Rural School Staff Roles in Career Development for Students with Disabilities: A Mixed Methods Study

By

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To my former students with disabilities who inspired me to pursue this dream with their

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<center>**Introduction**</center>

Preparing students with disabilities for the future is a primary purpose of special education. The importance of equipping students for adulthood is reflected in the reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. More specifically, IDEA (2004) mandates that schools provide students with disabilities with a coordinated set of transition services that facilitate progression toward goals for postsecondary success. These goals address postsecondary education or training, independent living, community participation, and employment.

Career Development Services in School Districts

High schools are tasked with providing rigorous career development programs that deliver a range of experiences to help students progress towards their postsecondary employment goals (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018; National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2021). In the initial phases of career development (i.e., career awareness, career exploration), students learn about the importance of work and explore job interests from a range of career pathways (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018). These phases typically begin in elementary or middle school but may continue in high school for many students. Relevant activities include field trips, mentorships, interest and skills assessments, job shadowing, job sampling, and internships. In the final two career development phases (i.e., career preparation, career assimilation), students learn career-specific and work-related skills through instruction, planning, and on-the-job-experiences. They may participate in job skills training, work-based

<center>1</center>

learning experiences, school jobs, and paid work in the community. Several components of effective career development supported through these various activities (e.g., engagement in work-based learning; paid jobs during high school; participation in vocational courses; career counseling, learning self-determination, socialization, and self-care skills) are associated with strong employment outcomes for students with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2021).

The policies and funding opportunities affecting the capacity of school districts to support career development vary across states. Within Tennessee, career and technical education (CTE) aims to provide all students – with a particular focus on historically marginalized students, including those with disabilities – to prepare for the workforce during high school (Tennessee Department of Education, 2021). The Tennessee Department of Education and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (2022) have introduced a number of CTE initiatives across school districts (e.g., funding for additional personnel, materials and supports for career exploration) in an effort to break down generational poverty, improve the access and equity of high-quality CTE programs, help students to connect what they learn in school with what they will do in employment, and build a stronger workforce within the state. Additionally, state and regional not-for-profit organizations, as well as local employers, have provided additional monetary resources, training, personnel, and other supports for career development to districts across Tennessee with the intention of improving opportunities for students to pursue lucrative careers and develop more robust workforces within local communities in the state (e.g., Jobs for Tennessee Graduates, 2022; The Ayres Foundation, 2022). Regarding students with disabilities, the Tennessee Department of Human Services has made Transition School to Work grants available to school districts to employ specialized staff – such as transition specialists, workplace readiness coaches, and job coaches – to provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS)

required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. These services include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary enrollment, work-place readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

Career development experiences for students with disabilities are likely to be most effective when integrated within the continuum of initiatives in place to prepare all high school students for postsecondary success (Morningstar et al., 2012). Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) – a model in which all students receive broad supports while students with the most extensive support needs receive more targeted services – is advocated for ensuring all students receive necessary academic and behavioral supports (ESSA, 2015). Morningstar and colleagues (2012) proposed a transition-focused framework for extending the MTSS model for delivering employment services and other transition services to students with disabilities amongst their peers without disabilities. In this framework, schools provide varying levels of support to prepare all students for adulthood. For example, all students receive career assessment, curricula focused on postsecondary outcomes, and instruction emphasizing independence. Students who need additional support receive supplemental assessment, ancillary transition curricula, and small-group instruction. Those requiring the most intense services receive more targeted transition assessment and planning, individualized transition curricula, and customized community-based instruction (Morningstar et al., 2015). By adopting a transition-focused MTSS framework, schools can support all high school students – including those with disabilities – in remaining engaged in school and graduating college and career ready (Morningstar et al., 2017).

Collaboration and Career Development for Students with Disabilities

       Collaboration Within and Beyond School Districts. Employing a transition-focused

MTSS framework that includes students with disabilities in career development experiences with their peers depends upon purposeful collaboration. Stakeholder collaboration within and beyond the education system has long been advocated as a best practice in transition and career development (Kohler & Field, 2003; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Oertle & Trach, 2007). Indeed, researchers have associated collaboration with better postsecondary employment outcomes for students with disabilities (Flowers et al., 2018; Haber et al., 2016). In their position statement on aligning transition services with secondary educational reform, the Division on Career Development and Transition specifically advocated for active collaboration amongst special education and general education staff to provide transition-focused instruction, planning, and experiences for students with disabilities (Morningstar et al., 2012). Other researchers have echoed these sentiments, advocating for school staff with varying expertise (i.e., CTE, special education, school counseling, related services) to work together to support students with disabilities in the transition to employment and other adult outcomes (Milsom et al., 2007; Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018; Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014).

Collaboration amongst school staff is particularly important when implementing career development programs in rural school districts. Staff serving rural schools are likely to face a host of logistical and financial challenges when preparing students for work. Practitioners in many rural districts report limited employment opportunities in the local community that can hinder the involvement of students with disabilities in work-based learning and paid employment (Anderson, 2012; Mahiko, 2017). This may help explain the high rates of unemployment for young adults with disabilities in rural areas (Sheehey & Black, 2003). Additionally, rural districts often have limited public or affordable transportation options available for students with disabilities who live in isolated areas and face long commute times to potential workplaces

(Anderson, 2012; Test & Fowler, 2018). These districts are also likely to struggle with constrained budgets for addressing the lack of resources in their local communities. Finally, many rural areas have limited internet connectivity or cellular service, making it difficult for educators, students, and families to identify and connect with important services that could support employment (Castillo & Cartwright, 2018; Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Sutton et al., 2017). Students in these communities may struggle to access a variety of formal disability services and may possess lower expectations for postsecondary education than those in urban or suburban settings (Alfonso et al., 2015; Test & Fowler, 2018).

Despite their distinct employment barriers, rural communities also possess unique assets for collaboration that can lead students to work. For example, rural communities may be particularly rich in social capital, networking, and relationships that could support collaboration (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019; Rowe et al., 2020). In smaller districts, rural staff can develop close relationships, tap into the tightly knit personal networks of one another, and develop awareness of formal and informal supports available within their local school communities. Indeed, in a survey of 596 middle and high school special educators, Carter and colleagues (2020) found that educators working in rural communities described their collaborations for supporting students in employment as more extensive, effective, and positive than those working in non-rural communities. Cultivating the expertise and connections of multiple staff members within a district is especially important for preparing students with disabilities to participate in the evolving labor markets of rural communities. Together, staff may tap into one another's contacts and resources to equip students with disabilities to identify and obtain work in the community that they may otherwise be rarely exposed (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019).

Collaboration amongst several stakeholders with varying expertise is essential for

students with disabilities to access comprehensive career experiences. High school staff in various positions contribute to this work, and many staff have several distinct responsibilities (Zhang et al., 2005). This is particularly true in rural districts, in which limited resources, smaller schools, and fewer available qualified staff often result in staff playing multiple roles related to transition and work (Johnson et al., 2018; Rowe et al., 2020). Staff pertinent to the career development of students with disabilities include special educators, paraprofessionals, CTE educators, school counselors, administrators, related service providers, and others.

Staff Who Support Career Development for Students with Disabilities. *Special educators* and *paraprofessionals* are central to career development for students with disabilities, as they often know these students and their support needs better than anyone else in the district. Special educators primarily provide career-related planning, instruction, and experiences. They may also connect with others within and outside of the school to access supports for students and their families. In some districts, special educators are designated as transition specialists with specialized responsibilities for conducting assessments, coordinating community-based experiences, and building capacity amongst other educators to facilitate career development for students with disabilities (Lillis & Kutscher, 2022; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). Paraprofessionals may transport students to work sites, act as job coaches, provide instructional supports, and collaborate with local employers and employees at work sites.

Yet, this work can be expanded and improved upon through the contributions of other key players in schools (Morningstar et al., 2012). *CTE educators* have expertise in developing and implementing curricula that incorporates assessment of student employment skills and aligns with instructional standards (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). They have

access to employment facilities and equipment, partner with local businesses to facilitate career development, and often coordinate work-based learning opportunities for students in their districts. Additionally, CTE educators are responsible for ensuring equity for marginalized student populations – including those with disabilities – in their programs (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). Given their expertise, CTE educators can contribute pertinent information to support students and special educators in making informed decisions regarding the placement in vocational courses and experiences (Haber & Sutherland, 2008).

Likewise, *school counselors* can provide essential services to students with disabilities. In addition to developing course schedules and coordinating district-wide testing, they may identify pre-requisites needed for accessing training and postsecondary education opportunities aligned with careers of interest and enroll students in coursework relevant to their postsecondary goals (Milsom et al., 2007). They provide direct services related to social-emotional skills and mental health that can support student success in school and at work, as well as indirect services that include consulting with educators and other team members and advocating to postsecondary personnel on students' behalf (American School Counselor Association, 2020).

