

TAKE ACTION: A PROGRAM EXPLORING SELF-DETERMINATION
AMONG NINTH GRADE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Self-determination has been identified as a major contributing factor to positive post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. However, the arduous transition from eighth grade into high school makes the acquisition and application of self-determination skills very difficult for this group. The purpose of this dissertation was to: 1) assess the extent to which ninth grade students with disabilities possess the self-determination skills necessary to be successful in high school, and 2) design a program to address this need. Nine students in total participated in the needs assessment. The needs of the target population were assessed through the completion of both educator and student versions of the American Institute for Research (AIR) Self-Determination Form. Students also were interviewed by the investigator.

The results of the interview were analyzed through the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Results indicated that students lack the capacity and opportunity to perform all of the self-determination behaviors. Furthermore, students were generally not aware of the nature of their disability or of the critical components of their Individualized Education Program that help to address their specific academic needs.

A program called “Take Action” was designed based on the results of the needs assessment. The program consisted of ten weekly sessions that focused on the explicit teaching of self-determination skills such as goal setting, decision-making, self-awareness and advocacy. The program used lessons from the Choice-Maker Self-Determination curriculum (Martin et al., 1996). In addition, instructor-made lessons were used to develop a student’s sense of disability awareness and knowledge of critical IEP

components. Suggestions for future research and school psychology practice are also discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The transition of middle school students into high school has been a concern of educators for a number of years. Middle school students face numerous difficulties including a greater variety of teachers and more pressure to succeed academically and socially (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Eccles & Goodman, 2002; Mizelle and Irvin, 2000). In the period of early adolescence, peers become more important and teens desire more independence and the expression of individuality. During this transition students often exhibit lower self-esteem and poor planning skills (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

Despite the many pressures faced by high school freshmen, adults often tell students they are expected to make important decisions regarding their education and future. This expectation surrounding the transition to adulthood can often be intimidating (Agran, Snow & Swiner, 1999). High school transition programs can address the concerns of parents and students alike to bridge the gap between parents' and teachers' expectations of ninth graders and what ninth grade activities students struggle with when first entering high school.

According to Mac Iver (1990), the middle level transition programs that school administrators perceived as best at helping students succeed used a number of different articulation activities. They were programs that (a) provided students and parents with information about the new school, (b) provided social support to students during the transition, and (c) brought middle school and high school personnel together to learn

about one another's curriculum and requirements. This study found that when middle school students took part in a high school transition program with several of these diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990).

Despite this overwhelming evidence for the need for high school transition programs, little or no research has addressed the challenging transition needs for ninth grade students with disabilities. About 27% of all 15-16 year old students receiving special education services drop out of school each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). Reasons for this large number include major difficulties with both academic and developmental adjustments students with disabilities face when first entering high school. In addition to the difficulties typical adolescents face, students with disabilities might have trouble in areas such as: organizing homework and belongings, following directions and completing assignments, reading at grade-level, and writing skills. School-related difficulties often surface when the student enters high school because the students' compensation efforts are no longer adequate (Smith & Diller, 1999).

Letrello and Miles (2003) compared perceptions of transitioning to high school in students with and without learning disabilities. Despite previous research suggesting that ninth grade students with disabilities face greater difficulties (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005; Smith & Diller 1999), Letrello and Miles found that most perceptions of students with and without disabilities were the same. However, students with learning disabilities indicated that they relied more heavily on help from peers and teachers to be successful in the ninth grade year than did their non-classified counterparts.

A factor that could help students to better manage transition is “self-determination.” Self-determination is defined as the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field & Hoffman, 1994). Research suggests that enhanced self-determination skills may play a role in student outcomes including academic performance (Martin et al, 2003) and overall quality of life (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Many research studies also have demonstrated that students with a wide range of levels and types of abilities can be taught an array of self-determination skills (Algozzine et al, 2001).

For instance, Martin et al., (2003) conducted a study to determine if secondary aged students could use self-determination skills to regulate the correspondence between their plans, work, self-evaluations and adjustments made on academic tasks. Among these skills are choice making, goal setting, problem solving, participation in the IEP process and self-awareness. (Agran et al., 2001; Kennedy & Haring, 1993; Snyder & Shapiro, 1997). These skills were measured through the students’ use of a self-determination contract. By simply learning to evaluate their own academic and social success using self-determination skills, it was found that students were able to achieve academic growth (from baseline data) and regulate previously disruptive behavior (Martin et al., 2003). The use of the self-determination contracts represents a way to provide opportunities for students to learn to self-regulate academic and behavioral outcomes, identify their own self-directed pursuits, and attain their own goals. This study is crucial to the purpose of the current dissertation which aims to show that there is a need for ninth grade students with disabilities to be taught self-determination skills. Martin et al., (2003) concluded that learning self-determination skills improves academic

and behavioral outcomes later in high school which ultimately means that a student's transition through high school is successful.

In working in a high school for the past five years, I have observed ninth grade students with disabilities experience great difficulties that come with their transition to high school. The shame associated with having a disability in combination with the developmentally appropriate need to blend in with their peers, makes self-determination quite difficult. This shame is translated to a student's classroom experience where the student is embarrassed to ask a question for fear of his/her disability being exposed. In addition, research shows students with disabilities are more likely to struggle in the transition (Eccles & Wigfield, 1997) and drop out of high school (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation focuses on the exploration of self-determination through a new program called "Take Action". Take Action was designed to meet the specific needs of nine, ninth grade students classified as being "Eligible for Special Education and Related Services." The client served by the program is the Supervisor of Special Education for an urban high school in Northern New Jersey. The Clarification Phase and Design Phase of the program followed the Program Planning and Evaluation Framework (Maher, 2000). The purpose of Take Action is to not only teach the elements of self-determination but for the target population to apply each of these skills to real word situations they will face throughout high school and further into adulthood.

Importance of the Study

The information gained from the design of this study should have benefits for individual students, the school, the community, and the larger society. First, the target population will likely be equipped with knowledge of how to advocate for themselves. This is a crucial component of success at school and also in the job market. The school as an organization will benefit because it will provide a sustainable process for the middle school to high school transition of certain classified students. Students with disabilities in the ninth grade who show an improvement in their knowledge of specific self-determination skills to include choice making, goal setting, goal attainment, problem solving, self regulation, self advocacy, self interest and study skills should have the tools they need to be academically, socially, and emotionally successful in ninth grade and the years following. This program also has implications for state policy because it can help many classified ninth grade students to have less difficulty meeting not only their IEP goals, but New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards.

Overview of the Study

The general aim of this dissertation is to clarify and design a program using Charles Maher's (2000) Program Planning Framework. The program was designed to increase the knowledge and use of self-determination skills in transitioning ninth grade students classified as being Eligible for Special Education and Related Services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Current middle to high school transition programming in the school where the program design will take place only addresses wide scale issues that both classified and non- classified students face when entering high school. These issues include only the organizational and structural difficulties

(departmentalization) that all students will face. The program will include ten lessons specifically designed to address components of self-determination.

The participants chosen for the purpose of increasing the knowledge and use of self-determination skills are twelve ninth-grade students who are classified as having a disability in one of the fourteen categories outlined in IDEA. The students have been found Eligible for Special Education and Related Services under the following categories: Specific Learning Disability, Multiply Disabled, Mild Cognitively Impaired, and Other Health Impaired.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Middle School to High School Transition

As American students progress through the K-12 educational system, they encounter key transition points. These changes generally coincide with a new level of schooling. The entrance to ninth grade marks one critical juncture in this process. For 80 percent of ninth graders attending public school in the United States, this transition is a literal one, involving the switch from a middle school to a 9-12 high school building (Common Core of Data, 2006). Regardless of whether a change in school occurs, ninth grade marks the start of new academic, physical, and social expectations.

Academic Factors in Transition to High School

Researchers target ninth grade as the “make it or break it year” for completing high school. It is during this year that many students need to earn passing grades in core courses (Fulk, 2003; Slim, Akos, & Wiley, 2008). For many students, entry into ninth grade is their first exposure to a completely departmentalized curriculum, extensive academic tracking, ordering of ability via class rankings, and recurrent reminders of graduation requirements (Benner & Graham, 2009). Furthermore, the rising use of standardized examinations to measure school performance adds to the difficulty and importance of achieving in high school.

As a result of the increased demands of high school, ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996).

The ninth grade also has the highest enrollment rate in high schools. This is mainly due to the fact that approximately 22% of students are retained in their ninth grade year (1996). Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have found that up to 40% of ninth-grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10% to 15% of those retained go on to graduate (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

According to NCES, the average freshmen graduation rate for 2001-2002 is 72.6%, but is as low as 57.9% in states such as South Carolina (Seastrom et al., 2005). This means that there can be more than double the amount of students in ninth grade as compared to twelfth grade (Useem, Neild, & Morrison, 2001). These alarming statistics are the reason why the ninth-grade year has become such a focal point of educational reform.

Developmental Factors in the Transition to High School

Numerous studies have attempted to pinpoint exactly why students have so much trouble during the ninth grade year, and most research points to one overarching problem: stresses associated with the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. According to Akos and Galassi (2004), 40% of ninth grade students generally suffer serious emotional problems after the transition to high school. While the transition of a student from middle school to high school can represent an important milestone seen in a student's educational career, it can also be a time marked with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection (Cooper & Liou, 2007).

Wiles and Bondi (2001) noted that early adolescence is characterized by emotional instability. At this age, students experience the hormonal and physical changes associated with puberty which further complicates social interactions among this age

group (Eccles & Wigfield, 1997). Eccles and Wigfield (1997) also noted that during early adolescence the importance of peer-related activities, peer acceptance and physical appearance increases. Cliques become especially prominent and students may engage in maladaptive behaviors (bullying, teasing) to gain social acceptance. At no other time in development is a student likely to encounter so many issues simultaneously (Wiles & Bondi, 2001).

Addressing Transition Concerns

There are many student, parental and administrative concerns regarding the transition from middle school to high school. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) categorize three types of transitional fears eighth grade students expressed. These include: academic, procedural and social. Academic concerns can include having a tough teacher who expects too much or assigns difficult school work (Elias, 2001), having more responsibility for their work (Odegaard and Heath, 1992) and not knowing how to get extra help when they need it (Diemert, 1992). Procedural concerns are about day to day workings of getting around a school, finding classes, and knowing their locker combinations (Elias, 2001; Odegaard & Heath, 1992). According to Elias (2001), social concerns deal with peer and teacher relationships. Students entering ninth grade are often concerned that they will not be part of the in-group or even make friends at all. They also worry about getting along with teachers.

Neild (2009) proposes a combination of four factors for why ninth graders “get off track.” The first posits that ninth grade coincides with life-course changes that are independent of the structure or academic requirements of schooling itself. For example, adolescents wish to be more autonomous during this time which leads to greater peer

influence which further leads to an increase in risky behavior. A second explanation links ninth grade problems to the transition to a new school where social bonds with teachers and classmates are broken. In high school, students must negotiate social relationships and adapt to the new routines and practices of a new school. A third explanation could be an inadequate preparation for high school. Neild proposes that often students in middle school have learned how to “get by” in the earlier grades. Now those students are required to possess advanced high order thinking skills, and they are no longer able to compensate for weak skills.

The fourth explanation for why ninth graders get off track could be the organization of the high school itself. Beginning in the 1990’s researchers began to analyze data from a large national study of high schools (NELS, 1988) looking for organizational features that were linked to academic achievement. Statistical analysis of the NELS data suggested that students attending high schools that were “communally organized,” where there was shared responsibility and decision making among staff, a commitment to a personal set of goals and an emphasis on personal relationships between teachers and students, saw greater academic gains than their peers at a “bureaucratically” organized school where decisions were hierarchical and roles highly differentiated. Yet, most high schools are structured in a way where communal organization is deemphasized. The departmentalizing of students who have seven classes with seven different teachers for forty five minutes each make it difficult for teachers to track student progress.

Transition for Students with Disabilities

Although the middle to high school transition poses a challenge for all students, it has varying effects depending on their levels of academic preparation for high school, emotional stability, ability to adapt, and the programs that their middle schools provide to ease this transition (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). J.B. Smith (1997) suggested that full transition programs that involve complete support have the greatest positive effect on high school retention and experiences.

There have been many investigations of early adolescents' school transitions. But, these have primarily focused on general education students rather than students with disabilities (Arawosafe & Irvin, 1992; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Odegaard & Heath, 1992). The academic curriculum continues to increase in difficulty, and students are changing in dramatic ways— physically, socially, and emotionally. While early adolescents experience these changes as part of typical development, students with mild disabilities frequently struggle more and longer with skill development and adjustment than do students without disabilities (Masters, Mori, & Mori, 1999).

Knesting et al. (2008) investigated transition difficulties among middle school students with disabilities. The students with disabilities in this study took an extended length of time to master activities their non-classified counterparts managed with ease. Activities such as remembering different teachers' rules and the organization of school materials proved to be troublesome. The findings suggest that students with mild disabilities may need support and guidance for longer periods of time than their typical developing peers.

Self Determination Defined

Allowing students in early adolescence the opportunities to make choices in their day is consistent with what is known about early adolescence being a time of increasing independence (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Choice-making can be empowering for individuals with disabilities when they are allowed to be active participants and informed decision-makers (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003). Developing students' choice-making and self-determination skills could be an aspect of early transition planning and students' individual educational programs (Grigal et al., 2003).

There are many definitions of self-determination in the literature. The most comprehensive definition is provided by Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998). They define self-determination as a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated and autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society.

Along with many definitions, there are many models of self-determination as well. Field and Hoffman (1994) developed one of these models. Their model was the result of a 3-year process that included the following steps: (a) review the literature, (b) conduct interviews, (c) observe, (d) consider internal expertise, and (e) consider external expertise. This model development process included more than 1,500 observations and more than 200 interviews with individuals with and without disabilities. A national panel

of parents, students and teachers reviewed and provided insight on this model and its development.

