition planning only. A more thorough and valuable investigation could include students' perceptions. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the exploration of parents' perceptions related to postsecondary transition planning after their child had either exited school or was close to completion. Future research could further investigate the process by which transition goals for students with ID are identified, targeted during classroom instruction, and achieved following high school graduation. Outcomes of this type of research could provide educators with potential strategies for implementation. Other research could also examine student perceptions of the transition planning process. After all, students are the ultimate consumers of education. While the parent voice is powerful and necessary for student advocacy, the spirit of transition planning is to empower students to become involved in all educational decisions, with great emphasis placed on the development of their own voices. The strongest bridge between the present and the future should be created through utilization of the student voice.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. What is your child's disability?

2. Is your child still in high school? If not, what year did your child graduate from high school?

3. What are/were your child's postsecondary plans as documented in his/her transition plan?

4. What is/was your level of involvement in your child's postsecondary transition plan?

5. What are/were your perceptions of your child's postsecondary transition plan?

6. Is your child currently engaging in opportunities and experiences correlating with those developed in his/her postsecondary transition plan?

7. Are you satisfied with your child's level of opportunities and experiences as a young adult?

8. If you could change any aspect of your child's postsecondary transition planning experience, what would it be?