Furthermore, *related service providers* can play essential roles in supporting student skill development that is relevant for employment (e.g., social skills, motor skills, communication). They can consult with educators on supports needed in the workplace and support students in transitioning to adult services in their respective areas of expertise (e.g., rehabilitative services, mental health counseling). These services are formally mandated in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to assist students with disabilities in benefiting from special education (IDEA, 2014). Moreover, several professional organizations guiding these related service providers have released standards or recommendations that address ways in which they could contribute to

career development for students with disabilities, such as collaborating with families and other staff to plan postsecondary employment and teaching students to advocate for accommodations in workplace settings or postsecondary education programs. These organizations include the National Association of School Psychologists (2010), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Perryman et al., 2020), American Physical Therapy Association (2006), American Occupational Therapy Association (2018), and the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (2021).

Finally, district- and school-level *administrators* act as local educational agency representatives and supervisors of staff. They oversee (and sometimes provide) instruction for students with disabilities, ensure that curricula reflect general education standards, and allocate district resources to support students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). As a result, administrators can ensure schools adopt evidence-based practices related to employment; implement initiatives for including students with disabilities in CTE; allot funding to work-based learning, transportation, and other costs associated with career-related experiences; and coordinate professional development, training, and collaboration time that staff need to best serve their students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Test et al., 2015).

Rural Staff Roles in Career Development for Students with Disabilities

Although researchers and practitioners recognize the importance of collaboration amongst multiple school staff for supporting career development for students with disabilities, there is a dearth of empirical literature examining the specific roles these staff play in schools. Some studies have explored the responsibilities of special educators in career development (Carter et al., 2020; Eisenman et al., 2011; Trainor et al., 2008; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). In these

studies, special educators reported teaching vocational skills, increasing student awareness of job opportunities, sharing information with businesses, providing professional development to general educators, communicating with administrators, and collaborating with employment specialists from outside agencies. More recently, Lillis and Kutscher (2022) interviewed seven transition specialists about their roles, concluding that these professionals performed widely varied tasks in career development, some self-decided and others imposed by administrators. These roles included participating in IEP development and building capacity among other staff to contribute to transition services. Other studies have identified tasks of paraprofessionals in high school settings to include fostering student self-determination, teaching vocational skills, providing behavioral and social support, and job coaching (e.g., Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Lane et al., 2012; Rogan & Held, 1999; Seaman-Tullis et al., 2019). Nonetheless, questions remain on (a) how special educators and paraprofessionals have come to assume these roles, (b) the assistance they receive from other staff in supporting students with disabilities in career development, and (c) the extent to which they view their own roles and district staffing models to be effective for preparing students with disabilities for employment. Research is needed for (a) examining staff perceptions on role allocation in schools and (b) exploring the roles of additional key players (i.e., CTE educator, school counselors, related service providers, administrators, others) to understand the ways in which multiple staff members contribute – or could potentially contribute – to robust career development services for students with disabilities.

The limited research characterizing the roles of additional school staff members suggests that staff who primarily serve general education students (e.g., school counselors, CTE educators) are often underutilized in the career development of students with disabilities and calls for more clearly defined roles within schools. In a survey of 100 high school counselors on

the activities they performed with students with disabilities, Milsom (2002) found that counselors most frequently reported providing individual or group counseling (82.8%) and feedback for IEP teams (73.7%). They were less likely to report assisting with transition plans than any other task (i.e., 40.4%) and expressed feeling less prepared to assist with transition plans than in all other areas. When Milsom (2007) surveyed 126 high school counselors about their involvement in transition planning for students with disabilities, counselors reported minimal involvement in several career-related activities for students with disabilities, such as supporting students in assessing their own abilities and exploring their interests. They infrequently reported providing direct services (e.g., exploring careers, assessing interests) to students with more severe disabilities. These counselors often reported relying on other staff to ensure that the career development needs of students with disabilities were met. Lastly, in a dissertation study, Hudson (2011) interviewed seven school counselors about their perceptions of transition planning for students with learning disabilities and found that counselors cited scheduling, developing plans of study, administrative duties, and test administration to hinder time for providing any guidance on postsecondary success to these students.

Research also suggests that many CTE educators face challenges in serving students with disabilities. Schmalzried and Harvey (2014) surveyed 69 CTE teachers and administrators, 42 special educators, and 20 school counselors on collaboration between special education and CTE departments. Participants described communication as inconsistent, suggesting that CTE educators often had inconsistent access to information on which of their students had disabilities or the IEP supports they necessitated. CTE educators reported having limited professional development for working with students with disabilities, and special educators tended to report that they were not provided with training on CTE programs and services. At the same time, CTE

educators expressed a desire to know of student accommodations at the beginning of the school year and engage in ongoing communication with special educators throughout the school year.

Other studies have suggested that related service providers and administrators (e.g., school psychologists, speech language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, vision or hearing itinerant teachers) are also underutilized. Ducharme and colleagues (2020) surveyed and interviewed 38 school psychologists from a large urban district about their roles in employment-focused transition services. School psychologists saw themselves as having skills that could contribute to employment services for students with disabilities but were unsure of how exactly to help. Moreover, in another study, Lehman (2020) identified a lack of literature regarding the responsibilities of school principals in transition and suggested they play more active roles in preparing students with disabilities for adulthood. Each of these studies recommended ways in which school staff outside of special education could potentially participate in career development for students with disabilities. Yet, questions remain regarding (a) the tasks that staff are currently performing within school staffing models, (b) how they came to assume these roles, or (c) the extent to which their contributions jointly prepare students with disabilities for work.

The collective work of multiple staff members is needed to prepare students with disabilities to work. Research focused on the level of individual school districts (i.e., examining views and experiences of various staff members that work together within a given district) is necessary for understanding the combined efforts of school staff. Furthermore, research that explores the roles of multiple staff could unveil ways in which their efforts overlap – or result in programmatic gaps – in career development for students with disabilities. Discerning the reasons for which staff come to assume their roles and the factors informing these roles could identify implications for administrators with respect to training and supporting staff to provide services

and developing partnerships essential for students with disabilities to connect to work. Finally, an understanding of the district-wide strengths and gaps that exist with respect to supporting all students – and specifically students with various types of disabilities – in career development could guide districts in expanding and reconfiguring their staffing models to be more effective in these areas. By tapping into the capacities of existing staff in novel ways, districts may improve student outcomes without having to lend substantial resources towards hiring additional staff.

Strategic role allocation and staffing is particularly important in rural districts, as they often consist of smaller schools, fewer staff, and more unfilled positions than urban or suburban communities. In an overview of the past, present, and future of rural secondary transition, Test and Fowler (2018) recommended that rural schools integrate the efforts of general education and special education staff to provide strong transition services to students with disabilities. Coordinating these services to better prepare all students for work could facilitate districts in capitalizing upon the strengths of rural communities in collaboration and address some of the challenges they face in preparing students for work in light of limited funding or access to disability agencies. Nonetheless, research on the joint efforts of multiple staff in preparing students with disabilities for employment has yet to be conducted in rural districts.

In this study, I sought to understand how high school staff collectively deliver career development programs to students with disabilities within the context of rural school districts. Guided by the transition-focused MTSS framework that promotes collaborative efforts from both general education and special education to support all students in transition, I (a) identified the roles that various staff perform in career development for students with disabilities, (b) explored how they come to assume these roles, and (c) examined the extent to which they viewed district staffing models to be effective for preparing all students for the world of work. In addition, I (d)

identified district-level strengths and gaps regarding role allocation and staffing and (e)

examined the extent to which roles and staffing models vary by position and district,

respectively. Using a mixed-methods approach that incorporated elements from quantitative

descriptive design and multiple case study design, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the roles of school staff in career development for students with disabilities in rural districts?

2. How do school staff come to assume their roles?

3. How do school staff view their roles and district staffing models?

4. To what extent do roles vary by staff position?

5. What are the strengths and gaps regarding career development programming within rural school districts?

6. How do staff roles and district profiles vary across districts?

Method

I used a multi-phased mixed methods design to address my research questions (Creswell, 2015; see Figure 1). In the brief convergent design phase, I merged data from qualitative interviews of district administrators with data from quantitative surveys of administrators and school staff. I then integrated quantitative and qualitative findings to understand staff roles related to career development for students with disabilities. In the explanatory sequential design phase, I used data gathered during the convergent phase to refine questions for subsequent focus group and individual interviews of staff and administrators that could explain staffing models and how staff assumed roles. Finally, I integrated all data sources to (a) interpret findings on staff roles, (b) identify strengths and gaps of district programming, and (c) generate implications for district improvement.