This model is based on a definition of self-determination as “one’s ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing yourself” (Field & Hoffman, 1994). The model states that self-determination is promoted or inhibited by factors within the individual’s control (e.g., knowledge, values, and skills) and also by environmental variables that are sometimes not in an individual’s control (e.g., opportunities for making choices, and support of significant others). This model recognizes the importance of environmental factors but focuses its attention primarily on factors within the individual’s control. This model has five major components: (a) know yourself, (b) value yourself, (c) plan, (d) act, and (e) experience outcomes and learn. The first two components, know yourself and value yourself, describe the internal development that provides a foundation for self-determination. The final three components describe specific skills that constitute the action stage of this model. Both processes are necessary for an individual to be self-determined. Both stages are without meaning, or incomplete without the other.

Another model of self-determination, “The Adaptability Instruction Model,” was designed to teach students with disabilities adaptability skills for use during school to work transitions. This model includes four parts: (a) decision making to identify interest, abilities, and needs and to set goals based on available alternatives; (b) independent performance based on action plans and follow through using self-monitoring strategies; (c) self-evaluation to monitor and compare their performance outcomes against

performance expectations; and (d) adjustments to review previous performance outcomes and to set goals and plans accordingly (Mithaug, Martin, & Agran, 1987).

Studies conducted since the development of this model added self-determination as a separate component. The reason for this change was to take into account the possibility that adapting to existing circumstances might not lead to goal attainment. By individuals taking action and adjusting the goal or plan, goal attainment should improve. The result was The Self- Determined Learning Model of Instruction. The Self- Determined Learning Model of Instruction expands on the previous model by recognizing the importance of self-directed learning of new experiences. Students are taught to set their own goals, to plan how they will achieve these goals, self-evaluate and adjust these goals as necessary.

Specific components of self-determination have been thoroughly addressed in the literature. J. E. Martin and Marshall (1996) conducted interviews, a comprehensive literature review, and a national survey to derive seven self-determination constructs. These include: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-advocacy, (c) self-efficacy, (d) decision making, (e) independent performance, (f) self evaluation, and (g) adjustment. Additionally, Wehmeyer et al. (1998) described component skills necessary for self-determined behavior. These include: (a) choice making; (b) decision making; (c) problem solving; (d) goal setting and attainment; (e) independence, risk taking, and safety skills;(f) self observation, evaluation, and reinforcement skills; (g) self-instruction; (h) self-advocacy and leadership skills; (i) internal locus of control; (j) positive attributes of efficacy and outcome expectancy; (k) self-awareness; and (l) self- knowledge. A common theme that is noticeable when comparing all components of self- determination involves

thinking, doing, and adjusting. These commonalities provide the framework for developing, implementing, and adjusting specific goals. Not every skill or component will be applicable for each student all the time. However, through these three core components, the effectiveness of specific strategies and outcomes of those strategies can be thoroughly addressed.

Another model developed by Wolman et al. (1994) which will be the basis for this dissertation broke down the self-determination process into three components: Thinking, Doing, and Adjusting. Each component has two steps. People who are self-determined know and can express their own needs, interests, and abilities. They have the ability to set appropriate expectations and goals for themselves. A self-determined person makes choices and plans in pursuit of their goals. If necessary, they follow through with actions and make adjustments, to achieve their desired goals effectively (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Self-determination components

<u>Self-Determination Components</u>	<u>Steps</u>
Thinking	Identify and express own needs, interests, and abilities Set expectations and goals to meet these needs and interests
Doing	Make choices and plans to meet goals and expectations Take actions to complete plans
Adjusting	Evaluate the results of actions Alter plans and actions, if necessary, to meet goals more effectively

Wolman et al.'s model is based on Mithaug, Mithaug, et al.'s (2003) Self Determined Learning Theory and focuses on the process by which students become self-determined learners. Specifically, this theory attempts to explain how individuals “interact with opportunities to improve their prospects of getting what they want and need in life” (Wolman et al., 1994). When opportunities are just right challenges, meaning that they offer close to optimal opportunities for experiencing gain (Mithaug et al., 2003), they are pursued. In pursuing these opportunities, people learn to adjust and regulate their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Thus the theory posits that self-determination depends on students' capacities and opportunities.

Self Determination as a Function of Identity Development

Forming an integrated and personalized sense of identity is a pivotal developmental task in adolescents and emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Forming a

sense of identity can be especially challenging for people today. A better developed identity structure allows individuals to be more aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses which facilitate psychosocial well-being. According to Erik Erikson, development functions by the epigenetic principle. This principle says that we develop through a predetermined unfolding of our personalities in eight stages. Our progress through each stage is in part determined by our success, or lack of success, in all the previous stages. This theory has implications for education.

The fifth stage in Erikson's theory addresses adolescents. The task during adolescence is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. Ego identity means knowing who you are and how you fit in to the rest of society. It requires that you take all you've learned about life and yourself and mold it into a unified self-image, one that your community finds meaningful. There are a number of factors that determine the ease in which ego identity develops. First, we should have a mainstream adult culture that is worthy of the adolescent's respect, one with good adult role models and open lines of communication.

Further, society should provide clear rites of passage, certain accomplishments and rituals that help to distinguish the adult from the child. Without these supports, we are likely to see role confusion, meaning an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world. When an adolescent is confronted by role confusion, Erikson would say he or she is suffering from an identity crisis. In fact, a common question adolescents in our society ask is a straightforward question of identity: "Who am I?" In relation to transition, knowing one's own strengths, weaknesses, desires and short or long term goals can influence the degree to which a student demonstrates self-determination skills.

In adolescence, identity continues to form around competencies and the career or profession that might naturally emerge from school activities or extracurricular pursuits. Adolescents also begin to adopt role identities as romantic partners and friends (Laguardia, 2009). Parents and teachers play a pivotal role in the nurturance of these identities, especially at important developmental crossroads such as the transition from one school to another (Laguardia, 2009). How well people negotiate tasks that surround identity development has a direct and deep impact on their sense of worth and personal well-being.

Marcia (1966) elaborated on Erik Erikson's previous work on the central processes that underlie identity development to include exploration and commitment as key factors to identity formation. Identity achievement is evidenced when both substantial exploration has been undertaken and a commitment has been made. The empirical work that has followed from this framework has focused on two themes: 1) understanding the mechanisms that underlie exploration and commitment processes, 2) understanding the consequences of identity status for personal well-being (Laguardia, 2009). Relating to academics, Marcia's theoretical framework has been linked to students' abilities to find purpose and direction with regard to academic goals (e.g. educational involvement, career planning and commitment).

Berzonsky et al. (1994) models different social-cognitive styles and relates these styles to the levels of exploration and commitment adolescents face when confronted with identity development. There are three styles, and each represents a different level of exploration and commitment: informational style, diffuse-avoidant style, and normative style. A child with a normative style follows the expectations and prescriptions of others

which marks a rigidity for exploring new information (Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). A child with an informational style openly seeks out and evaluates self-relevant information and bases his or her commitments on such constructions. A child with a diffuse-avoidant style actively evades considering information that challenges identity relevant decisions. These children are ultimately coerced by situational demands and never really explore or commit to an identity (Erikson, 1968). These styles have also been linked to students' expectations for academic success and performance (Boyd et al. 2003). Optimal outcomes for identity require exploration that is active, open and ultimately constructed from social experience.

Self Determination Theory combines the work of all three major contributors to identity development in children: Erikson, Berzonsky and Marcia. Specifically, SDT employs the concept of basic psychological needs to understand innate tendencies for the pursuit of intrinsic potential and examines how support for these needs within the social context influences the motivation for important extrinsic identity activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT suggests there are three basic psychological needs---autonomy, competence and relatedness---that are the essential constituents for psychological development (including identity development). Identities are adopted according to these three intrinsic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In an environment where a child's motivation for success is usually extrinsic (use of grades, rewards, privileges) there is a great need for support for intrinsic motivation underlying identity.

Parents and teachers alike can play an important role in encouraging proactive identity processes through autonomy, supportive teaching and parenting practices as well as the provision of structure so that children become steadily more aware of and start to

behave according to self-initiated and authentic goals and values which in turn promotes self-endorsed commitments (Grolnick, 2003). Teachers' negative responses to adolescents' role experimentation can either aid or interfere with the development of their basic psychological needs- and consequently, the process of identity formation (Luyckx & Vansteenkiste, 2009). Emphasis on the importance of this process is often clouded by policies which emphasize only academic success.

Self Determination and IEP Involvement

As noted previously, school and home environments may either foster or inhibit students' self determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires schools to ensure that students with disabilities access the same rigorous curriculum as their peers without disabilities. In essence, the development of self-determination skills (specifically advocacy) for students with disabilities could relate directly to their ability to meet rigorous curricular standards.

Much research suggests that many adolescents with disabilities lack the knowledge, skills and beliefs that could enhance their self-determination (Cameto et al., 2001; Houchins, 2002; Zhang, 2001). A study by Carter, Lane and Pierson (2008) explored the promotion of self- determination among transition students with disabilities. They found that both general education and special education teachers attached the highest level of importance to teaching three major self determination skills: problem solving, self management and decision making. Only special education teachers found the area of self-advocacy to be the most important. Supplemental instructional contexts for developing students' capacities for self-advocacy and self-awareness could include educational planning (Martin et al., 2006).

Self-determination has been identified as an important issue in transition planning and service delivery involving adolescents with disabilities (Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999). The Individualized Education Program conference is a required annual event and provides an opportunity for a concentrated, annual focus on and measurement of discrete self-determination skills. The skills that can be enhanced through student involvement in their IEP meetings and relate directly to the IEP components, including: describing one's own disability, strengths, needs, legal rights, and present levels of performance; evaluating one's own progress; preparing to advocate for oneself in a formal setting; communicating one's own preferences and interests; and determining one's accommodations (Test, Mason, Hughes & Conrad, 2004). Increasing students' involvement in their own IEP meetings provides a target for enhancing skills that may generalize to post secondary environments. Increasing one's self-advocacy skills could be critical to enhancing quality of life as well as self-confidence (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Research suggests that students' lack of involvement in their own IEP meetings can be problematic.

First, there have been many studies to show that only 40-64% of transition age youth participate in their IEP meetings (Getzel & Kregel, 1994; Grigal et al, 1997; Trach & Sheldon, 2001). Research also shows that students are unprepared to represent themselves, and teachers are unsure how to prepare their students for IEP meetings (Agran et al. 1999). However, students who maximize opportunities to practice self-determination skills have a better understanding of themselves in relation to their disability. For example, Mason et al. (2002) taught 43 students, most of whom had learning disabilities, the skills to be more active in their transition planning. After

training, the students reported they understood the IEP process better, they were more aware of their disabilities and needed accommodations, and they learned how they could be better prepared for future meetings. Ben, Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) reported higher graduation rates for students involved in their IEP development. These studies suggest that improved educational and transition outcomes for adolescents with disabilities are positively associated with active IEP involvement and self-determination activities.

Despite the positive outcomes related to student involvement in the IEP process, data suggest that the majority of students are not being taught how to set their own goals (Agran, Snow and Swaner, 1999). Also, Agran (1999) reported that of a sample of teachers who served students with cognitive and developmental disabilities, 55% indicated that skills related to self-determination were not included in their student's IEPs, and 59% indicated they spent little or no time discussing any issue related to self-determination.

The question, "What can we do to increase student involvement in their IEPs?" remains. Test et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of sixteen articles addressing how self-determination is taught. Their findings indicate that both the use of published curricula to teach students skills to enhance their participation prior to IEP meetings and the use of person-centered planning are effective in increasing students' involvement in their IEP meetings. This was substantiated through direct observation, scores on measures of self-determination, and/or feedback from teachers, parents and participants. In addition, facilitators increased student involvement in IEP meetings by having questions directed to them and by avoiding jargon. Therefore, this suggests direct

instruction prior to a meeting, as well as modifying the role played by the facilitator during the meeting, could greatly increase a student's self-determination during IEP meetings. Martin et al. (2006) argues that without specific IEP meeting instruction, students attending their meetings do not know what to do, do not understand the purpose of what is said, and feel as if none of the adult participants listen to them when they talk.

Summary of Literature Review

For the next four years of high school, ninth graders with disabilities have a challenging road ahead. The transition to high school, combined with the difficulties faced among students with disabilities and typical issues surrounding identity development, could result in academic and/or emotional failure if not addressed in combination. According to the research previously mentioned, typical middle to high school transition programs do not address specific difficulties students with disabilities may encounter at a greater rate than their typical peers. As a result, students with disabilities do not use self-determination skills when developing their Individualized Education Program. Often times, students with disabilities are also unsure how their disability relates to their developing identity. As a result, students with disabilities do not know how to use self-determination skills in the classroom.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Overview of Program Planning Framework

Maher's (2000) program planning and evaluation framework was designed to be applied to human services programs. Program relevant information is used for deciding how to place a program in operation so that goals can be attained and needs met. The program planning and evaluation process includes gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information so that value judgments can be made in regard to the merit of a program. The framework includes four different phases: Clarification, Design, Implementation and Program Evaluation. For the purpose of this dissertation, only the first two phases were used.

Clarification Phase

The Clarification phase is the first of the four major phases of the program planning and evaluation process. Its purpose is to clarify the current situation that is of concern to the client and perhaps other stakeholders. It is realized through a series of sequential, interrelated activities through which a program consultant gathers, analyzes and interprets information. Without clear understanding of a present situation that is of concern to a client and relevant to stakeholders, it is indeed impossible to plan a program that adds value to an individual, group, or organization. When the Clarification phase is implemented the result allows a sound understanding and agreement about a target population being served, needs of the target population that may be addressed by means

of a program, and relevant context within which those needs are embedded (Maher, 2000).

There are three major activities that make up the Clarification Phase: specifying the target population, determining the needs of the target population, and the delineation of the relevant context. These three activities are sequential in that one must follow the other. Also, the information from one activity is used to generate information in another and so forth. Finally, the changes in one activity might require a restructuring of another.