Figure 1.

Mixed Methods Multi-Phased Design Diagram
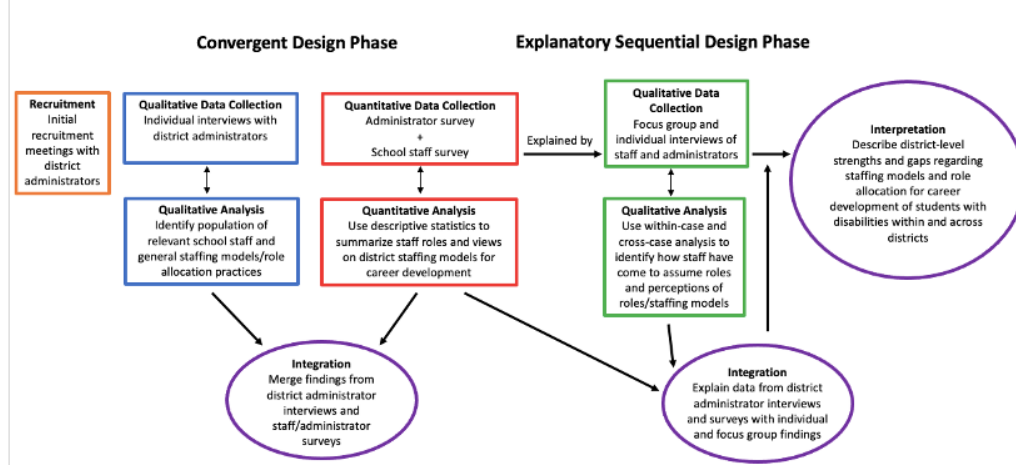
In the sections that follow, I describe the districts of focus in the study, the administrators and

school staff who participated in various ways across districts, the measures used to collect qualitative and quantitative data, and the data analysis procedures.

Participants

To be included in the sample, districts met four inclusion criteria. First, they served students aged 14-22 in Tennessee. I excluded districts solely serving students in elementary and middle school. Second, all districts were considered rural public schools [i.e., solely including locales designated by the U.S. Census Bureau to fall outside of urban areas (i.e., those with more than 2,500 people; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006)]. School districts that solely served communities with the following locale codes (in parenthesis) were considered rural: town, fringe (31); town, distant (32); town, remote (33); rural, fringe (41); rural, distant (42); or rural, remote (43) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Districts that served any other locale were excluded. Third, an administrator with knowledge of special education and transition agreed to participate. Specifically, the administrator agreed to: (a) complete an interview and survey, (b) attempt to recruit 75% of eligible high school staff (i.e., special educators, paraprofessionals, CTE educators, school counselors, related service providers, other staff supporting career development for students with disabilities) to participate in a survey on staff roles, and (c) allow for eligible staff to participate in individual and focus group interviews following the survey.

Ten districts participated in the study. See Table 1 for district demographic information. Districts were located across the three grand regions of Tennessee, with five districts in Middle Tennessee, three in East Tennessee, and two in West Tennessee. Although all districts were rural, they varied greatly in student enrollment ($M = 3,604$, range 976 to 7,301); number of

15

schools serving students aged 14 to 22 ($M = 1.8$, range 1 to 5); and staff employed. They varied

less in student characteristics, including the percentage of students with disabilities in each

district ($M = 16.9$, $SD = 4.1$) and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students ($M =$

35.3, $SD = 7.3$). Most students served in these districts tended to be White ($M = 89.0\%$, $SD =$

5.9), with a small percentage of English language learners ($M = 1.6\%$, $SD = 2.1$). Two districts

served more racially/ethnically diverse student populations: Rieger (14.3% Hispanic) and Maker

(11.0% Black, 9.6% Hispanic). This sample was representative of race/ethnicity demographics

across rural America, particularly in the Southeastern United States (Dobis et al., 2021).

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participating Districts

	School information				Number of staff serving high school students[a]						
District	Students enrolled	No. of high schools	Students with disabilities (%)	Economically disadvantaged students (%)	Special educators	CTE educators	School counselors	Related service providers	District and school administrators[b]	Paras	Additional staff with career development responsibilities (no.)
Woodford	7301	2	13.9	34.1	19	32	9	9	15	10	Transition specialists (2); alternative learning coach (1); student services assistant (1)
Rose	6511	5	19.3	35.1	16	12	5	5	17	13	Transition coach (1); CTE career counselor (1); work-based learning coordinators (2); graduation coach (1); inclusion specialist (1)
Maker	5446	3[c]	13.3	25.5	8	18	6	4	16	15	Special education coaches (2)
Blanton	3992	2	13.8	36.3	5	11	4	2	14	11	College counselors (2); special education clerk (1); special education counselor (1)
Weller	3945	1	14.1	25.6	7	19	7	2	13	9	College advisor (1)
Rieger	2965	1	16.6	40.0	10	9	3	4	11	12	Graduation coach (1)
Daniels	1947	1	17.2	29.1	12	9	2	0	9	5	College counselor (1); family resource center coordinator (1); transition specialist (1)
Bard	1601	1	18.1	42.1	5	8	1	2	10	4	Transition specialist (1); college counselor (1)
Forrester	1360	1	14.5	34.6	4	4	1	2	12	4	Transition specialist (1); workplace readiness specialist (1); general educator teaching career exploration (1)
Beam	976	1[c]	27.8	50.6	4	6	2	0	8	4	Transition-school-to-work job coaches (4)

Note: CTE = career technical education; paras = paraprofessionals.
[a]Employed by district at the start of the study as reported by district administrator; excluded contracted staff (e.g., contracted physical therapist).
[b]Administrators with leadership responsibilities related to special education or knowledge of career development programming.
[c]Schools also served middle school students.

Across the 10 districts, I recruited 291 participants (i.e., 56 administrators and 235 school

staff), representing approximately 58.2% of the estimated 500 staff members within these

positions across the 10 districts. See Table 2 for the demographic characteristics of participants who completed the following study measures: (a) an initial administrator interview, (b) a survey, or (c) a subsequent individual or focus group interview. Participating administrators self-reported as district- or school-level administrators who had leadership responsibilities related to special education and knowledge of transition programming. Of the 56 participating administrators, 29 (51.8%) were *district-level administrators*. They included 19 (33.9%) with responsibilities related to students with and without disabilities (e.g., director of schools, instructional coach, CTE director, director of secondary curriculum, director of special programs, testing supervisor) and 10 (17.9%) with responsibilities related only to students with disabilities (e.g., special education supervisor, special education program coordinator, transition coach). The 27 (48.2%) remaining administrators were *school-level administrators*, including 20 (35.7%) with responsibilities related to students with and without disabilities (e.g., principal, assistant principal) and seven (12.5%) with responsibilities related only to students with disabilities (i.e., high school special education coach; special educator with leadership responsibilities). Several administrators held multiple titles (e.g., instructional coach and testing supervisor).

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants Completing Each Study Measure

		Survey participants		Individual and focus group interview participants
Variable	Administrator interview participants	Administrators	Staff	
Number of participants (*n*)	12	56	235	27
Staff role				
District-level administrator	12 (100%)	29 (51.8%)	-	1 (3.7%)
School-level administrator	-	27 (48.2%)	-	1 (3.7%)
Special educator	-	-	68 (29.0%)	11 (40.7%)
CTE educator	-	-	57 (24.3%)	5 (18.5%)
Paraprofessional	-	-	54 (23.0%)	3 (11.1%)
School counselor	-	-	21 (8.9%)	4 (14.8%)
Related service provider	-	-	17 (7.2%)	1 (3.7%)
Other (e.g., general educator, graduation coach, school nurse)	-	-	18 (7.7%)	1 (3.7%)
Gender				
Female	12 (100%)	38 (67.9%)	172 (73.2%)	22 (91.5%)
Male	-	18 (32.1%)	63 (26.8%)	5 (18.5%)
Race/ethnicity				
White	12 (100%)	55 (98.2%)	217 (92.3%)	27 (100%)
Black or African American	-	1 (1.8%)	7 (3.0%)	-
Hispanic or Latino/Latina	-	-	4 (1.7%)	-
American Indian or Alaskan	-	-	3 (1.3%)	-
Other or prefer to self-describe	-	-	4 (1.7%)	-
Highest level of education				
Bachelor's degree	-	2 (3.6%)	76 (32.3%)	7 (25.9%)
Master's degree	5 (41.7%)	15 (26.8%)	54 (23.0%)	4 (14.8%)
Postgraduate education[a]	7 (58.3%)	38 (67.9%)	50 (21.3%)	12 (44.4%)
Other or preferred not to answer[b]	-	1 (1.8%)	55 (23.4%)	4 (14.8%)

Note: Percentages in parentheses refer to the total number (*n*) of participants who completed each measure; all district administrator interview participants and individual/focus group interview participants were also survey participants.