The first activity in the Clarification phase is the specification of the target population. A target population is the individual, group or organization to who progress can be designed and implemented. Certain factors need to be considered when choosing a target population, such as demographic, social-community, educational, psychological and physical characteristics, how the target population will be segmented and the size of the target population. Methods that can be used to determine the aforementioned target population include an interview, permanent product review or questionnaire.

The next task in the Clarification Phase is to determine the needs of the target population that the program design will address. A need is defined as a discrepancy between the current state of affairs having to do with psychological or educational functioning of the target population and a desired state of affairs. Based on the gathering, analyzing, and interpreting of information, evaluative judgments about the nature, scope and extent of needs of the target population can be made. This is called a needs assessment. According to Maher (2000) there are four qualities of a sound needs assessment; practicality, utility, propriety and technical defensibility.

The first quality, practicality means that the implementation of a needs assessment must not interrupt the organization routine. The second quality, utility, states that the needs assessment must obtain useful information relevant to psychological and educational domains.

The third quality, propriety, refers to the needs assessment adhering to all rules, laws and policies relevant to the organization. The fourth quality, technical defensibility, speaks of the needs assessment to include justifiable, valid and useful information for the intended purposes. These principles were designed to ensure sound, evaluative judgments can be made.

The final task in the Clarification phase is to determine the relevant context within which the target population functions. Relevant context refers to those factors in the environment of the target population that provide meaning to the target population and their needs and that provide direction for further program planning activities.

Understanding the relevant context helps those involved in the process to have a clear picture of the readiness and ability of the target population to take part in the process. The major framework Maher uses to delineate the relevant context is known as AVICTORY. Each letter represents a different aspect of the context. The factors are:

1. Ability of the organization to commit resources to design and implement a human services program for the target population.
2. Values that people within the organization and other stakeholders ascribe to the target population and its needs, as well as potential programs.
3. Ideas that people have about the current situation with respect to the target population and their needs.

4. Circumstances within the organization that relate to its structure and direction.
5. Timing of the human services program and its appropriateness.
6. Obligation of the organization to assist in addressing the needs of the target population programmatically.
7. Resistance that might be encountered by individuals or groups in relation to the program planning process.
8. Yield that may result for the target population as a result of the programmatic efforts.

Design Phase

The purpose of the Design Phase is to document the program in terms of program design elements based on evaluative information from the Clarification phase. Through Design phase activities the following elements are addressed: a) purpose, goals and indicators; b) program components, phases and activities; c) personnel; d) development and implementation schedule; e) budget; and f) program evaluation plan. As with the Clarification phase, these activities are sequential. The purpose of the program design should address four main questions:

1. What are the goals of the program?
2. Who is to receive the program?
3. How will they be provided with the program?
4. What value is expected from participation in the program?

The program goals should reflect the outcomes that will ensue for members of the target population due to their participation in the program. These goals should be derived from the needs of the target population and linked to anticipated knowledge, skills, and

abilities of the target population following participation in the program. The program goals should be SMART, meaning that they are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-framed.

Next, program design alternatives should be considered for the purpose of the program being customized to meet the specific needs of the target population and to the purpose and goals of the program. The client should not feel “locked-in” to any non-customized alternative. After considering alternatives, the details of the program design elements should be clarified to ensure valuable outcomes. The program design includes the following specific 12 elements: program purpose and SMART goals; eligibility standards and criteria; policies and procedures; methods and techniques; materials; equipment; facilities; components, phases and activities; budget; personnel; incentives; and program evaluation plan.

Background Information on the Setting

Client

The client is the Supervisor of Special Education in the Weehawken School District. He had been working in the district for just one year when the district underwent a district performance review through the Department of Education’s Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC). Additionally, the Special Services department underwent a separate monitoring process through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) which is responsible for ensuring the district’s compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The results from both the QSAC and OSEP processes were favorable. However, the client, along with the Child Study Team and other school personnel, were found to be

lacking in the area of transition. Although the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides information regarding post-secondary activities, the school district was found to not provide school based activities to address post-secondary transition. The client and high school principal met to discuss ways of addressing transition at two critical transition points: middle school to high school and high school to post secondary. The client met with the Child Study Team and various administrators in the Fall of 2009 on a weekly basis to discuss ways to incorporate transition activities into the lives of classified students who meet the IDEA requirements for transition services. This team expressed interest in developing a program designed to meet the needs of fourteen year old classified students where transition activities are required to be introduced. The client has the authority to approve the design, implementation, and evaluation of such a program, and he has obtained verbal approval and support for this project from the principal and the superintendent.

Organization

The organization for this project is Weehawken High School which serves students from grades seven to twelve in the Weehawken School District in Weehawken, New Jersey. The middle school is housed in the same building as the high school. However, block scheduling, separate teaching staff and physical barriers exist for middle school students which are comprised of students in grades seven and eight. Specific information about the school is as follows:

- There are approximately 515 students in the school (grades 7-12). The largest enrollment is in grade nine with 113 students.
- There are approximately 46 full time teachers on staff.

- The student-to-teacher ratio is 11:1.
- 73.5 percent of the student population is Hispanic. Caucasians comprise 21 percent of the population with the remaining population comprised of Black/African American, Asian and Multiracial students.
- 15% of the students are classified (n=89) as requiring special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These students are provided with an Individualized Education Program.

The large enrollment size for ninth grade students is mainly due to the high retention rate in that grade. In the school year 2009-2010, there were approximately 11 grade-nine retentions. This means that roughly ten percent of all ninth graders did not meet core curriculum standards to warrant promotion to tenth grade.

For the general population at Weehawken High School, eighth grade to ninth grade specific transition activities take the form of parent open houses where parents and students learn about the differing procedures and policies of the high school. Self-determination is portrayed as a necessary component of success in high school in these meetings. However, specific skills for promoting self-determination are typically not addressed in the general open house sessions. For students requiring special education and related services provided through an IEP, the development of self-determination skills is addressed through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) document specifying goals and objectives. The proposed program called “Take Action” provides a measurable way of meeting the self-determination goals of ninth grade students with disabilities, as will be described in detail below.

Target Population Description

To delineate the target population, I interviewed both the school principal (relevant stakeholder) and the client to determine which population could benefit from a program to address middle to high school transition. It was determined that both the general population and special education population could benefit greatly from a program addressing self-determination in the transition to high school. However, students with disabilities have additional pressures in their transition to high school that students among the general population do not have. Specifically, self-determination skills among students with disabilities require the knowledge of one's own goals as set forth by an IEP and the nature of one's disability as it affects academic and social performance. The population of ninth grade students with disabilities was selected to form a target population with the following characteristics:

- Students are in ninth grade.
- Students are classified as requiring Special Education and/or Related Services.
- Students attend Weehawken High School.
- Students attend at least one class with typical peers in the general population.

There were twelve students who met the above criteria for the target population. This number was obtained from data indicating the number of eighth grade classified students. Two students' parents did not consent to their child participating in the needs assessment and one student moved out of district. Thus, there were a total of nine students who participated in the needs assessment portion of the program design.

Federal policies indicate that students with disabilities are to be increasingly integrated with typical peers. It is important to view the program as a stepping-stone to

the real world environment. If students with disabilities are able to effectively utilize self-determination skills in the general education classroom and develop a strong and clear personal identity, it is more likely they will apply these skills to a work environment where people of all ability levels and personal characteristics work together to obtain a common goal. Therefore, the general education environment is necessary to practice these skills.

Five students in the target population fall under the category “Specific Learning Disability,” one student is classified as “Other Health Impaired,” two fall under the category “Multiply Disabled,” and one student falls under the category “Cognitively Impaired- Mild.” I discussed with the client whether or not to include students from all fourteen categories of IDEA classifications. However, we determined that students who attend school in an out-of-district placement with more severe disabilities would require separate specialized programming to address their functional living skills during transition.

Needs Assessment Procedure

The needs assessment methods and procedures were designed to answer the three questions. The first one was, “To what extent do ninth grade students classified as eligible for special education and related services exhibit capacity and opportunity for self-determination?” To address this question, students and educators were administered the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Self-Determination Scale (AIR; Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994). The AIR is designed to measure the extent of self-determination in students eligible for special education. Students were asked to complete the student form (AIR-S, and one of their teacher’s was asked to

complete the educator form (AIR-E). Each form has two parts. One measures a student's capacity for self-determination and the other measures opportunities for self-determination in the student's environment.

In the Educator version (See Appendix A), Capacity is divided into three sections: Ability, Knowledge, and Perceptions. The Ability section measures the extent to which the student possesses the skills necessary for self-determination (e.g., "Student expresses own interests, needs and abilities."). The Knowledge section measures the extent to which the student understands self-determination and the behaviors necessary to achieve it (e.g., "Student knows how to change actions or plans to meet goals and satisfy needs and wants."). The Perceptions section measures attitudes and beliefs that contribute to self-determination, such as optimism or a willingness to take risks (e.g., "Student feels confident about being able to successfully complete his/her own plans."). In the Student version (Appendix B), the Knowledge section is omitted. So there are only two sections for Capacity: Ability and Perceptions.

The second part of the AIR, Opportunity, is divided into two sections. One section measures opportunity for self-determination at school and the other measures opportunity at home. Because the focus of this dissertation is on the school setting, only the Opportunity at School section was used. Questions in this section refer to the availability and access to a supportive school environment that promotes self-determination.

Each section has six items. Thus, the Educator version has a total of 30 items and the Student version has a total of 24 items. These forms were completed and collected between March 15th, 2011 and June 30th, 2011. Students and educators are asked to rate

their responses on a 5-point scale (Never, Almost Never, Sometimes, Almost Always, Always).

Previous research suggests that the AIR Self-Determination Scale has adequate reliability and construct validity. It was originally field tested in 72 schools and programs in San Jose, California, and New York City (Wolman et al., 1994). Educators including special education teachers, resource specialists, and regular education teachers assessed more than 450 students with and without disabilities. Reliability tests conducted on the AIR Self Determination Sale included an alternative item correlation for item consistency, a split half test for the internal consistency of the scale and a test-retest measure of stability of results over time. The field test instrument included duplicate question items for each of the six self-determination variables comprising a student's capacity for self-determination.

These include: (a) knowing and expressing ones needs, interests and abilities, (b) setting expectations and goals; (c) making choices and plans, (d) acting on plans, (e) evaluating the results of actions and (f) altering plans to meet goals more effectively. For the alternative-item test, scores on these duplicate items were correlated to yield an alternative item consistency. The results yielded correlations between .91 and .98. The split-half test for internal consistency compared the odd-numbered items of the scale with the even-numbered items and yielded a correlation of .95. The test-retest measure of consistency over a lapsed period of time separating the first and second administration of the scale yielded a correlation of .74.

The AIR-Self Determination Scale was intended to measure three constructs: capacity-opportunity, home-school and knowledge-ability-perception. The validity of the

scale was assessed by examining these relationships. A factor analysis of scores on the 30 items of the AIR yielded results that were consistent with the conceptual structure of the scale which includes the two major components; capacity (items 1-18) and opportunity (items 19-30) of which knowledge, abilities, perceptions and opportunities at home and school are all substructures. The results of the factor analysis explained indicated the presence of four factors that explained 74 percent of the variance in the scale. Capacity explained 42.4 percent of the variance. Factor two, home-school explained 17.2 percent of the variance. Factor three, the opportunity factor explained 10.3 percent of the variance. Factor four, knowledge-abilities-perception explained 4.1 percent of the variance.

Overall, the four factors explained most of the variance in the item scores. This means that the theorized constructs were reflected in the factor structure, and the items fit within the scales for each construct.

The AIR-S version of the questionnaire was completed during students' homeroom period in order to not disturb instruction. A suggestion was made to the homeroom teacher to read each question aloud for students who have reading difficulties. The AIR-E version of the questionnaire was completed by the students' homeroom teachers. This would be the best teacher reporter because it is the homeroom teachers who are able to comment on students' capacity and opportunity for self-determination skills in both structured (during the class period) and unstructured (the homeroom period) settings within the classroom.

The second needs assessment question was, "To what extent do ninth grade students classified as eligible for special education and related services recognize their

disability as part of their developing identity?” and the third question was, “To what extent do ninth grade students classified as eligible for special education and related services need to be aware of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) components designed to aid in their transition to high school?” To address these questions, students participated in an interview consisting of 11 questions. Five questions explored whether the students recognize their disability as part of their developing identity. They were:

1. Can you tell me what your disability is?
2. How does your disability affect your learning in and out of the classroom?
3. Have you learned strategies to help you? If so, what are they?
4. Tell me some of your strengths and weaknesses.
5. Do your feelings about your disability affect how you act?

The remaining questions explored whether the students were aware of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) components designed to aid in their transition to high school?” They were:

6. Do you know what an IEP is?
7. Do you go to your IEP meetings? If so, what do you talk about?
8. Have you read your IEP document?
9. Do you know what your IEP goals are?
10. Do you discuss your IEP goals with your parents and teachers?
11. Have you been taught to evaluate whether you have made progress in accomplishing your IEP goals?

As part of Self-Determination Theory, healthy identity development is the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence).

These needs will naturally develop as a result of having self-determination skills which is precisely what the program, Take Action will address. Interview questions were created in conjunction with the client and approved by the superintendent.

Each interview lasted between 17 and 26 minutes. Interview duration was dependent on interviewee's varying paces, depth of response and other questions which might have arisen during the interview process. Interviews were conducted and transcribed over a two-month period of time.

A qualitative approach for analyzing the data was used. Qualitative methods such as student interviews can provide a much richer description of human experiences. They give the examiner a chance to see the process behind student thought. The interviews were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Analysis began by coding the similarities in responses to each question across students. Each code was labeled a different category. Next, more diverse answers became more integrated into an existing category as new properties were discovered. Data collection variables or "categories" were specified as patterns in the answers to the interview questions.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

As of 3/2009, I successfully completed the Rutgers University Human Subjects Compliance Program. Additionally, I applied for and received full IRB. Informed consent to participate in the program were gathered from potential participants' parents or guardian. Student assent forms were gathered from participants themselves to request participation in the program.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Capacity and Opportunity for Self Determination

Table 2 presents data relating to the first needs assessment question, which was, “To what extent do ninth grade students classified as Eligible for Special Education and Related Services exhibit the capacity and opportunity for self-determined behavior?” Each student and educator rated their responses on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). In the Educator Form, the responses were added for each section of Capacity and Opportunity, producing a raw total score for each participant. The raw total score was divided by the maximum amount of points that could be earned. For example, if a student’s raw total score for Capacity was a 72, this number would be divided by the maximum points that could be earned (90), resulting in a score of 80 percent.