[a]Included educational specialist degree (i.e., Ed.S.); doctoral degree (i.e., Ph.D., Ed.D.); and any college beyond Master's degree.

[b]Included less than a Bachelor's degree, high school diploma, and general education development (i.e., GED).

School staff self-reported to be (a) employed by a participating district and (b) directly or indirectly supported at least one student with disabilities aged 14 or older in preparing for employment. The 235 participating staff included 68 (29.0%) *special educators*, inclusive of transition specialists and staff employed by the district to provide pre-ETS services. Of these special educators, 46 (67.6%) reported serving students with high-incidence disabilities, 45 (66.2%) served students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD), and 13 (19.1%) also served students without disabilities in ways related to career development. Furthermore, the sample included 57 (24.3%) CTE educators; 54 (23.0%) paraprofessionals; 21 (8.9%) school counselors, including school counselors or college-career advisors; 17 (7.2%) related service providers (i.e., 11 speech-language therapists, three school psychologists, one occupational therapist, one audiologist, and one vision itinerant specialist); and 18 (7.7%) other staff who met inclusion criteria (e.g., general education academic educator, graduation coach). Across districts, 172 (73.2%) staff were female, 217 (92.3%) were White, and seven (3.0%) were Black. Seventy-

six staff members (32.3%) had a Bachelor's degree, 54 (23.8%) had a Master's degree, 27

(11.5%) had a Master's degree with additional education, 16 (6.8%) had an educational specialist

degree, 7 (3.0%) had a doctoral degree, and 44 (18.7%) had less than a Bachelor's degree, while

11 (4.7%) preferred not to answer. The mean number of participating administrators and staff

combined within each district was 29.1 (range 15-55). In addition to completing a survey, 25

school staff participated in individual or focus group interviews (i.e., 11 special educators or

transition specialists, five CTE educators, four school counselors, three paraprofessionals, one

related service provider, and one general educator teaching career development classes).

Across the districts, 36 staff members who held positions targeted within the study were

excluded from participating because they self-reported that they did not directly or indirectly

support at least one student with disabilities aged 14 or older in preparing for employment.

Specifically, 21 CTE educators, nine special educators, three related service providers, two

paraprofessionals, and one school counselor were excluded for this reason. Additionally, staff

providing services but who were not employed by districts (e.g., related service providers or pre-

ETS specialists contracted from external agencies) were excluded from participating.

Recruitment

The following sections describe recruitment of participating districts, followed by

individual participants within each district.

Recruitment of School Districts and Administrators

I purposively sampled districts across the three regions of Tennessee with variation on

characteristics expected to impact role allocation and staffing models. I recruited districts with

variation in (a) number of high schools, (b) number of students served, and (c) staff with specialized responsibilities for transition or career development (e.g., transition specialists, work-based readiness specialists, college-career advisors). I used the most recent educational statistics in Tennessee (i.e., 2019 school year) from the National Rural Education Association (A. Pratt, personal communication, April 5, 2021), school report cards from the Tennessee Department of Education, and individual school district websites to compile a spreadsheet of the 89 districts meeting eligibility criteria (i.e., rural districts serving students aged 14-22 in Tennessee).

I used a staggered approach to recruit districts in July and August of 2021 by emailing invitations to special education supervisors at all eligible districts (10 districts per week). Invitations included (a) the purpose of the study, (b) criteria for district inclusion, (c) a request for an initial recruitment meeting, and (d) my contact information. I began by reaching out to eligible districts known through previous projects (i.e., Transition Tennessee technical assistance, professional development presentations) or recommended by a representative of the state department of education as a district likely to be willing to engage in program evaluation and improvement. During the initial recruitment meeting, I asked each administrator to provide a letter of cooperation that expressed their commitment to (a) participate in a survey and individual interview and (b) encourage their staff to participate in surveys and interviews. In return, I committed to providing each administrator with a summary report of findings on their district's strengths, needs, and recommendations related to career development programming for students with disabilities. See Appendix A for the checklist used to clarify responsibilities of the district administrator and myself. Finally, I conducted interviews with administrators during initial recruitment meetings after they agreed to participate in the study. Each administrator who participated in an interview was offered a $25 Amazon gift card.

I contacted 59 districts, ultimately recruiting 10 of them. Of the districts recruited, six had previously participated in Transition Tennessee professional development or technical assistance, two were recommended by a representative from the state department of education, and two were recruited through a mass email sent out to special education supervisors. Five other districts had initially expressed interest in participating but later withdrew due to being overwhelmed with pandemic-related challenges or other issues at the start of the school year.

Recruitment for Participation in Surveys

A graduate assistant and I completed all recruitment procedures. To recruit administrators to complete the survey, I emailed a survey link to each administrator who participated in initial recruitment meetings. I also developed a list of other eligible administrators for each district (e.g., school principals, assistant principals, CTE supervisors, supervisors of curriculum) through information gained during the administrator interview. To recruit school staff, I developed another list of eligible school staff for each district (i.e., special educators and transition specialists, CTE educators, school counselors, related service providers, paraprofessionals, others) using the district website and information gained during the administrator interview. I provided districts with flyers containing a survey link to distribute to eligible staff and requested that an administrator email all eligible staff to encourage their participation in the survey. Additionally, I emailed eligible staff a link to the survey using contact information provided on the district website or by administrators. The graduate assistant or I sent up to three follow-up emails to each school staff member or administrator on the recruitment list that reminded them to complete the survey. If administrators were willing, I also asked them to send follow-up emails. I collaborated with the graduate student and administrators to track recruitment efforts using

shared spreadsheets. I continued recruitment until at least 50% of eligible school staff within each district completed the survey. Each district administrator and school staff member who completed the survey was offered a $10 Amazon gift card.

Recruitment for Participation in Interviews

Using contact information provided on surveys, I emailed staff and administrators who (a) expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview or (b) were identified by other staff or administrators as individuals who could speak to role allocation and staffing (e.g., special educators who taught transition courses, school counselors who met with students with disabilities). I purposively invited staff who expressed varying views on surveys (e.g., expressed that their roles were unclear, expressed perceptions on staffing untypical of responses within the district). I contacted participants via email to confirm their interest in participating schedule a time and date, and provide meeting information. I continued recruiting participants for interviews until saturation occurred (i.e., analyses solely provided repetition of themes or categories with respect to each research; Creswell, 2015).

I selected interview participants from across (a) all 10 districts and (b) all staff positions (i.e., special educators and transition specialists, CTE educators, school counselors, related service providers, paraprofessionals, school- and district-level administrators, others). This varied sample of participants explained findings of convergent phase data from multiple perspectives, including those who provided survey responses typical of staff in a given district or staff position and those who provided atypical or unique responses (e.g., performed different tasks than others in their position; unique views of staffing models). Each staff member or administrator who participated was offered a $25 Amazon gift card.

Data Collection

Data collection included individual interviews with district administrators, surveys of administrators and staff, and subsequent individual and focus group interviews with staff and administrators.

District Administrator Interviews

During the initial phase of the design, I used interviews with district administrators to build rapport with representatives of each district, better understand district staffing models, and affirm staff who performed tasks related to career development for students with disabilities. I used a semi-structured interview protocol containing four sections: district background information, administrator background information, staff roles in career development, and logistical information. Each section included primary questions with underlying questions to prompt responses or dive deeper into topics as necessary for gathering information to proceed with the study. See Appendix B for the interview protocol.

Interviews occurred at locations selected by district administrators (i.e., office or conference room at district building) and ranged from 45 to 59 min ($M = 48$ min). I conducted an interview with one administrator per district, with the exception of two districts who requested that two administrators participate together for each district. I audio-recorded, transcribed, and de-identified all interviews and recorded field notes following each interview to note observations important for interpreting transcriptions and designing interview protocols for the next phase of the study (Berg, 2017; Seidman, 2019).