The Percentage scores for the Capacity and Opportunity dimensions for each student are reported for both student and educator ratings. The percentage scores for total self-determination (the average of percentage scores for Capacity and Opportunity) also are reported.

Table 2.

Percentage Score on Each Dimension of the AIR for Each Student as Rated by Students and Educators

<u>Students</u>	<u>Student Rating</u>			<u>Educator Rating</u>		
	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Opportunity</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Opportunity</u>	<u>Total</u>
A.S.	73.3	73.3	73.3	58.8	66.6	62.7
B.R.	95	80	87.5	52.2	76.6	64.4
E.M.	78.3	70	74.2	36.6	70	53.3
C.D.	45	60	52.5	35.5	93.3	57.8
N.W.	68.3	60	64.2	31.1	60	48.9
A.V.	91.6	96.6	94.1	37.7	93.3	64.4
K.D.	55	46.6	50.8	43.3	100	71.7
H.T.	70	76.6	73.3	85.5	100	92.8
B.P.	60	90	75	67.7	93.3	80.5

Using 70% of the Total AIR score as a rough cutoff to determine whether a student is self-determined, 6 out of 9 students perceived themselves to be self-determined. However, only 3 out of 9 teachers perceived their student to be self-determined. Also, with the exception of one student, educators consistently rated students' opportunity for self-determination to be much higher than the students' capacity for self-determination, while students consistently rated their opportunity for self-determination as being fairly equal to their capacity for self-determination. Additional results which could have an effect on the program's design include the large spread of scores. For instance, capacity scores based on the students' ratings varied between 45 and 91.6 percent. Capacity scores based on the educators' ratings ranged from 31.1 to 85.5 percent. Opportunity scores for student ratings ranged from 46.6 to 96.6 percent. Opportunity scores for educator ratings ranged from 60 to 100 percent.

Disability Awareness in Identity Development

Identity development is an extremely important part of self-determination in adolescents. As part of the self-determination process, participants need to not only know their basic strengths and weaknesses as they relate to their disability, but also how their disability impacts various parts of their development. To address the second needs assessment question, "To what extent do ninth grade students classified as Eligible for Special Education and Related Services recognize their disability as part of their developing identity?" participants were interviewed to determine the level at which they are aware of their disability and the impact it makes on their identity.

The first interview question asked participants, "What is your disability?" Participants were given credit for knowing what their disability was if they were able to

say the name of their specific disability or describe a defining characteristic of their disability. Participants were given partial credit or “P” if they recognized they had a disability without being able to describe its defining characteristic. Three out of nine participants were able to tell the investigator what their disability is, and five out of nine participants did not know at all what their disability is (See Table 3).

Table 3.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 1: What is Your Disability?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	Shrugged Shoulders	N	
2	Shook head “no”	N	
3	“I have ADHD which means that I get antsy and hyper.”	Y	
4	“As you know, I have ADHD, so when I’m in class, I can’t help but beat like a drum. That’s basically it. I go from calm to nuts in minutes. I also fall asleep in class sometimes and teachers say, “Wake up!”	Y	
5	“I don’t read as well as I should for my age”	Y	
6	“With math, I don’t get what he’s talking about. When he tells us to remember a formula or something it’s hard.”	N	Student has a Specific Learning Disability in Reading Comprehension and Oral Expression.
7	“Whenever I try to pay attention to something or remember something really hard it doesn’t stick in my head. It’s really annoying.”	N	Student has a Specific Learning Disability in Reading Comprehension and Oral Expression.
8	“No.”	N	
9	“Sometimes I talk too fast and sometimes I read too fast.”	P	Student is classified as “Multiply” Disabled.” He does have ADHD and a Communication Impairment.

The second interview question asked participants, “How does your disability affect your learning inside and outside of the classroom?” Participants met the criteria for this question if they were able to describe how a characteristic of their disability affects some aspect of their life. Five out of nine participants recognized that their disability affects functioning in some aspect of their life (either inside or outside of school). Two other participants were not able to recognize if their disability affects them either in school or outside of school. The remaining participants described how they are distracted inside and outside of school but they do not have a disability that would cause this problem.

Table 4.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 2: How does your disability affect your learning in/out of the classroom?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"I don't know."	N	Student has a Communication Impairment which affects the way she expresses her thoughts to others Shyness in school could be a reflection of this difficulty.
2	"In speech we talk about vocabulary and sentences. It's different outside of school. I am not so shy."	Y	
3	"I don't feel like I learn, because if the teacher is teaching and she writes something down, or if someone drops a book by mistake, I'll look up and completely not do what I am supposed to do. I would make faces or noises. Outside of school, my friends sometimes pick me to be on their team for basketball because they know I get hyper so I will run fast."	Y	
4	"I get distracted, that's about it. Outside of school it really doesn't affect me. I just don't get into so much trouble."	Y	Student does not have a diagnosed disability where distractibility is a symptom.
5	"When I read by myself I see a word and break it down into pieces. I read out loud sometimes but I am really quiet so I would go up to the teacher and read just me and her. Outside of school I sometimes have problems remembering people's names."	Y	
6	"In school I am shy so I don't get help when I need it. I get distracted. Also, when I am watching TV and my mom asks me to do something I won't answer her because I get distracted."	N	
7	"It affects me a little bit outside of school because when my mom tells me to do something, it's a little hard to follow directions and remember what they are saying. That's why I stick to the friends I've had for such a long time. They kind of understand me. In school I have to study more than normal in order to make it stick."	N	Student does not have a diagnosed disability where distractibility is a symptom.
8	Shrugs	N	
9	"I read and speak too fast in school. Outside of school I just speak too fast."	Y	

The third interview question asked participants, “Tell me some of your strengths and weaknesses.” Participants met the full criteria for this question if they were able to self-reflect on their own behavior patterns, personality traits and general abilities by describing at least one strength and one weakness. Partial credit was given to those participants who listed a strength or weakness, but not both. Additionally, answers that provided only one word such as “I am nice” were only given credit if the student was able to expand on the statement after prompting. Six out of nine participants did require some form of prompting to expand on their statements.

Six out of nine participants were able to describe their strengths and weaknesses. (“Strengths and weaknesses” were also defined for a few students as “Things I am good at” and “Things I need to work on”.) Most respondents were able to describe both strengths and weaknesses to varying degrees. Some respondents’ level of self-reflection seemed more advanced (Participants 3 and 4) as their responses also showed some level of critical thinking. Other respondents (1 and 9) showed a limited degree of self-reflection as they merely just answered the question with little to no exploration.

Table 5.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 3: Tell me some of your strengths and weaknesses.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	I am good at playing basketball and band and I am a good listener. I am not good at math. That's about it. Oh, I am also independent."	Y	
2	I am shy which could be good or bad. I don't like to be around too many people. But, I am happy when my friends are happy. In school, I am very good at math and solving equations."	Y	
3	"Oh, I kind of like being the center of attention. Not like always but when I feel I should be. I am kind of outgoing. I follow and I also lead at the same time. I listen to what other people have to say but I also put my opinion into it. I am pretty loud. I am good at History. I feel like I am doing very well because I know the material. Also in English, because I know how to write what I'm thinking but my attention span really isn't that high."	Y	
4	"Well, I am basically outgoing, a nice person to be around. I could be short tempered and lazy. But I am outgoing and a very loyal friend. When a friend needs something, they know they can pick up the phone and call. I am very good at History. I have a great memory for random things."	Y	
5	"I am fun. I make people laugh. I am shy. I am good at basketball, swimming and volleyball. Weaknesses are basically reading and trying to remember peoples' names. I can't do that all the time."	Y	
6	"I don't know. I'm not good at anything. I need to pay attention more."	P	Not able to describe any strengths.
7	"I am very friendly and weird. I am a very good drawer and cook. In school, I am good at Gym, Band and Science. Outside of having to study extra hard, I don't think I have any weaknesses."	P	
8	"I am good at football and I am a wide receiver. In school, I am good at Algebra. I am not very good at English, maybe because I don't like it too much."	Y	
9	"I am happy, funny and good at judging people."	P	

Two themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the participants' responses. These were: a) the difficulty students experienced with describing weaknesses as opposed to strengths, and b) black-and-white thinking. Many participants were very comfortable discussing their strengths. Strengths were described in terms of ability (athletic and academic) and personality traits. Some students (Participants 2, 3 and 4) were able to describe their strengths in more detail by providing examples (e.g., "I am a very loyal friend. When a friend needs something, they know they can pick up the phone and call"). However, describing weaknesses was difficult for virtually all students. For example, Participant 1 noted how he was not good at math; however he was unable to describe what about math he is not good at. If students were able to describe weaknesses, it was almost always after speaking of their strengths. Out of all the participants, Participant 6 was the only one who described a weakness without being able to describe a single strength.

Most students (Participants 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8) merely listed their strengths and weaknesses without discussing how they might interact with each other. At times, a participant's strengths and weakness did not have anything to do with each other. At the beginning stage of adolescent development, participants' developing cognitive skills should allow them to begin to make abstract generalizations about the self (Keating, 1990). For instance, Participant 1 merely listed her strengths and weaknesses. Then as if she remembered she left something out, she replied, "Oh, I am also independent." Only Participants 3 and 4 were able to discuss how their strengths and weaknesses interacted with each other. For example, Participant 3 said "I am kind of outgoing. I follow and I also lead at the same time. I listen to what other people have to say but I also put my

opinion into it. I'm pretty loud." This trend indicates that seven out of nine participants have not developed the ability to think abstractly regarding their identity development.

The fourth interview questions asked participants, "Have you learned strategies to help you? If so, what are they?" Participants were given full credit for this question if they recognized that they have been taught strategies to help them and mentioned how they use the strategies. Partial credit was given to those participants who mentioned strategies they were taught without explaining how they use the strategies. One out of nine participants received full credit for this question. Three out of nine participants received partial credit. Participant 4 was able to describe both a strategy he has learned ("...I will make a noise to bring myself back in.") and how he applies this strategy in the classroom ("I basically move my hands; that way I can focus enough to hear what the teacher is saying."). Two additional patterns emerged as participants' responses were examined. These were: a) desire for independence; and b) the varied roles of the persons who taught the strategies.

Table 6.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 4: Have you learned strategies to help you? If so, tell me how you use them.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"My teacher might call me up to tell me how I'm doing. Like my writing teacher, she told me I am getting better with my grammar and putting together sentences. When she says that that means I want to do even better."	N	
2	"No, not really."	N	
3	"No one has ever brought it up to me when I get distracted."	N	
4	"I have but I haven't really used them because I just just try to control my own behavior. Well when I'm looking out the window, I basically move my hands; that way I can at focus enough to hear what the teacher is saying. I can be in the class but be somewhere else at the same time. When I know I'm getting to far, I distract myself by making a certain noise to bring myself back in."	Y	
5	"Ms. R teachers [sic] me how to do my homework and study for tests. We also talk about non-reading stuff in reading class all the time."	P	
6	"No."	N	
7	"My mom told me to write things down and that really helped a lot. Back when I first had a problem, teachers told me strategies but I just blew it off. Now, just go to my friends."	P	
8	"No, but my coach help me be a good wide receiver."	N	Could not describe how coach helps.
9	"No, I just tell myself to slow down or I repeat things over to myself so I remember."	P	

Fewer than half the participants mentioned they learned strategies from another adult (parent, teacher, coach). Either participants were not able to tell the investigator that they had learned strategies at all or participants described self-taught strategies.

Participant 9 felt that he has not learned strategies to help him despite telling the interviewer he uses strategies he learned on his own. Participants 4 and 7 mentioned that they have been taught strategies by others but actively chose to assert their independence by using different strategies they have learned on their own. For example, Participant 7 explained, “My mom told me to write things down and that really helped a lot...Now, I just go to my friends.”

Out of the four participants who recognized they have been taught strategies, only participants 1 and 5 mentioned their teachers as the person who taught them these strategies. Participant 4 did not mention any one person specifically. Participant 7 mentioned her mother taught her to write on index cards as a way to remember. Participant 8 did not recognize that he had been taught strategies to help him. However, he mentioned his coach taught him to be a good wide receiver. This participant did not receive credit because he was unable to tell the interviewer what his coach did to help him be a good wide receiver.

From this information, it can be assumed that the role of the person teaching students strategies could include anyone with a vested interest in the success of that student. Participants mentioned teachers, a parent, a coach and even themselves as people who taught them strategies to help them be successful.

The fifth interview question asked participants, “How do your feelings about your disability affect how you act?” Participants were given full credit for this question if they

were able to: 1) tell the interviewer how they feel about having a disability; and 2) describe how this feeling affects how they act. Two out of nine participants were able to tell the interviewer how feelings about their disability affect the way they act. Participant 5 received partial credit because even though she told the interviewer how she feels about her disability, she was unable to describe how these feelings affect how she acts. Two additional patterns emerged as participants' responses were examined: a) negative feelings associated with having a disability; and b) friendship's role in participants' feelings about having a disability.