Surveys of Administrators and School Staff

I developed two surveys based on best practices in career development and my own experiences working in transition. The surveys were parallel in structure and addressed similar topics but were written for either (a) an administrator to describe staff roles and the sufficiency of services in the district or (b) a staff member to describe their own roles and views on staffing. After developing an initial draft of each survey, I used multiple rounds of revision to incorporate feedback from my advisor, doctoral committee, and colleagues with backgrounds in special education, transition, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and disability advocacy. I then piloted the survey with four current or former high school educators and incorporated recommendations for clarity and efficiency. I used REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture; Harris et al., 2009) to host both surveys online from September to December 2021. Participants who expressed interest in receiving a gift card were required to provide their name and contact information. I included language in the survey that assured participants that any identifying information provided would be kept confidential. Both surveys were approved by the university Institutional Review Board. See Appendices C and D for the administrator and school staff surveys.

Administrator Survey. The administrator survey included: (a) participant and school demographic information, (b) views on staffing in the district, (c) the sufficiency of career development tasks performed for high school students with disabilities, and (d) the responsibilities of staff members regarding these tasks. For participant and school demographic information, administrators provided their job title, identified whether their position was at the level of the district or a specific school, reported their primary job responsibilities, and described the students they served [i.e., students without disabilities, students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, emotional/behavioral disorders), students with

IDD (e.g., Down syndrome or intellectual disability, Autism, multiple disabilities). They also reported their gender, race/ethnicity, and highest level of education.

To describe their views on district staffing, administrators completed four items in which they rated the extent to which they agreed that sufficient staffing was available for preparing all students for employment, sufficient staffing was available for preparing students with disabilities for employment, staff roles were clear for supporting students with disabilities in career development, and the district effectively prepared students with disabilities for employment. They used a 4-point, Likert type scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 2 = *disagree,* 3 = *agree,* 4 = *strongly agree*), and Cronbach's alpha for this section was 0.80, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, they described the extent to which supporting students with disabilities in preparing for employment was a priority of the district as being a *primary* or *secondary goal* and identified other areas that take priority.

In the next section, administrators were presented with 48 tasks related to six areas of career development and used the 4-point, Likert type scale to describe the extent to which they agreed that each task was performed sufficiently in the district. The area of *career assessment and goal development* included eight items pertaining to the assessment of student interests, preferences, needs, and strengths with respect to employment and the development of career goals; Cronbach's alpha for this section was 0.89. *Career-related instruction* included nine items pertaining to teaching skills or information needed for employment*;* Cronbach's alpha was 0.89. The area of *addressing skills and needs for employment* included eight items pertaining to tangential supports not directly related to work but necessary for students to successfully obtain and maintain a job; Cronbach's alpha was 0.92. *Career-related experiences* included nine items related to opportunities provided to students to complete work tasks within school or community

work settings; Cronbach's alpha was 0.89. *School partnerships* included six items around collaboration between the district and other entities that fostered career development for students with disabilities; Cronbach's alpha was 0.88. *Program development and improvement* included eight items pertaining to ongoing expansion and evaluation of district initiatives in career development for students with disabilities; Cronbach's alpha was 0.94. I developed these task items based on literature in career development, transition practices, and the transition-focused MTSS framework (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Morningstar, 2015; Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018; National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2020; Test et al., 2018). I also incorporated professional standards for various staff (American School Counselor Association, 2020; Association for Career and Technical Education, 2020; National Association of School Psychologists, 2010; Perryman et al., 2020). Finally, I consulted studies on roles in special education (Eisenman et al., 2011; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Wasburn-Moses, 2005) and considered my own experiences as a high school special educator and transition specialist.

In addition to describing the extent to which each of the 48 career development tasks were performed sufficiently, administrators identified the staff responsible for performing each task. They marked each of the following staffing positions who performed each task: (a) special educators, (b) CTE educators, (c) school counselors, (d) related service providers, (e) administrators, (f) paraprofessionals, (g) professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, VR counselor, or (h) other staff (prompted to describe these individuals).

School Staff Survey. The school staff survey included the following sections: (a) participant and student demographics, (b) views on staffing in their district, (c) the extent to which they performed career development tasks for high school students with disabilities, and (d) how they came to perform tasks. For participant and student demographic information, staff

provided their job title, gender, race/ethnicity, and highest level of education. They also described the students they served using the same categories described in the administrator survey. Staff who identified as special educators were also prompted to report the number of students on their caseload; type of setting in which they worked (i.e., self-contained class, general education class); and the percentage of their students that took the alternate assessment.

In the next section, school staff rated the sufficiency of staffing, clarity of staff roles, and district effectiveness in preparing students with disabilities for employment using the same items described in the administrator survey. Cronbach's alpha for this section was 0.90, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, they selected one of the following options to describe the extent to which supporting students with disabilities in preparing for employment was a part of their own job: (a) primary role of my job (more important than most other job roles); (b) secondary role of my job (important but there are many other more important job roles); (c) I am not sure if this is part of my job; or (d) this is not a part of my job. Participants selecting one of the last three options were then asked to identify other areas that must take priority over this role.

In the last section, staff described the frequency with which they have performed career development tasks for high school students with disabilities in the last year. Participants used a 5-point scale (1 = *never,* 2 = *rarely,* 3 = *monthly,* 4 = *weekly,* 5 = *daily*) to describe the frequency by which they performed the same 48 career development tasks described in the administrator survey. In addition, participants described how they came to perform each of these tasks, selecting one of the following options for each task item: *someone else assigned me to perform this task, I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues, I chose to perform this task on my own,* or *I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.*

Individual and Focus Group Interviews

I conducted 22 individual interviews and two focus group interviews (one with three participants and the other with two participants). I attempted to organize focus group interviews when possible but resorted to individual interviews to accommodate staff availability and preferences. To encourage staff to respond honestly with minimal hesitance or bias, I organized the two focus groups to reflect groupings of staff who held similar positions (e.g., special educators within a district) or typically worked with one another (e.g., special educator and school counselor from same school). I initially intended to conduct interviews in person but conducted all interviews virtually by Zoom to accommodate participant schedules and needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews ranged from 35 to 64 min ($M = 51$ min).

The semi-structured interview protocols for both interview formats included four sections: (a) background information, (b) staff roles, (c) district staffing models and role allocation, and (d) recommendations for district improvement. See Appendices E and F for interview protocols. First, I elicited background information from staff on their specific position and the students they serve to create a comfortable environment in which each staff member could share their views. I then asked staff members about their specific roles in career development for students with disabilities and how they came to assume such roles, probing additional information regarding survey responses from staff in their district. I customized and expanded upon questions based on participant role(s) and findings from surveys and previous interviews. For example, after surveyed related service providers reported limited involvement in preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary work, I asked an interviewed speech-language therapist why they felt involvement was limited. In another example, after staff mentioned that special education case managers took responsibility for writing all IEP transition

plans, I asked a case manager about their roles in this area.

Next, I asked staff about their views on district staffing models and role allocation based on aggregated survey responses from their district. For example, when most staff in a district reported that roles were unclear, I asked participants why they believed this to be so. I also asked staff about potential gaps in career development programming. For example, when few surveyed staff in a district reported developing school partnerships, I asked interviewed staff if they had relationships with employers or why they believed such a gap existed. Finally, I asked staff to share recommendations for addressing gaps in district programming, such as how the district could go about clarifying roles, tapping into the knowledge and expertise of staff in new ways, involving staff not currently being utilized, implementing new practices, or making additional efforts to include students with disabilities within existing practices.

Data Analysis

Within this multi-phased mixed methods design, I analyzed data within two phases: a convergent design phase and an explanatory sequential design phase.

Convergent Design Phase

During the convergent design phase, I merged qualitative data from administrator interviews with quantitative data from surveys completed by administrators and staff to identify the general career development initiatives pursued within each district and the various staff members who may have contributed to these initiatives.

Administrator Interviews. I recorded field notes during and after interviews and audio-recorded each interview for transcription and analyses. Upon reviewing interview transcripts, I

used a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) to develop an initial coding framework that addressed the roles that staff play in career development for students with disabilities (e.g., career development activities available to all students within districts, the extent to which students with disabilities were included in career development activities) and the involvement of various staff members (e.g., CTE educators providing accommodations to students with disabilities, school counselors preparing students for work-based learning experiences, special educators connecting students to adult agency providers). I also used data from transcripts and field notes to identify additional staff who played roles in career development for students with disabilities and added them to the survey recruitment list (e.g., a general educator providing career exploration activities in an ACT preparation course; college-career advisors funded through a local foundation who connected students with disabilities to postsecondary vocational training and education programs). I gained feedback from my advisor regarding the clarity of this coding framework. To increase the trustworthiness of this data, I sent summaries of the initial coding framework with notes specific to each district, along with any remaining clarification questions, to each administrator for member checking. An administrator from each district confirmed the accuracy of information provided, and some provided additional clarity (e.g., "I do not believe that related service providers are supporting students in career development, but I would love for them to do so if we had the staffing needed to fulfill these positions consistently"). I incorporated all feedback within the coding framework and findings.