Table 7.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 5: How do your feelings about your disability affect how you act?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"I don't know. It doesn't really matter to me."	N	Student maintains that having a disability does not affect behavior but admits to being secretive about school.
2	"It doesn't affect me. I don't really like to talk about school with anyone; not even my friends."	N	
3	"When I feel like I should have concentrated and I get an assignment or a paper back and it shows I have a failing grade or it wasn't a grade I thought I should have gotten, I feel embarrassed. Also, when I'm conscious of my disability, I sometimes get real quiet."	Y	
4	"My friends and I crack jokes at each other about it. Like one time my friend asked me what I did, I said "guaranteed a lot less than you." Not bad jokes but they are kind of jealous I am in resource classes because, basically because they feel that someone knows I have a problem and they want to help me and sometimes they feel like there is no one to help them because those classes are bigger and there is more to do."	N	Spoke about how his friends felt his disability and not about how he felt. Participant was able to describe how he acted around his friends but not how his feelings affect the way he acts.
5	"The way I see it is that people do not know everything. So if I need help reading, then I need extra help and that's it."	N	Recognition that everyone needs help with something. But participant does not directly answer the question.
6	"I get embarrassed because my friends learned in 4th what I am learning now."	P	Not able to describe how her feelings affect how she acts.
7	"I feel uncomfortable about it sometimes but that's why I laugh." I make light of it. But that sometimes gets me in trouble in class with friends. But, in meetings I have to take it seriously because everybody else is serious. It make me feel worse."	Y	

Table 7 - continued

8	"I don't understand."	N
9	"I don't know. I have never thought about it before."	N

Five out of nine students mentioned either a negative feeling or action associated with their disability. Two students (participants 3 and 6) specifically mentioned being embarrassed they have a disability. Participant 7 mentioned laughing as a replacement behavior for feeling uncomfortable with her disability. Participant 2 is secretive about school as she mentioned she does not like to talk about school with anyone. Only participant 4 reported any positive feelings or actions regarding his disabilities. He described how his friends react to his disability ("... they are kind of jealous because they know someone knows I have a problem and they want to help me...") By saying this, participant 4 could be stating that he is grateful for the help he receives for his disability.

Four out of nine students mentioned their peers in some way when discussing feelings associated with their disability. Participants 4 and 7 seem to use humor with their friends to disguise their feelings about their disability. For example, participant 4 says, "My friends and I crack jokes at each other about it." Participant 2 does not like to talk about school with her friends. When prompted to explain this further, she shrugged her shoulders and would not elaborate. Participant 6 seems embarrassed by her disability because she compares her own ability level with that of her friends.

From this information, most participants associate negative feelings and actions related to their disability. For those participants who did relay feelings (negative or not) about their disability, they almost always mentioned how having a disability affects how

they act socially. The social repercussions of having a disability will be explored further in a later section.

Awareness of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Components

The sixth interview question asked participants, “Do you know what an Individualized Education Program is?” Participants would have been given credit for this question if they were able to tell the examiner that the Individualized Education Program is simply a plan designed to meet their specific learning needs. Participants would have been given partial credit if they alluded to an IEP component without mentioning the IEP’s individualistic nature. For example, a statement such as “An IEP reviews how I have done in my classes since the last meeting” hints at the Present Levels of Academic and Adaptive Functional Performance component. A statement such as this would have received partial credit. None of the participants was able to explain to the investigator the definition or purpose of the Individualized Education Program.

The seventh interview question asked participants, “Do you go to your IEP meetings? If so, what do you talk about?” Full credit was given if participants were able to: 1) attend their IEP meetings on at least one occasion; and 2) tell the investigator that the main purpose of what is discussed at an IEP meeting is to review progress from year to year. Partial credit was given to participants who attended their IEP meetings but did not describe the main purpose of an IEP meeting. Three out of nine participants attended at least one IEP meeting and were able to describe the main purpose of what is discussed at an IEP meeting. Some additional patterns began to emerge as participants’ responses were examined. These emerging factors include: a) general lack of knowledge of the IEP document; and b) the role of participants’ disability in IEP meetings.

Table 8.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 7: Do you go to your IEP meetings? If so, what do you talk about?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"Yes. We talk to me and my mom about how I'm doing in school and whether or not I am progressing or not progressing."	Y	
2	"I sometimes go. We talk about how I'm doing and how to help me next school year."	Y	
3	"I went to one. My case manager asked me how I was doing in class."	P	
4	"I'm not too sure. I thought it was to discuss my schedule for next year. That's basically it."	N	
5	"I was going to go this year but I forgot about it. I usually do go. We talk about my reading and ways to help it get better."	Y	
6	"Yes. We go over how I'm doing and we talk about my problem."	P	Although student attended meetings, she did not recognize that assessing progress was purpose of meeting.
7	"Didn't we just have that meeting? I know it has something to do with school but I can't remember."	N	
8	"No. I don't know what you're talking about."	N	
9	"Sometimes. We talk about my schedule for next year."	P	Although student attended meetings, she did not recognize that assessing progress was purpose of meeting.

While no participants were able to describe what the Individualized Education Program document is, seven out of nine participants acknowledged having an IEP meeting. Yet, only three participants were able to describe the main purpose of what is discussed at an IEP meeting. It can be inferred from this discrepancy that while the majority of students recognized the term “IEP meeting,” only a few understand how this meeting relates to the main purpose of the IEP document.

Only one participant specifically mentioned discussing progress at her Annual Review IEP meeting as it relates to her disability. Participant 5 said, “We talk about my reading and ways to help it get better.” Another student may have hinted at her disability or “problem” being factored in at IEP meetings, but she did not recognize progress from one year to another. Participant 6 said, “Yes. We go over how I’m doing and we talk about my problem.” Only one out of the three participants who received full credit for this question mentioned discussing progress specifically relating to her disability. Other participants who received full credit for this question spoke of general progress in school. It can be concluded that only one student understands the central purpose of the IEP meeting.

The eighth interview question asked participants, “Have you read your IEP?” Full credit was given if participants acknowledged ever reading their Individualized Education Program document. One participant received full credit for this question.

Table 9.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 8: Have you ever read your IEP?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"My mom has never shown me the paper. She just tells me when we have a meeting so I could go."	N	
2	"No."	N	
3	"No. My mom just explains that we got it in the mail."	N	
4	"No I don't. But, my dad does."	N	
5	"I saw it in the mail but I didn't read it."	N	
6	"No."	N	
7	"No, but that's my problem, too. When I try to think back, it's like I can't remember anything."	N	
8	"No."	N	
9	"Not all the time but I have before."	Y	

The ninth interview question asked participants, “Do you know what your IEP goals are?” Full credit would have been given if a participant was able to tell the investigator at least one goal stated in his or her current Individualized Education Program document. None of the nine participants received full credit for this question. Additional patterns began to emerge as participants’ responses were examined. These emerging factors are: a) participants’ emphasis on personal goals; and b) knowledge of what an “IEP goal” is.

Table 10.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 9: Do you know what your IEP goals are?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"Yes. One of my goals is to work harder."	N	
2	"No. But, I want to get good grades."	N	
3	"No. But, goals I have for myself are to become more mature so people can see me as more grown up than I am now."	N	
4	"One of my goals is to go to college and become a Marine. After I serve my time, I want to do something with art. My friends told me I would make an awesome tattoo artist."	N	
5	"What's an IEP goal? My goal is to get into a good to be a dentist."	N	
6	"No."	N	
7	"I think I did read that part of it but I forgot what it said."	N	
8	"I want a chance to play football in college."	N	
9	"I still don't know but I want to go to college."	N	

Seven out of nine participants spoke about their personal goals instead of goals listed in their Individualized Education Program. Of these seven participants, four spoke about their desire to attend college after high school. Participant 3 was the only student to tell the examiner about a non-academic personal goal he wants to achieve. He said, "...But goals I have for myself are to become more mature so people can see me as more grown up...". While this statement is very insightful, it does not receive full credit because it does not answer the question.

Only two students (Participants 5 and 7) made statements regarding their knowledge of their IEP goals rather than just answering the question with a "yes" or "no". Participant 5 acknowledged she did not know what an IEP goal was. She said, "What's an IEP goal? My goal is to get into a good college to become a dentist." Participant 7 acknowledged she might have read her IEP goals but was unable to recall a single goal. She said, "I think I read that part of it but I forgot what it said." Participants' responses to this question and previous questions suggest that students do not know what an "IEP goal" is.

The tenth interview question asked participants, "Do you discuss your IEP goals with your parents and teachers?" Full credit for this question would have been given if students said that they discuss IEP goals with their parents and teachers. Partial credit would have been given if participants said they discuss their IEP goals with either their parents or their teachers, but not both. None of the participants received credit for this question. It has already been established by responses to previous items that the participants as a whole do not know how IEP goals differ from personal goals. Since no

participants were able to tell the investigator a single goal listed in their IEP document, it was assumed that no participants would meet the criteria for full credit for this question.

The final interview question asked participants, “Have you been taught to evaluate whether you have made progress with your goals since your last IEP meeting?” Full credit would have been given if participants were able to tell the investigator that they have been taught to evaluate their own progress with either their personal goals or IEP specific goals. None of the participants received full credit for this question. One participant received partial credit for this question. Partial credit was given if a participant was able to tell the investigator that either a personal or IEP-specific goal is being evaluated by someone other than the student. Participant 1 recognized that her teacher evaluated her progress in class. However, she was unable to tell the investigator if she has been taught to evaluate her own progress.

It was the intention of the investigator to explore only whether students were taught to evaluate their own progress with their IEP-specific goals. However, it became evident that participants were unaware of their IEP- specific goals. Therefore, the evaluation of progress with personal goals was also included in the analysis of this question.

Table 11.

Participant Responses to Interview Question 11: Have you been taught to evaluate if you have made progress on your goals since your last IEP meeting?

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Criteria Met?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	"My teacher might call me up to tell me how I'm doing. Like my writing teacher, she told me I am getting better with my grammar. When she says that that means I want to do even better."	P	Participant describes how her teacher evaluates her progress rather than answering if she has been taught to evaluate her own progress.
2	"I don't know."	N	
3	"No."	N	
4	"Not really. I try to do my best. I just try to do what I can."	N	
5	"When I read by myself I see a word and break it into pieces. I read out loud sometimes but I am really quiet so I would go up to the teacher and read just me and her."	N	Student describes a strategy she uses that helps her Improve her reading rather than answering the question.
6	"No. I guess I've never thought about it. "	N	
7	"I've been taught strategies but I mostly ignore them and talk to my friends. If I really need help, I go to my dad."	N	
8	"I don't understand."	N	
9	"I don't know."	N	

Summary of Results

Data relating to the first needs assessment question suggests that students in general lack knowledge of self-determined behaviors, the ability to perform these behaviors consistently, and confidence in their knowledge and ability to perform these behaviors. Therefore, capacity for self-determined behaviors and the opportunity to perform these behaviors in school will be addressed programmatically.

Data relating to the second needs assessment question suggests that few if any students were able to describe their disability and how having a disability affects their learning in and outside of the classroom. Additionally, students were unable to tell the investigator of strategies they have learned to help them. Participants also were unable to describe how their feelings about their disability affect how they act. Thus, these areas of disability awareness also will be addressed programmatically.

Data relating to the third needs assessment question suggest that students were unaware of the purpose of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) document. Although students readily discussed their personal goals, they were unable to relate their disability to the IEP process, let alone describe their IEP specific goals and objectives. Therefore, these areas of IEP component awareness also will be addressed programmatically.

Context Assessment

Overview of AVICTORY Framework

As described previously, the AVICTORY framework for context assessment (Maher, 2000) was used in order to collect information about the organization and personnel in the school setting. The contextual variables being used in this context

assessment are as follows: ability to commit resources, values of the organization, ideas regarding the program, circumstances of the setting, timing of the program planning process, obligation of individuals in the setting, resistance of individuals to programmatic efforts, and the yield to participants.

The following information was based upon an interview with the client. This framework has implications for the readiness of the target population, the client, relevant stakeholders and the organization for design of a program that can address important needs. Within this framework, factors that may inhibit design and implementation may be specified and the readiness of the organization to engage in this program design can be judged.

Ability

The first step in determining the relevant context is to assess the ability of the organization to design and implement a program based on the target population. Understanding the level of and extent of resources the organization is able to commit allows the examiner to determine what type of program needs to be designed. Based on the results of the interview with the client there are many human resources that the client is able to provide during the design of this program. The School Psychologist will be designing this program with the consultation of the client. No technological resources for the design of this program are needed.

There are no financial costs to the design and implementation of this program. The only feasible cost would be the purchase of a curriculum guide to teach self-determination skills. As far as temporal resources, the program will be conducted over the course of nine sessions. There might be difficulty with arranging the student's

schedules so they do not miss instructional time. This might be a barrier for implementation. However, their schedules may be aligned as to incorporate program implementation during a student's elective period.

Values

The client is committed to addressing transition issues among students. In the Fall of 2009, he single handedly chose part time jobs for high school Juniors with disabilities commensurate with their IEP transition statements. This demonstrates a desire to prepare students with disabilities for the world outside of school. The school community as a whole aims to develop critical thinking skills among students for the purpose of empowering each student to reach maximum potential, develop life values that enhance social responsibility, and prepare them to accept the challenges of a changing society.

Once identified as an area of needs, the amount of in-school transition activities for students age 16 and older increased dramatically. The client introduced the Work-Experience Program with great success with the creation of detailed transition activities for each classified student over the age of sixteen. Guidance counselors are now an integral part of the post- secondary transition of students with disabilities along with their case managers and teachers. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation now works hand in hand with all school personnel. By creating the Work Experience Program, the client has increase collaboration with community leaders and developed what seems to be lifelong partnerships.

Ideas

At this stage, the client is pretty clear about what he is seeking in the design and implementation of this program. Although he is aware that no in school transition program exists for ninth grade students with disabilities, he is unsure about specific aspects of the program design that need to take place. The professional response from the Office of Special Education Programs was that our district was required to include more in-school transition activities. While the client did create the Work Experience Program for those students who are over sixteen, he desires a program to address those just entering high school.

Circumstances

It is likely that both the client and school principal who is the key administrator will remain in their position throughout the duration of program design and eventual implementation. However, the school principal has been associated with the school district in his current role for over thirty years and has reached retirement age. The mission of the organization and the strategic plan for addressing transition will remain unchanged over the next few years.

Due to the outstanding administrative support in the school district, it is unlikely the factor of turnover will be a problem during the duration of program design and implementation. The organization and the people within it have been stable in terms of administration, leadership and personnel.