School Staff and Administrator Surveys. I analyzed quantitative data from administrator and staff surveys. I used online surveys with responses required for participants to progress through and complete surveys to prevent missing data. I exported responses to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Given my interest in analyzing data at the

district level using cross-case analysis of a relatively small sample of districts ($n = 10$) rather than characterize the entire population of rural districts in Tennessee, I used descriptive statistics to summarize data within and across districts. For Research Questions 1-3, I used means, standard deviations, and percentages to summarize the following within each district: tasks performed staff, tasks performed for various reasons, and views on staffing and roles (i.e., sufficiency of staffing, clarity of roles, effectiveness for preparing students with disabilities for work). For Research Question 4, I used percentages to summarize tasks completed by each staffing position. For Research Questions 5-6, I used means and standard deviations to summarize the reporting of tasks and views across districts as well as within each district.

Merging of Data. I brought together qualitative data from administrator interviews and quantitative data from surveys (Creswell, 2015). More specifically, I compared (a) information that administrators shared during interviews on career development tasks performed in their district (e.g., CTE programs, dual-credit courses, vocational assessments and programs of study available); staffing models (e.g., case management of students with disabilities, allocation of paraprofessionals); and their perceived district strengths and gaps with (b) staff views of staffing models shared through surveys (e.g., sufficiency of staff available, clarity of roles, effectiveness of preparation of students with disabilities for work) and reporting of career development tasks they performed. As a result of this merging, I identified staff who could further explain these findings in interviews (e.g., special education case managers who wrote IEP transition plans for all students, transition specialists hired through state funding to establish work-based learning experiences, CTE educators supporting several students with disabilities). I also refined interview questions to explain findings within specific districts and for certain staff positions (e.g., asking staff about how case managers and classroom special educators collaborated in

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planning, asking school counselors how they came to support work-based learning).

Explanatory Sequential Design Phase

Individual and Focus Group Interviews. I analyzed data from subsequent individual and focus group interviews with administrators and staff. I transcribed all audio-recorded interviews and worked with the research team to use a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) to (a) establish clear links between research questions and findings from the data, (b) develop detailed descriptions of each case (i.e., district) that allow for within-case and cross-case analysis, and (c) produce summary reports of each district's career development programs.

The research team consisted of myself, a research associate with experience in qualitative analyses and transition for students with disabilities, and my advisor. I applied the initial coding framework developed during the convergent design phase and created additional codes from actual phrases used by interviewed participants when possible. I then collaborated with a second coder (i.e., the research associate) to conduct multiple rounds of coding, meeting regularly and using strategies for achieving ongoing consensus (Saldana, 2016). I met with the second coder to discuss the initial codebook and provide explanation and updates to the coding scheme as needed. Next, the second coder and I independently performed a close reading of one interview to gain an understanding of information addressed and apply inductive codes that emerged from interview data (Thomas, 2006). We met to resolve differences of opinion through discussion and updates to the coding scheme. When necessary, we double-coded text that met the definitions of multiple codes and left text uncoded that did not align with any codes. Finally, we participated in multiple rounds of coding in which we coded 3-4 additional interviews and met to continually refine, collapse, and add themes, codes, and definitions until consensus was reached. This

process continued until we each separately coded half of interviews. Upon adopting a final coding framework, I used the final codebook to independently code remaining interviews.

Explanation of Data. I integrated data by using findings from individual and focus group interviews to explain data from the convergent design phase. Upon applying codes to interviews, I followed the recommendations of Stake (2006) and Yin (2009) for conducting within-case and cross-case analysis. I completed an analysis of each district's case independently (i.e., within-case analysis) to develop a district profile of staffing and role allocation for career development of students with disabilities. I triangulated findings across coded data and field notes from individual and focus group interviews with survey data and administrator interviews using Yin's (2009) process for conducting explanation building to develop a case description of career development within each district. First, I developed a theoretical explanatory statement about roles staff play in career development for students with disabilities. For example, I initially theorized that the presence of specialized staff with specific responsibilities for career development helped to clarify staff roles in this area. Next, I compared this statement to themes and codes that emerged from a single district and revised the theoretical statement to reflect that district more accurately. For example, after comparing my initial theory with data collected from Forrester staff, I adjusted my initial explanation to consider the following: the ambiguity of the Forrester transition specialist's job responsibilities hindered the career development tasks she performed and, although a general educator supported students with high-incidence disabilities in career planning, she did not have many of the students with IDD in her class. This analysis suggested that specialized staff increased role clarity when their own job responsibilities were clearly delineated and infrastructure was in place for all students with disabilities to access them. Finally, I reviewed the revised statement against data from the district. I repeated the process

with codes from the remaining districts, first with those with similar profiles (e.g., one high school with a transition specialist) and then moving on to districts expected to produce varying results (e.g., having more than one high school and no transition specialist; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

       After I developed an explanatory statement that summarized staffing and role allocation within each district, the third member of the research team (i.e., my advisor) acted as a peer auditor, reading the revised statements and providing feedback on clarity. These procedures ensured that final explanatory statements were defensible and aligned with the data and purposes of the study. Finally, I reviewed the 10 cases and used explanatory statements from each case to develop a cross-case assertion on staffing related to career development programs for students with disabilities within these rural Tennessee districts (Stake, 2006). To increase trustworthiness in qualitative findings, I kept an audit trail of all data collection and analysis procedures (Brantlinger et al., 2005) and intentionally sought out disconfirming evidence to each theoretical statement to identify outlying data or alternate explanations across districts (Patton, 2015).

CHAPTER III

Results

In the following sections, I first describe the 10 participating districts and their surrounding communities to contextualize subsequent findings on staff roles in career development for students with disabilities and district-level strengths and gaps that emerged. See Table 1 for district demographics. Then, I address each of my six research questions.

Participating Districts and Surrounding Communities

Woodford County

Woodford County was the largest of all participating districts and included two high schools. Of the Woodford administrators who completed the survey, 60.0% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 20.0% that it was a secondary goal, and 20.0% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. The special education supervisor reported that, although the district offered a variety of CTE courses, students with IDD rarely participated. The district employed a transition specialist and included a separate transition program at which students with disabilities aged 18-22 participated in paid and unpaid work-based learning. The primary industries in Woodford included manufacturing, healthcare, and retail. Staff reported that most of the community were employed locally, with a few commuting to a distant urban area.

Rose County

Rose County had five high schools. Of the surveyed Rose administrators, 42.9% reported

that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 42.9% that it was a secondary goal, and 14.3% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. Rose employed a district-level transition coordinator who provided staff with training, resources, and other supports related to employment. However, the coordinator reported during the initial interview that, as additional responsibilities were added over time (e.g., testing, virtual learning), her position had become less focused on supporting career development. Thus, she had begun allocating additional roles (e.g., partnering with VR, developing work-based learning sites) to special educators across the district. The primary industries in Rose included healthcare, manufacturing, and retail. Staff reported that the various towns within the county were quite varied, with some in remote areas and others closer to a distant urban city, in which many community members were employed.

Maker County

Maker County had three schools serving high school students. Half of surveyed Maker administrators reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, and half reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. During the initial interview, district administrators reported that no community work-based learning opportunities were being provided to students with disabilities nor was the school collaborating with VR counselors or pre-ETS providers. Special education coaches sought to specifically develop work-based learning opportunities and were confident that local employers would participate. Maker was considered the most racially/ethnically diverse of all districts, and some staff described challenges in communicating with families of students who were non-English speakers. The primary industry was

manufacturing. Administrators reported that some people in the surrounding county commuted to distant urbanized area for work, but much of the county worked in the local community.

Blanton County

Blanton County had two high schools. Of the surveyed Blanton administrators, 42.9% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 14.3% that it was a secondary goal, and 42.9% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. Blanton employed two college-career advisors through funding from a local philanthropic foundation. The special education supervisor had assumed her position within the last year and reported that she had limited knowledge of career development or transition planning for students with disabilities and hoped to develop work-based learning opportunities for students aged 18-22 with IDD. The primary industries in Blanton were manufacturing and healthcare. Staff reported that most of the community were employed by local factories with a few commuting to a distant urban city.