Timing

Key administrators including the client, school principal and superintendent are allotting the time for this program to be designed. The timing is appropriate for design

and implementation based on the recommendations of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Within the program design, it may be more beneficial for the program to span the course of a student's entire freshman year. This would create more time for the development of self determination, identity and IEP knowledge skills. Due to time constraints, the program can only be implemented for half the school year. Whatever funding is necessary for the design and implementation of this program will be readily available for the examiner.

Obligation

Understanding about the obligation perceived by people involved or affected by the situation and program can help in making important decisions about the program. These decisions have to do with people benefitting from the information provided by the provisions of the program and how people can be active supporters of it. Administrators such as the Director of Curriculum, the client, the school principal and superintendent are all active supporters of the program. Teachers can also be active supporters of the program because this program is designed so they can eventually be the ones instructing the programs components. On the policy level, state law makers could also be active supporters of a program that provides a systematic look into high school transition.

On the other hand, parents might not support this program because it involves dissemination of confidential information. Some parents might feel like it is not the obligation of the school but of the parent to provide self-determination instruction to the target population. It is expected that parents who share this view will not give informed consent for their student to be a participant in this program. Also, certain

teachers might not support the program if the program takes away from crucial instruction time.

Resistance

This step is important to undertake to obtain understanding of people who may be resistant to the design and eventual implementation of the program. It is not expected that any administrators will be resistant to the program. However, members of the target population might be resistant. If the program is to be implemented during a student's elective period, this might take away from the reprieve of academic classes students feel that elective periods provide. Resistance among other staff might occur due to the timing of the program. However, there is expected to be no resistance over the policies, program goals, program methods, personnel or budget of the program.

Yield

This step is important to undertake in order to understand how a program is likely to add value to the target population, program implementers and the organization as a whole. This program will be designed to benefit the target population. Members of the target population will be at a great advantage if they exhibit self determined behavior through understanding the nature of their disability and participation and knowledge of the IEP process.

CHAPTER V

PROGRAM DESIGN

Purpose and Goals

All nine participants who participated in the needs assessment phase are eligible to join the program “Take Action” with parental consent. Participants are eligible if: a) they are in the ninth grade, b) students are classified as being eligible for special education and/or related services, c) students attend Weehawken High School, and d) students attend at least one class with typical peers in the general education setting. Over the course of 10 weekly, forty-two minute sessions, students will be exposed to information about self-determination as it relates to disability awareness and the Individualized Education Program. The program will be facilitated using a combination of direct instruction, solitary seat work and group activities where students can learn from each other. Additionally, the program will aim to enhance the transition process as it addresses the requirements for students aged 14 and older as set forth by the NJ Administrative Code on Special Education.

Program Goals

Goal 1: At the conclusion of the program, students will have the capacity for self-determination.

1. It is anticipated that at least 90% of educators will obtain a percentage score of at least 70% on the “Knowledge” section of the AIR-Educator Form. This goal will address the “Knowledge” component of students’ capacity for self-determination.

2. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will obtain a percentage score of at least 70% on the “Things I Do” section of the AIR-Student Form.

This goal will address the “Abilities” component of students’ capacity for self-determination.

3. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will obtain a percentage score of at least 70% on the “How I Feel” section of the AIR-Student Form.

This goal will address the “Perceptions” component of students’ capacity for self-determination.

Goal 2: At the conclusion of the program, students will have the opportunity for self determination.

1. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will obtain a percentage score of at least 70% on the “Opportunities at School” scale of the AIR-Student Form. This goal will address the “Opportunities at School” component of students’ opportunity for self- determination.

Goal 3: At the conclusion of the program, students will be aware of their disability as it relates to their identity development. Measurement of this goal will be based on answers given to certain questions from the student interviews.

1. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer correctly the question, “What is my disability?”
2. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer adequately the question, “What are my strengths and weaknesses?”

3. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer adequately the question, “What strategies have I learned to help me with my disability?”

Goal 4: At the conclusion of the program, students will be aware of the IEP components.

Measurement of this goal will be based on answers given to certain questions from the student interviews.

1. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer correctly the question, “What is an IEP?”
2. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer correctly the question, “What are my IEP specific goals?”
3. It is anticipated that at least 90% of students will be able to answer adequately the question, “How do I know how I am doing with mastering my IEP goals?”

Overview of Curriculum

Based on the findings of the needs assessment, the program instructor will utilize selected lessons of the Choice-Maker Self Determination curriculum (Martin et al., 1996), which is designed to teach students receiving special education services how to choose, express, and take action toward goals in all areas of their lives. To address program goals directly related to a student’s disability, the students also will be provided with instructor-made lessons. The first manual, “Choosing Education Goals,” instructs in the following components of self determination: Choice-Making, Decision Making, and Goal Attainment/Goal Setting. The first lesson, “Introduction and Subjects I Like”, introduces the meaning of goals and explores students’ general interest and abilities in

academic subjects. The aim of the second lesson, “Study Habits”, is for students to identify and evaluate their own personal, home and school study habits. The third lesson, “Choosing General and Educational Goals,” helps students learn the process for choosing goals by considering their own interests, skills and limits. The fourth lesson, “School and Community Resources”, has students explore school and community resources and services that could help them develop, change, and/or adjust their goals.

The second manual, “Choosing Personal Goals,” teaches students to set personal goals by considering their interests, skills and limits as part of their identity. The fourth lesson, “Personal Activities,” helps students identify their reasons for doing certain personal activities. The fifth and sixth lessons will be instructor-made. The fifth lesson will be designed to help students understand their disability as it relates to their identity development. The lesson will help students review their academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses and determine which disability category each student has been classified as based on the results of their findings. The sixth lesson will help students identify the strategies they have learned to help them deal with their disability. The lesson will review the roles of different people in school who have the ability to teach students strategies to help with their disability. This lesson will also help students identify instructional and behavioral strategies that might be helpful for specific disability categories.

The third manual, “Self-Directed IEP”, teaches students to participate in their own IEP meetings using skills taught in the first two manuals. This manual teaches students to generalize self-determination components to the Individualized Education Program to include such topics as: the Introduction and importance of the IEP, Instructing

IEP components, and the student's role in the development of the IEP. Some components may require adaptations for use with students functioning at supported levels. The aim of the seventh lesson, "Introduce Everyone" is to teach students how to participate in an IEP meeting by: stating its purpose, who attends the meeting, and why. Students will also have an opportunity to practice introducing the members of the IEP to each other. This will make the students aware of the different roles of IEP members. The eighth lesson, "Review Past Goals and Performance," will teach students to review their IEP goals and the actions they took to meet them. Students will also learn to say their IEP goals out loud. The ninth lesson, "Ask for Others' Feedback," will teach students to decide how they receive feedback on each of their IEP goals.

The tenth and last lesson will be instructor-made and will not follow any particular curriculum. The aim of the last lesson is to have students demonstrate with each other and the instructor what they have learned through role-plays. Students will conduct mock-IEP meetings where they will be able to practice the skills they have learned in the previous nine lessons.

Eligibility Standards and Criteria

A student is eligible to participate in the program if they meet the following standards and criteria:

1. They are a ninth grade student eligible for Special Education/Related Services at Weehawken High School.
2. They have written parent permission.
3. They agree to participate in 10 weekly sessions.

Policies and Procedures

Policies

Only students who meet eligibility criteria can participate in the program.

1. Students must sign and abide by the confidentiality agreement on the permission slip. Violations of the confidentiality agreement will be dealt with at the discretion of the instructor.
2. Student attendance is mandatory. Two unexcused missed sessions warrants immediate removal from the group.
3. Students will treat each other with respect and kindness. Single incidents of disrespectful behavior will be dealt with at the discretion of the instructor. More than one incident of disrespectful behavior by a single student warrants a conference with the student, instructor and guardian to discuss the behavior and to arrange appropriate reinforcement for the facilitation of positive behavior.

The policies for this program provide the client and instructor with specific facts about how the program should operate. Specifically, the policies outline how to deal with violations of group rules.

Procedures

1. The instructor will hold an information session for all students who are eligible to participate.
2. Students will be advised as to the policies listed above.

3. At the conclusion of the information session, each student will be presented with an introductory letter, permission slip and confidentiality agreement to bring home to discuss with their parents.
4. All paperwork will be collected one week from the date of the information session.
5. Each session will last for 42 minutes. The sessions will consist of a brief review of the previous week's lesson and assignment, followed by the outlined lesson plan, and will end with the distribution of homework.
6. The lesson plans should be followed sequentially as they move from one phase to the next and each new lesson builds upon the skills developed through previous lessons.

These procedures outline how the program should proceed from beginning to end. The procedures for obtaining consent, addressing confidentiality and general structure of the curriculum are outlined so any instructor will know how to begin the program.

Methods and Techniques

There are two main methods by which students will accomplish the goals of the program: direct instruction and small group discussion. Direct instruction is a method that is specifically designed to enhance academic learning time. Direct instruction does not assume that students will develop insights on their own. Instead, direct instruction takes learners through the steps of learning systematically, helping them see both the purpose and the result of each step. When an instructor explains exactly what students are expected to learn, and demonstrate the steps needed to accomplish a particular task, they are likely to use their time more effectively. The basic components of direct instruction

are: 1) setting clear goals for each lesson and making sure the students understand these goals; 2) presenting a sequence of well-organized assignments; 3) giving students clear, concise explanations and illustrations of the subject matter; 4) asking frequent questions to see if the students understand the work; 5) giving students frequent opportunities to practice what they have learned. Small group discussion will allow students to work together to arrive at conclusions about the lessons after they have been taught. The procedure for this task involves the instructor first introducing the task, breaking up the students into small groups, monitoring the small group discussion, providing feedback as necessary, reconvening the larger group and having a representative from each group sharing their group's ideas. Finally, the instructor will relate the students' ideas to the goal of the day's lesson.

Materials

In addition to the guided lessons themselves, there are some extra materials that will need to be included in order for the program to run at its optimal level. These materials include overhead projector with transparency markers, TV/VCR for Choosing Goals video, handouts, students personal folders.

1. Overhead projector with transparency markers - The projector with the accompanying transparencies and documents will be used to introduce lessons, write down students' thoughts and highlight key words in the lesson.
2. TV/VCR for Choosing Goals lesson - Students will be introduced to choosing personal goals early in the program. This is a 10-minute long video that introduces students to the process of choosing personal goals that are in line with their strengths and weaknesses.

3. Handouts - Each appropriate lesson includes a handout designed to elicit or distribute information to students. Each handout will pertain to the lesson being taught that day. The instructor will explain the objective of the lesson in the handout. It is expected that the students will be able to use the information on the handout to stimulate ideas about the topic at hand.

4. Student's folders - Each student will maintain a personal folder with all class handouts and documents. Since each lesson builds upon each other, this information should be kept in chronological order so students can refer to information in earlier lessons.

Equipment

There is no equipment needed for this program. All relevant tools needed is included in the Materials section.

Facilities

The facility needed for this program is one classroom. Chairs will be arranged at the instructor's discretion. Obtaining an available classroom will be the instructor's responsibility. The instructor is encouraged to choose a time of day to run the program when many classrooms would be available.

Personnel

Roles and Responsibilities

There are three major roles for this program. The first is that of the direct service provider, or instructor. The instructor implements the program as designed and follows the curriculum. The second role is that of the students in the program. The students are expected to arrive to each session on time with any materials they were

asked to bring. They are also expected to be active participants by engaging in the lesson. The third role is that of the Supervisor of Special Services who provides troubleshooting, support and gives suggestions to the instructor.

The responsibility of the instructor is to follow the program as designed. It is the job of the instructor to gather the necessary materials for the lesson, present the lesson topic and monitor the group. The instructor is also responsible for meeting with the Supervisor of Special Services on at least three occasions to review the topics that have been taught, discuss any concerns, and to share ideas if lessons need to be adjusted for any reason. The students are responsible for actively participating in lessons and completing assignments or activities.

Relationships

The instructor and Supervisor of Special Services will meet on at least three occasions to review the progress of the program. The main relationship will be between the instructor and students who will meet one time per week for ten weeks.

Incentives

While there are no monetary incentives for either the instructor or students, there are non-monetary incentives for both. First, the need for more intensive transition programming will decrease due to the increase in students' self-determination skills. All the areas of non-compliance cited in the 2010 monitoring by the Office of Special Education Programs will be addressed. These are incentives for both the instructor and the Supervisor of Special Services.

There are also non-monetary incentives for students. It is anticipated that students will increase their self-determination skills, become more aware of their

disability and learn about the IEP process. Hopefully, students will gain a sense of motivation to apply these new skills in both school and home environments. The students in the program will also be exposed to lessons that non-participants will not be exposed to. Therefore, these students could be viewed as “leaders” or “models” and help guide the process for non-participants.

Program Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions are designed to determine if the needs of the target population have been met. The questions are as follows:

1. To what extent have ninth grade students classified as Eligible for Special Education and Related Services learned to exhibit capacity and opportunity for self determined behavior?
2. To what extent have ninth grade students classified as Eligible for Special Education and Related Services learned to recognize their disability as part of their developing identity?
3. To what extent have ninth grade students classified as Eligible for Special Education and Related Services learned the Individualized Education Program (IEP) components designed aid in their transition to high school?

Data Collection Variables

The first data collection variable relates to the first evaluation question. The data collection variables for this question concern whether students are able to: 1) have the capacity to exhibit all components of self-determined behavior (thinking, doing,

adjusting), and 2) have the opportunity to exhibit all components of self-determined behavior (thinking, doing, adjusting).

The second data collection variable relates to the second evaluation question. The data collection variable for this question relates to whether students are able to incorporate awareness of their disability into their developing identity. The third data collection variable relates to the third evaluation question. The data collection variables for this question relate to whether students are able to: 1) describe what an IEP is, 2) state who is involved in an IEP meeting, and 3) review IEP goals and objectives (See Table 12).

Methods, Instruments, and Procedures for Data Collection

Data will be collected in two ways to determine the effectiveness of the program. The first method of data collection is in the form of a questionnaire. To determine each student's level of self-determination after the conclusion of the program, each student will be asked to fill out the AIR-Student Form. Additionally, the teachers who filled out the AIR-Educator form before the start of the program will fill out the same questionnaire at the program's end. The due date for submission of the questionnaires will be one month after the conclusion of the program to give students adequate time to practice the skills they have learned. Students will also be given a post program interview within one month of each student's Annual Review IEP meeting to determine if they have an improved understanding of how their disability relates to their identity development and the important components of their IEP. The following questions will be asked during the post-program interview:

- What is your disability?

- How does your disability affect your learning in/outside of the classroom?
- Tell me some of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Have you learned strategies to help you? If so, tell me how you use them.
- Do you know what an Individualized Education Program is?
- Do you go to your IEP meetings? If so, what do you talk about?
- Have you ever read your IEP?
- Do you know what your IEP goals are?
- Do you discuss your IEP goals with your parents and teachers?
- Have you been taught to evaluate if you have made progress on your IEP goals since your last IEP meeting?

Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis and Interpretation

It will be beneficial to determine whether teaching the program components had an impact on the students' self-determination behaviors -- specifically whether these behaviors have increased, decreased or remained the same. For the program to be considered successful, 90% of students must accomplish all the program goals. However, it will also be beneficial to measure individual achievement from pre- to post- program.

To determine whether students accomplished the first and second program goals, the percentage of pre- and post- program scores on each dimension of the AIR-Student and the AIR- Educator forms will be compared. If the student has achieved at least a 10 percent increase in their percentage score since before the program began, then that student has responded positively to the program. Additionally, an educator will conduct a post-program interview with the instructor to determine if students are applying

their self-determination skills to the classroom. This educator preferably will be the same person who completed the AIR Self-Determination Scale-Educator form.

To determine whether students accomplished the third and fourth goals of the program relating to disability awareness in identity development and the understanding of important IEP components, students will be given the same interview as was given pre-program. To measure individual student achievement, the determination of “credit given” for each individual question will be compared. If a student positively changed categories from either: no credit to partial credit, no credit to full credit or partial credit to full credit, then that student can be considered successful for that question. If a student receives full credit on at least 70% of the questions for “Disability Awareness in Identity Development” and “Awareness of IEP components”, then that student has responded positively to the program.

Communication of Evaluation results

The Supervisor of Special Education and the Superintendent will receive the program evaluation information in the form of a report. The report will include the goals of the program and whether or not they were met with success. For the first two goals, tables comparing the percentage of pre- and post- program scores on each dimension of Capacity and Opportunity in the AIR-Student and AIR-Educator forms will be presented. For the third and fourth goals, a table for each question will be presented. The table will list each individual student and the type of credit they received for that question in both pre- and post- program. After the results have been presented, the instructor will make a recommendation as to whether the program should continue in the district for a different group of ninth grade students.

Sustainability of the Program

In order for optimal functioning, the program and its core values should have the capacity to endure and be maintained. Within any given system there lie challenges to a program's sustainability. For this particular program that includes: changes in personnel, commitment to other job roles, availability of resources, and the timing of the program.

Changes in Personnel

It is very likely that any one or all of the stakeholders who had a role in the original development of the program's design will not be the same personnel to administer it. Therefore, the roles continue to need re-defining as each stakeholder (instructor, supervisor or superintendent) is replaced. Additionally, the values of future stakeholders will be different from the values of current stakeholders. For instance, the

original idea for Take Action derived from a requirement from a state monitoring procedure. For non-monitoring years, the district might place emphasis on other areas of special education.

There is not much that can be done about a change in personnel. However, the roles of who is involved in Take Action can remain the same. For instance, the three main stakeholders can permanently be: an instructor, supervisor and superintendent. To aid in the sustainability of the program, each stakeholder's job description can be modified to include participation in and training not only to implement Take Action, but training to work with the other stakeholders.

Obligations

At any given moment, Take Action might lose sustainability due to stakeholders' obligations to their main job role. This obligation might outweigh their commitment to Take Action because stakeholders gain monetary incentive from their main job role. There is no monetary incentive for stakeholders for participating in Take Action. Additionally, future students in the program might not be as committed to their role as the core curriculum standards might require more classes to develop academic rigor and fewer ways to address social and emotional development. Priorities in the school's value system might not match the priorities of the implementer of the program.

Levine et al. (2004) note that strong obligations to forms of practice stem from training, direct experience and the need to believe that what is done is right and good. They also suggest that changes requiring either a marked increase or decrease in work will elicit resistance. Therefore, the organization must support the stakeholders when implementing new skills associated with the implementation of the program. The

development of a tangible incentive for both students and personnel also might be a way to increase the obligation of students and stakeholders to the program. For instance, an instructor might be able to have an additional preparatory period in exchange for their participation. Additionally, students might be able to gain extra credit for academic classes based on their participation.

Availability of resources

From year to year, the school district votes on a budget that allows for monies to be allotted to the Special Education department for teacher salaries, curriculum and instruction, out- of-district placements, transportation, etc. From year to year, this amount changes. Although Take Action does not require much money to run, the cost of the curriculum materials might be taking away funding from another crucial area where that money could be better spent. Another sustainability issue which might arise is the availability of any of the environmental tools to run this program including but not limited to: a classroom, chairs, a TV/VCR and a working copy machine to run worksheets.

Because a large part of the school budget is determined by the Board of Education, it is important for the stakeholders in the program to address the board directly and request the appropriate funding. Only the stakeholders can explain how Take Action could improve self- determination skills in not only those specific students who participate, but to the rest of the student population who are secondary receivers of the information from the program (friends, classmates and siblings of participants). Take Action can eventually have a district-wide positive effect on any student's social and emotional development which in turn will increase academic performance. An evaluation

of the program should be completed one year after its first implementation. The purpose of the program evaluation is to assure that data is gathered and analyzed with respect to evaluation questions. The resulting evaluation information enables sound judgments to be made about the worth and value of the program thereby contributing to continuous program development and improvement (Maher, 2000). The evaluation information also could help with sustainability if it is shown to be effective and it is communicated to the board and other key individuals or groups in a compelling way.

Timing

Students participating in Take Action will differ from year to year in many ways. Although they will all be in the same grade, there is no predicting the exact needs each individual student and/or group might have toward reaching the goals of the program. Therefore the number of lessons, types of lessons, and the way they are administered will vary greatly.

The timing of the program needs to be flexible in order for it to be sustainable. This means that the instructor should determine the needs of the target population in the Spring before the program is to begin. This way, the program can begin promptly in September in order to give plenty of time for any adjustments to the program to take place.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to design a program to develop and enhance specific self-determination skills of the target population. I used Charles Maher's Program Planning Framework to ensure the program was developed for the exact needs of the target population. The results of the needs assessment suggest that students lack knowledge of self-determined behaviors, do not have the ability to perform these behaviors consistently, and have difficulty articulating how they feel about their knowledge and ability in performing these behaviors. Additionally, students were unaware of their disability and the major purpose and components of the IEP and the IEP process. It would be very difficult if not impossible for students to engage in self-determined behaviors unless they were first aware of the nature of their disabilities.

The program, Take Action, is a ten-week program that meets for forty-two minutes per session. The major purpose of the program is to create a general understanding in special needs children about the importance of being self-determined through the use of specific lessons from the Choice-Maker Self-Determination Curriculum (Martin et al. 1996) combined with instructor-made lessons. Further emphasis is placed on how the possession of self-determined behaviors and awareness could impact a participant's perception of his/her disability as it relates to: 1) identity development, and 2) the development of the Individualized Education Program. The

needs assessment results, along with the relevant literature on the topic of self-determination, informed the design of the program.

Why Self-Determination?

In developing the topic of my dissertation, I thought back to my own areas of difficulty when I entered high school. I was not classified as having a disability. However, I felt overwhelmed by having to juggle seven different classes, a school building larger than any school I had previously experienced, along with the high expectations of fitting in and being individualistic. At the same time, social cliques formed quickly. I had to decide which ones, if any, I wanted to join. As a school psychologist, I began noticing the same patterns of behavior in ninth grade students as I had seen in myself some fifteen years prior. When I came across the topic of self-determination in the literature, I quickly came to realize that while ninth grade students lacked self-determination skills, they were nevertheless expected to have them by the time they reached high school.

How Does Self Determination Relate to Disability Awareness?

A major part of adolescent development is the realization of the individual's own traits and characteristics. At the same time, ninth grade students want to cultivate friendships with others in a way they have not done so before. As adolescents discover new talents or abilities, as well as personality traits and academic strengths and weaknesses, they crave to find commonality with others. Therefore, it is not surprising that many social circles in high school are largely formed by the common traits found in individuals. It is not until we are further along in our development that we realize friendships can evolve from differences as well as from commonalities.

When interviewing the students for this dissertation, I discovered that many of the students never discuss their disability in their everyday interactions within their social circles. While almost all participants were able to give a general overview of their personalities, it was difficult for them to make the connection between a personality and disability trait. For example, a student who described his personality as “hyper” could not describe his disability (ADHD). In fact, many students were not able to describe their disabilities accurately to me. This made me wonder if students do not recognize their disabilities because they do not have an example to model. In other words, because many adolescent friendships are formed based on personality traits, it is easier for a young adolescent to assume that a friend’s trait is also his own. For example, a hyper student could act as a more concrete model than a student with ADHD who is also hyper. Disability is so individualistic that ninth graders do not yet have the developmental insight to recognize their own disability.

How Does Self-Determination Relate to the IEP process?

In my current role as a school psychologist, part of my job is to orchestrate IEP meetings. I notice that many ninth grade students do not know what the letters I.E.P. mean. They are usually unable to recognize me as their case manager or distinguish between the roles of their special education and general education teachers. When asked to discuss their goals, students often described a career goal that was unrealistic based on their difficulty (i.e. a student who reads on a second grade level wanting to be a lawyer). Students were very often intimidated by the prospect of speaking about themselves in front of a room full of adults and preferred to remain silent.

The heart of the IEP process for fourteen year olds is the development of a rough transition plan for post-secondary activities. My dissertation research led me to ask the question, “How can members of the IEP team expect ninth grade students to contribute effectively to this transition plan, if the students are not even aware of the goals specifically listed for them in their IEP?” The development of “Take Action” addresses this issue. Students are not only informed of IEP procedures, but also role-play how to have control over their IEP meeting so that they are active participants in the development of the IEP document’s vital components. Hopefully, with an understanding of how their disability manifests in academics and within their environment, students will be able to develop realistic transition plans as part of the IEP process.

Limitations

While there are many benefits to implementing the program as designed, it is not without limitations. One limitation of this program is the representativeness of the sample. While participants were a mix of diverse races, economic status and family background, there were only nine participants in total. With such a small sample size, it is difficult to determine how effective the program will be with larger, differing populations. Another limitation with the program design is that it is designed for implementation in one semi-urban school district in New Jersey. With such narrow parameters, there is no doubt that the design of this program will need to be adjusted as: 1) the demographics of the participants differ, and 2) more schools decide to implement this program.

A second limitation is that there is really no concrete way to conclude that a student is self-determined. While I chose a 70 percent cut-off score for the proficiency of

the capacity and opportunity for self-determination, this number is not based on any theory guiding this decision. With the additional resource of time, a thorough observation of the student would be conducted in varying environments to determine if and where students apply the information that Take Action has taught them. Additionally, an ideal comprehensive program would also include components taught by different instructors in varied environments as it is believed that self-determination should not be displayed just in the classroom, but in other environments such as the home or workplace.

A third probable limitation could be that Take Action could have a negative impact on a student's sense of self-worth if their disability becomes too much of a focus of the program. To label a student as "classified" might come with it the connotation that "something is wrong with me." The emphasis should be on disability in a broad sense in that a classification is a singular aspect of identity.

Lastly, this program has not yet been implemented or evaluated. Therefore, it has not yet been determined if the program is successful according to the parameters set forth in the program evaluation plan. Additionally, specific information about which aspects of the program require modification is not yet available.

Implications for School Psychology

This dissertation is relevant for school psychologists because the components of self-determination influence how adolescents develop their sense of self as they begin the fascinating journey through high school. The concept of self-determination suggests ways to help increase certain behaviors in children so they eventually become successful adults who practice these behaviors naturally in their everyday functioning.

School psychologists will also benefit from the knowledge of the program planning and evaluation framework used in this dissertation. The way in which the framework was used in this study can help school psychologists to design, implement and evaluate evidence-based interventions in the schools. This program will also help school psychologists become aware of the unique challenges students with disabilities face early in high school and how to make these challenges less daunting.

Future Directions

Future educators and researchers may choose to implement and/or evaluate this program. An evaluation plan is included as part of the program design. The evaluation plan follows Maher's (2001) program evaluation framework and includes procedures to evaluate the extent to which the program has met the needs of the target population. This information is useful for strengthening our understanding of what it means to be self-determined and how being self-determined impacts the transition process for ninth grade students with disabilities.

Researchers could additionally conduct a small scale follow-up study in which past participants are assessed and interviewed during their senior year of high school to determine if the principles taught in Take Action helped them tackle challenges through their later high school years. Future researchers might also be interested in eventually conducting a longer-term follow-up study. This study could focus on the long-term effects of the program by interviewing previous participants who are now post-secondary graduates participating in the work force. By conducting this follow-up study, researchers will be able to further explore just how necessary and applicable self-determination skills are to "real world" situations such as a job interview.

Summary and Conclusion

The long transition from young adolescent to independent, self-sufficient adult is filled with contradictions. Many young adolescents struggle to find their true identity while blending in with their peers. Additionally, ninth graders grapple with more challenging coursework, increased academic expectations, and a new school to navigate. On top of all this, they also need to learn to cope with the pressure of and desire for independence. All children must face this transition whether or not they have the ability to navigate it successfully.

Through conducting a needs assessment as part of Charles Maher's program planning framework (2000), I conclude that the ninth grade students with disabilities who participated in this study do not possess the skills they need to navigate the transition process successfully. According to the results, these students do not have the capacity or opportunity to practice these skills in the school setting. In fact, students had major difficulty describing areas of their identity relating to the IEP process that guides transition in students with disabilities.