Weller County

Weller County had one high school. Of the surveyed Weller administrators, 28.6% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 28.6% that it was a secondary goal (i.e., many other responsibilities were more important), and 42.9% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. During the initial interview, the special education supervisor reported that special educators provided a wide variety of paid and unpaid work-based learning opportunities within the school and in the community for students with IDD. Yet, although some students with high-

incidence disabilities had obtained part-time jobs and met with a state-funded college advisor, they were provided with minimal supports for work. The primary industry in Weller was manufacturing. Administrators reported that some people in the surrounding county commuted to a neighboring state for employment, and others sought work within the local community.

Rieger County

Rieger County had one high school. Of the surveyed Rieger administrators, 20.0% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 60.0% that it was a secondary goal, and 20.0% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. The special education supervisor had newly assumed her position and reported that, although students with disabilities participated in work-based learning, the district needed support for strengthening the quality of IEP transition plans for supporting student employment goals. The primary industries were manufacturing, healthcare, and education. Although staff reported that some people in the county commuted to a distant urbanized area for employment, many sought work within the local community.

Daniels County

Daniels County had one high school and a new special education supervisor. All surveyed Daniels administrators reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of the district. The supervisor reported having limited knowledge of career development or transition planning and hoped to increase partnerships with local agencies and employers. The primary industries were manufacturing and education. The district had recently hired a transition specialist with funding from a state program. Staff reported

that, given their remote location, much of the community worked locally or were unemployed.

Bard County

      Bard County had one high school. Of the surveyed Bard administrators, 75.0% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, and 25.0% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. The special education supervisor reported just hiring a transition specialist with state funds but reported limited work-based learning opportunities in the community for students with disabilities and virtually nonexistent partnerships with local disability agencies. She cited their remote location to limit overall work opportunities. The primary industries were manufacturing, healthcare, and retail. Bard also employed a college-career advisor through funding from the same local philanthropic foundation as Blanton, and these two districts engaged in ongoing joint development of jobs at local factories for high school students from Bard and Blanton.

Forrester County

      Forrester County had one high school. Of the surveyed Forrester administrators, 11.1% reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district, 66.7% said it was a secondary goal, and 22.2% reported that they were unsure of the extent to which this was a priority. District administrators reported that, although they had a transition specialist funded through a state program and students with disabilities were included in district-wide career development initiatives, the district offered limited CTE courses and other work-related opportunities to any students in the district. The primary industry in Forrester was manufacturing. As with Daniels and Bard, Forrester staff

reported that the remote location of their county led much of the community to work locally.

Beam County

Beam County was the smallest of all participating districts and had one school serving middle and high school students together. All the surveyed Beam administrators reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary goal of their district. The special education supervisor reported several new initiatives related to career development for students with disabilities, such as designating a special education transition teacher who developed work-based learning experiences in the community and hiring job coaches with funding from a state program. Yet, staff reported that the district provided few work-related supports for students with high-incidence disabilities. The primary industries in Beam were manufacturing, healthcare, and education. Staff cited the highly remote location of the county and pervasive poverty as factors limiting overall local employment opportunities.

RQ1: What are the Roles of School Staff in Career Development for Students with Disabilities in Rural Districts?

Across the 10 districts, school staff reported performing a variety of the 48 career development tasks spanning the six areas. The average number of tasks completed by a single staff member was 16. See Table 3 for a complete list of tasks performed within and across districts, as reported through surveys. The extent to which findings varied across districts is addressed under RQ6.

Table 3

Percentage of School Staff Performing Career Development Tasks by District

Task	District[a]										Total
	Woodford	Rose	Maker	Blanton	Weller	Rieger	Daniels	Bard	Forrester	Beam	
Number of school staff who completed survey (*n*)	50	23	32	22	27	31	15	11	9	15	235
Career Assessment and Goal Development[b]	**86.0**	**91.3**	**68.8**	**77.3**	**81.5**	**77.4**	**80.0**	**72.7**	**55.6**	**93.3**	**80.0**
Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans	74.0	78.3	59.4	59.1	63.0	67.7	80.0	72.7	55.6	86.7	69.4
Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans	46.0	56.5	40.6	45.5	44.4	41.9	33.3	54.5	22.2	73.3	46.0
Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development	52.0	60.9	31.3	40.9	40.7	48.4	33.3	45.5	44.4	60.0	46.0
Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD	46.0	52.2	34.4	40.9	33.3	58.1	33.3	45.5	33.3	66.7	44.7
Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning	44.0	69.6	28.1	22.7	51.9	38.7	26.7	54.5	33.3	66.7	43.0
Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD	36.0	43.5	31.3	45.5	33.3	48.4	46.7	45.5	44.4	46.7	40.4
Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills	36.0	47.8	25.0	36.4	44.4	32.3	20.0	36.4	22.2	53.3	35.7
Collect data on career development goals for SWD	42.0	60.9	31.3	22.7	29.6	32.3	13.3	36.4	33.3	60.0	36.6
Career-Related Instruction[b]	**78.0**	**91.3**	**75.0**	**68.2**	**85.2**	**80.6**	**80.0**	**81.8**	**66.7**	**93.3**	**80.0**
Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care)	58.0	78.3	62.5	54.5	74.1	61.3	53.3	72.7	44.4	66.7	63.0
Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work	54.5	78.3	56.3	50.0	63.0	54.8	60.0	54.5	55.6	73.3	61.7
Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal setting)	54.5	73.9	56.3	40.9	66.7	67.7	60.0	54.5	22.2	73.3	60.4
Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and their pre-requisite education and skills	56.0	65.2	34.4	45.5	59.3	41.9	26.7	63.6	44.4	60.0	49.8
Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals	54.5	47.8	43.8	40.9	40.7	58.1	40.0	54.5	44.4	60.0	47.2
Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job)	44.0	69.6	40.6	36.4	51.9	51.6	40.0	36.4	11.1	60.0	46.4
Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD	38.0	52.2	28.1	40.9	63.0	38.7	20.0	54.5	33.3	53.3	41.7
Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class)	50.0	43.5	21.9	36.4	51.9	35.5	13.3	45.5	44.4	73.3	41.3
Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate	42.0	47.8	21.9	31.8	48.1	41.9	6.7	45.5	33.3	60.0	38.3
Addressing Collateral Skills and Needs for Employment[b]	**78.0**	**87.0**	**65.6**	**77.3**	**77.8**	**71.0**	**66.7**	**63.6**	**44.4**	**86.7**	**74.0**
Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings	45.5	73.9	43.8	59.1	70.4	48.4	60.0	45.5	33.3	66.7	57.4
Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD	45.5	73.9	43.8	36.4	55.6	41.9	40.0	45.5	22.2	60.0	50.6
Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications)	42.0	65.2	21.9	31.8	48.1	38.7	40.0	45.5	33.3	53.3	41.3
Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD	36.4	56.5	34.4	36.4	33.3	32.3	13.3	36.4	11.1	53.3	38.3
Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare and work for SWD	46.0	43.5	28.1	31.8	37.0	29.0	33.3	45.5	11.1	66.7	37.9
Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education programs related to careers of interest	34.0	47.8	25.0	31.8	40.7	38.7	26.7	45.5	11.1	40.0	34.9
Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations)	36.0	39.1	15.6	22.7	18.5	32.3	6.7	45.5	22.2	26.7	27.9
Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD are working	24.0	17.4	15.6	18.2	14.8	16.1	0.0	45.5	11.1	20.0	18.3
Career-Related Experiences[b]	**68.0**	**60.9**	**59.4**	**36.4**	**70.4**	**54.8**	**60.0**	**72.7**	**22.2**	**66.7**	**59.6**
Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences	50.0	47.8	43.8	22.7	37.0	38.7	40.0	72.7	0.0	40.0	41.3
Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Future Health Professionals) or extra-curricular opportunities in the school	40.0	30.4	31.3	22.7	55.6	35.5	6.7	45.5	11.1	40.0	34.5
Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart)	28.0	43.5	28.1	18.2	22.2	19.4	20.0	36.4	11.1	46.7	26.8
Connect SWD to *unpaid* work-based learning experiences in	28.0	47.8	15.6	18.2	22.2	22.6	20.0	36.4	11.1	46.7	26.4