Ryan and Deci (2000), the creators of Self-Determination Theory, report that students experience competence when challenged and given prompt feedback. Students experience autonomy when they feel supported to explore, take initiative, develop and implement solutions for their problems. Students experience relatedness when they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these three needs are met, students are more intrinsically motivated, actively engaged in their learning and therefore, self-determined. Through program Take Action, students will not only become

motivated, but will also become self-determined participants in their education. They will gain a better understanding of the parts of their education directly related to their disability, and thus help themselves in the process of identity formation.

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Appendix A

AIR Self-Determination Scale©

STUDENT FORM

Student's Name _____ Date _____

School Name _____ Your Grade _____

Your Date of Birth _____
Month Day Year

HOW TO FILL OUT THIS FORM

Please answer these questions about how you go about getting what you want or need. This may occur at school, or after school, or it could be related to your friends, your family, or a job or hobby you have.

This is not a Test. There are no right or wrong answers. The questions will help you learn about what you do well and where you may need help.

Goal You may not be sure what some of the words in the questions mean. For example, the word **goal** is used a lot. A **goal is something you want to get or achieve**, either now or next week or in the distant future, like when you are an adult. You can have many different kinds of goals. You could have a goal that has to do with school (like getting a good grade on a test or graduating from high school). You could have a goal of saving money to buy something (a new iPod® or new sneakers), or doing better in sports (getting on the basketball team). Each person's goals are different because each person has different things that they want or need or that they are good at.

Plan Another word that is used in some of the questions is **plan**. A **plan is the way you decide to meet your goal, or the steps you need to take in order to get what you want or need**. Like goals, you can have many different kinds of plans. An example of a plan to meet the goal of getting on the basketball team would be: to get better by shooting more baskets at home after school, to play basketball with friends on the weekend, to listen to the coach when the team practices, and to watch the pros play basketball on TV.

The AIR Self-Determination Scale was developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in collaboration with Teachers College, Columbia University, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), under Cooperative Agreement HO23J200005

HOW TO MARK YOUR ANSWERS

EXAMPLE QUESTION:

I check for errors after completing a project.

EXAMPLE ANSWER:

Circle the number of the answer which tells what you are most like:
(Circle **ONLY ONE** number).

- 1 Never.....student **never** checks for errors.
- 2 Almost Never.....student **almost never** checks for errors.
- 3 Sometimes.....student **sometimes** checks for errors.
- 4 Almost Always.....student **almost always** checks for errors.
- 5 Always.....student **always** checks for errors.

REMEMBER

<p>There are NO right or wrong answers.</p>
--

This will not affect your grade. So please think about each question carefully before you circle your answer.

THINGS I DO

1. I know what I need, what I like, and what I'm good at.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. I set goals to get what I want or need. I think about what I am good at when I do this.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Things I do – Total Items 1+2					
3. I figure out how to meet my goals. I make plans and decide what I should do.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. I begin working on my plans to meet my goals as soon as possible.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Things I do – Total Items 3+4					
5. I check how I'm doing when I'm working on my plan. If I need to, I ask others what they think of how I'm doing.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. If my plan doesn't work, I try another one to meet my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Things I do – Total Items 5+6					

HOW I FEEL

1. I feel good about what I like, what I want, and what I need to do.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. I believe that I can set goals to get what I want.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
How I Feel – Total Items 1+2					
3. I like to make plans to meet my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. I like to begin working on my plans right away.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
How I Feel – Total Items 3+4					
5. I like to check on how well I'm doing in meeting my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. I am willing to try another way if it helps me to meet my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
How I Feel – Total Items 5+6					

WHAT HAPPENS AT SCHOOL

1. People at school listen to me when I talk about what I want, what I need, or what I'm good at.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. People at school let me know that I can set my own goals to get what I want or need.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At School – Total Items 1+2					
3. At school, I have learned how to make plans to meet my goals and to feel good about them.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. People at school encourage me to start working on my plans right away.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At School – Total Items 3+4					
5. I have someone at school who can tell me if I am meeting my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. People at school understand when I have to change my plan to meet my goals. They offer advice and encourage me when I'm doing this.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At School – Total Items 5+6					

WHAT HAPPENS AT HOME

1. People at home listen to me when I talk about what I want, what I need, or what I'm good at.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. People at home let me know that I can set my own goals to get what I want or need.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At Home – Total Items 1+2					
3. At home, I have learned how to make plans to meet my goals and to feel good about them.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. People at home encourage me to start working on my plans right away.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At Home – Total Items 3+4					
5. I have someone at home who can tell me if I am meeting my goals.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. People at home understand when I have to change my plan to meet my goals. They offer advice and encourage me when I'm doing this.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
What Happens At Home – Total Items 5+6					

PLEASE WRITE YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS...

Give an example of a goal you are working on.

What are you doing to reach this goal?

How well are you doing in reaching this goal?

THANK YOU!

The AIR Self-Determination Profile
Student Form

Items	Think: Do Adjust			Think: Do Adjust		
	1-2	3-4	5-6	1-2	3-4	5-6
10						
9						
8						
7						
6						
5						
4						
3						
2						
1						
0						

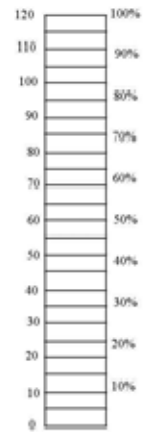
Total

Things I Do How I Feel

Items	Think: Do Adjust			Think: Do Adjust		
	1-2	3-4	5-6	1-2	3-4	5-6
10						
9						
8						
7						
6						
5						
4						
3						
2						
1						
0						

Total

What Happens at School What Happens at Home



Capacity

+

Opportunity

=

Level of Self-Determination

(Write sum in box and mark in column)

Name _____ Date _____

Appendix B

AIR Self-Determination Scale©
EDUCATOR FORM

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Date of Birth (or age) _____ Grade _____ ☐ Female ☐ Male

Educator's Name _____

School Name _____

HOW TO FILL OUT THIS FORM

Each page of this form lists characteristics and behaviors that indicate the degree to which your student demonstrates traits of self-determination and the degree to which the people influencing your student provides opportunities that foster self-determination. For each item, select the appropriate rating code based on what you have observed about your student. An example is provided to illustrate each characteristic. Feel free to write in a different example that supports your rating for your student.

Here is an example of how you should mark your answers.

EXAMPLE QUESTION:

Student checks for errors after completing a project.

EXAMPLE ANSWER:

Check the box of the rating code which tells what your student is most like:
(Check **ONLY ONE** box per question).

- 1 Never**.....student **never** checks for errors.
- 2 Almost Never**.....student **almost never** checks for errors.
- 3 Sometimes**.....student **sometimes** checks for errors.
- 4 Almost Always**.....student **almost always** checks for errors.
- 5 Always**.....student **always** checks for errors.

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KNOWLEDGE of Self-Determination Behaviors

1. Student knows own abilities and limitations. <i>Example:</i> James can identify his personal strengths and talents, such as his musical ability as well as areas in which he needs improvement, like his below average math problem-solving skills.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. Student knows how to set expectations and goals that satisfy own interests and needs. <i>Example:</i> Lee wants to attend college and knows that to get good grades, she needs to work hard on her assignments and complete them on time.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Knowledge Total – Items 1+2					
3. Student knows how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet own goals and expectations. <i>Example:</i> When making plans to meet her goals, Lynn knows how to identify various strategies, weigh the pros and cons, and follow through.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. Student knows how to take actions to complete own plans successfully. <i>Example:</i> Kenneth knows how to follow through on a scheduled plan to complete his work accurately and on time.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Knowledge Total – Items 3+4					
5. Student knows how to evaluate results of actions to determine what was effective. <i>Example:</i> Germaine knows what questions to ask to find out how well she is doing.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. Student knows how to change actions or plans to meet goals and satisfy needs and wants. <i>Example:</i> Jose understands that to get an A in math, he may need to study one hour every night; if that doesn't work he may have to work two hours every night; and if that doesn't work he may have to learn to study more effectively.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Knowledge Total – Items 5+6					

ABILITY to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors

1. Student expresses own interests, needs, and abilities. <i>Example:</i> Sarah communicates her athletic interest and talent in conversations, written journals, or participation in sports activities.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. Student sets expectations and goals that will satisfy own interests needs, and wants. <i>Example:</i> Loving to spend time drawing and doing art, Daniel sets the goal of finding art classes that he can take after school once a week.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Ability Total – Items 1+2					
3. Student knows how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet own goals and expectations. <i>Example:</i> Anna weighed the pros and cons of doing three types of history projects, chose to write a research report, outlined the report, and made a schedule for completing the report on time.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. Student initiates actions on own choices and plans. <i>Example:</i> Ming begins work right away each time he gets an assignment or is asked by someone to help with a project.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Ability Total – Items 3+4					
5. Student gathers information on results of actions. <i>Example:</i> After completing her work, Theresa checks it for errors and asks others to look it over and make suggestions.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. Student changes own actions or plans to satisfy expectations and goals, if necessary. <i>Example:</i> Ricardo tries different approaches to solve problems and to complete tasks that are difficult for him.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Ability Total – Items 5+6					

**PERCEPTION of Knowledge and Ability to Perform
Self-Determination Behaviors**

1. Student feels free to express own needs, interests, and abilities, even when facing opposition from others. <i>Example:</i> Fran defends her needs and interests to anyone who questions them.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
2. Student feels free to set own goals and expectations, even if they are different from the expectations others have for the student. <i>Example:</i> Trevor does not feel constrained by others' opinions in setting goals and expectations for himself.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Perception Total – Items 1+2					
3. Student feels free to make own choices, decisions, and plans to meet own goals and expectations. <i>Example:</i> Corine often considers her parents' suggestions when making choices and plans, but the final plans taken to meet her goals are her own.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
4. Student feels confident about being able to successfully complete own plans. <i>Example:</i> When Nicholas schedules his own activities, he is confident he can complete them accurately and on time.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Perception Total – Items 3+4					
5. Student is confident about using feedback to evaluate results of own work. <i>Example:</i> Amanda is confident that she will be able to benefit from the feedback she receives from her parents, teachers, and peers.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
6. Student changes plans again and again to meet a goal without getting discouraged. <i>Example:</i> Levar is motivated to work on a project as long as it takes, using whatever approaches are necessary, to get it right.	Never 1	Almost Never 2	Sometimes 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
Perception Total – Items 5+6					

OPPORTUNITY to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors at SCHOOL

1. Student has opportunities at school to explore, express, and feel good about own needs, interests, and abilities. <i>Example:</i> Christine's teachers encourage her to talk about her athletic interests and abilities and about what sports activities she wants to do.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
2. Student has opportunities at school to identify goals and expectations that will meet his or her needs, interests, and abilities; to set these goals; and to feel good about them. <i>Example:</i> Troy's teachers let him know that he is responsible for setting his own goals to get his needs and wants met.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at School Total – Items 1+2					
3. Student has opportunities at school to learn about making choices and plans, to make them, and to feel good about them. <i>Example:</i> Shebra's teachers allow her to make her own choices and plans for school assignments, family chores, and leisure activities.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
4. Student has opportunities at school to initiate actions to meet expectations and goals. <i>Example:</i> Manuel's teachers tell him that he is responsible for scheduling study time and for handing in assignments on time.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at School Total – Items 3+4					
5. Student has opportunities at school to get results of actions taken to meet own plans. <i>Example:</i> Michelle's teachers are available to give feedback on projects whenever she needs it.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
6. Student has opportunities at school to change actions and plans to satisfy own expectations. <i>Example:</i> Laurent's teacher encouraged him to take his time and to revise his work as often as necessary to satisfy his own expectations.	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at School Total – Items 5+6					

OPPORTUNITY to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors at HOME

1. Student has opportunities at home to explore, express, and feel good about own needs, interests, and abilities. <i>Example: Maria's parents encourage her to talk about her athletic interests and abilities and about what sports activities she wants to do.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
2. Student has opportunities at home to identify goals and expectations that will meet his or her needs, interests, and abilities; to set these goals; and to feel good about them. <i>Example: Roberto's parents let him know that he is responsible for setting his own goals to get his needs and wants met.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at Home Total – Items 1+2					
3. Student has opportunities at home to learn about making choices and plans, to make them, and to feel good about them. <i>Example: Kelly's parents allow her to make her own choices and plans for school assignments, family chores, and leisure activities.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
4. Student has opportunities at home to initiate actions to meet expectations and goals. <i>Example: Anthony's parents tell him that he is responsible for scheduling study time and for handing in assignments on time.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at Home Total – Items 3+4					
5. Student has opportunities at home to get results of actions taken to meet own plans. <i>Example: Thuy's parents are available to give feedback on projects whenever she needs it.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
6. Student has opportunities at home to change actions and plans to satisfy own expectations. <i>Example: Stacy's parents encourage him to take his time and to revise his work as often as necessary to satisfy his own expectations.</i>	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity at Home Total – Items 5+6					

**PLEASE WRITE YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN
THE SPACES BELOW.**

Give an example of a goal the student is working on.

What is the student doing to reach this goal?

How is the student doing in reaching this goal?

The AIR Self-Determination Profile
Educator Form

Think				Do				Adjust			
1-2				3-4				5-6			
10											
9											
8											
7											
6											
5											
4											
3											
2											
1											
0											

— — — —

Knowledge

— — — —

Ability

— — — —

Perception

— — — —

Opportunity at School

— — — —

Opportunity at Home

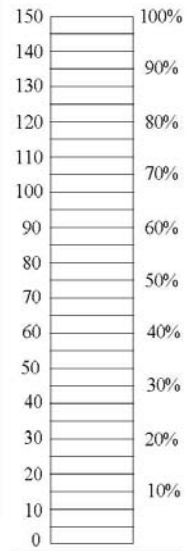
Capacity

+

Opportunity

=

Level of Self-Determination



Student Name _____ Date _____

(Write sum in box and mark in column)