	District[a]										
Task	Woodford	Rose	Maker	Blanton	Weller	Rieger	Daniels	Bard	Forrester	Beam	Total
the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling)											
Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest	34.0	26.1	18.8	22.7	25.9	19.4	6.7	45.5	11.1	40.0	25.5
Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites	28.0	34.8	15.6	18.2	18.5	16.1	6.7	18.2	0.0	26.7	20.4
Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers	26.0	30.4	18.8	13.6	7.4	22.6	6.7	18.2	11.1	26.7	19.6
Connect SWD to *paid* (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community	26.0	21.7	9.4	13.6	11.1	19.4	6.7	27.3	11.1	26.7	17.9
Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike)	26.0	26.1	15.6	13.6	7.4	16.1	13.3	18.2	0.0	26.7	17.9
School Partnerships[b]	**46.0**	**60.9**	**28.1**	**36.4**	**25.9**	**41.9**	**26.7**	**45.5**	**33.3**	**66.7**	**40.9**
Support families of SWD to develop high expectations in their child's career development	30.0	39.1	28.1	31.8	22.2	38.7	6.7	45.5	22.2	60.0	31.9
Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory)	26.0	34.8	18.8	13.6	11.1	19.4	6.7	27.3	11.1	40.0	21.3
Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, or other agencies	28.0	30.4	18.8	9.1	3.7	19.4	20.0	36.4	11.1	33.3	20.9
Develop partnerships with *disability agencies* (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) *or community organizations* (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school	26.0	30.4	12.5	22.7	11.1	12.9	13.3	36.4	11.1	33.3	20.4
Develop partnerships with local *employers* to provide work opportunities to SWD	30.0	26.1	9.4	13.6	7.4	12.9	0.0	36.4	0.0	40.0	18.3
Develop partnerships with local *colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships* to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD	28.0	17.4	6.3	22.7	0.0	22.6	0.0	36.4	0.0	33.3	17.4
Program Development and Improvement[b]	**40.0**	**47.8**	**37.5**	**36.4**	**40.7**	**45.2**	**13.3**	**45.5**	**33.3**	**66.7**	**40.9**
Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD	18.0	21.7	28.1	18.2	29.6	29.0	0.0	27.3	22.2	53.3	24.3
Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community	20.0	21.7	12.5	13.6	18.5	22.6	13.3	45.5	11.1	53.3	21.3
Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers	20.0	21.7	15.6	22.7	18.5	19.4	13.3	36.4	0.0	46.7	20.9
Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives	20.0	17.4	12.5	18.2	14.8	22.6	13.3	36.4	0.0	40.0	19.1
Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	20.0	30.4	9.4	13.6	3.7	25.8	13.3	45.5	0.0	26.7	18.3
Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs	20.0	26.1	9.4	9.1	18.5	19.4	6.7	27.3	0.0	40.0	17.9
Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students	18.0	8.7	9.4	9.1	3.7	16.1	6.7	27.3	11.1	26.7	13.2
Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	10.0	17.4	3.1	9.1	3.7	16.1	0.0	27.3	0.0	33.3	11.1

Note: SWD = students with disabilities.
[a]Percentage of school staff who reported to perform the given task daily, weekly, or monthly.
[b]Percentage of school staff who reported to perform at least one task within the given category daily, weekly, or monthly.

Career Assessment and Goal Development

Across districts, 80% of surveyed school staff reported that they regularly (i.e., monthly, weekly, or daily) performed at least one of the eight tasks related to career assessment and goal development. Within this area, 69.4% of staff reported they had informal conversations with students with disabilities about their career paths. For example, an interviewed Forrester general educator described her persistence in serving as a "hounder" who follows up with students with disabilities in her classes regarding their future goals to ensure they continue to make progress:

> How often do I have conversations with these kids? Weekly, [for] some of them it's daily until I get them on a path and then I will help them fill out their FAFSAs. I will help them get in contact with people who can [help]…and then they have to do the footwork. But I'm that nagging mom who is constantly saying, "You need to go get a copy of your IEP. You need to go to the board of education with your parent for a letter asking for this information."

Nearly half developed short-term goals for students related to career development (46.0%) or supported students in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways or plans (46.0%). Fewer surveyed staff reported involvement in conducting summative assessments to evaluate students' mastery of employment-related skills (35.7%) or collecting data on career development goals (36.6%). Surveyed administrators generally agreed that tasks related to career assessment and goal development were performed sufficiently within their districts.

Career-Related Instruction

Across districts, 80.0% of surveyed school staff reported that they performed at least one of the nine tasks in career-related instruction. Within this area, more than half of staff reported that they teach students with disabilities: general employment skills (63.0%); functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work (61.7%); and self-advocacy and self-determination skills (60.4%). Throughout interviews, participants specifically highlighted the importance of teaching students about the "job descriptions, work conditions, skills and qualifications, and job availability" of various careers of interest given the employment-related challenges of living in rural communities (e.g., limited or low-paying job opportunities, long commute times to jobs and postsecondary education programs in urban cities).

Staff supporting students with IDD tended to describe their instruction of job-specific skills, but staff supporting students with high-incidence disabilities tended to focus more broadly on general employment skills due to the limited time available within their academic classes to

focus on work preparation with their students. A Rose special educator said:

> We don't do [work-based learning], so I guess ours would be more of the soft skills… the class that I would do anything like that with is skinny block and it's only 50 minutes long. So, then you have to consider how long it's going to take to get somewhere, what we're going to do there, how long it's going to take to come back. But again, it's more of an intervention to help them with reading and math, so there's not a lot of like community-based learning or work-based learning incorporated into it. But I mean, it would be nice to have additional resources… I think the kids would really enjoy something like that, but that's just not something that is plausible around here… I guess there's just not a big push for work skills. I mean, I try to work with them a little bit as they get older on transitioning out of high school, especially the ones once I have sophomore year, some of them want to start getting jobs. And so, I'll talk to them about that and try to mentor them in a kind of way. But, other than that, I would say there's not a huge focus [on employment].

Special educators across Beam, Rose, Woodford, and Bard highlighted that pre-ETS providers within their districts provided career-related instruction to their students by pulling their students from class or pushing in within their classrooms while they "take a break."

Less than half of surveyed staff reported involvement in planning career development classes in ways that students with disabilities could meaningfully participate (38.3%), ensuring that students could access challenging career development classes (41.3%), or developing curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills (41.7%). When it came to teaching students with IDD, interviewed CTE educators tended to focus more on creating opportunities for these students to gain skills that would increase their independence in daily living (e.g., "knowing how to take care of a pet," "knowing how to take care of their yard"), rather than increasing their employability. Three participants (i.e., a Bard CTE educator, a Weller CTE educator, a Forrester general educator) described the inclusion of students with high-incidence disabilities within instructional units or courses that focused on career exploration, but the Bard educator was the only participant to have taught a student with more significant disabilities, such as ongoing support needs related to communication, mobility, and/or self-care, within her class.

Nonetheless, interviewed administrators generally agreed that tasks for career-related instruction were performed sufficiently within their districts. They expressed lower agreement in Beam, Bard, and Rieger, despite 80.0% or more of staff in these counties reporting involvement in this area.

Addressing Collateral Skills and Needs for Employment

Across districts, 74.0% of surveyed staff reported that they performed at least one of the eight tasks for addressing collateral skills and needs for employment. More than half of staff reported that they supported students with disabilities in regulating challenging behaviors that could present issues at work (57.4%) and provided input and intervention on communication skills (50.6%). During interviews, staff from various positions described efforts to support the emotional and behavioral needs of students, but several also expressed a desire for additional training and support in performing this role. In fact, multiple CTE educators said that, when they were unable to address student behaviors (e.g., outbursts, lack of attendance to mechanical tasks), students were typically removed from the course "because it is just unsafe for everyone."

On the other hand, fewer surveyed staff reported supporting students in applying to postsecondary education programs (34.9%), educating students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating (27.9%), or educating students and families about managing government benefits (18.3%). In interviews, some special educators cited a lack of time to address these areas with students. A Rieger special education case manager said, "there's no specific time they could really work on [identifying postsecondary education programs and applying] during school." Others expressed limited understanding of the supports their students could access upon graduation. A Beam special educator questioned: "Who are the

agencies? What do they do? What's the timeline? At what point do kids hook up with them and why? That's something I'm not all that clear on, and I need to understand that better."

Career-Related Experiences

Across districts, 59.6% of surveyed staff reported that they performed at least one of the nine tasks in career-related experiences. More than one third of staff reported that they support students in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences (41.3%) or participating in career and technical student organizations (34.5%). Multiple staff members in different positions described their efforts to ensure that students receive accommodations that meet their needs in CTE courses. Administrators reported providing training and conversations to further improve the ways in which educators modified safety tests in CTE courses and met the needs of individual students. A Rieger principal pointed out that, "so many times I see teachers and their accommodation is 'I give [students with disabilities] 20 questions instead of 40 on a test but that's not really what I'm looking for as accommodations." Therefore, he had scheduled an outside consultant to provide professional development to educators "to help them see what actual accommodations are and how to implement those accommodations." Additionally, a handful of CTE educators described supports they provided students with disabilities who participated in their extra-curricular organizations. Yet, most tended to describe the participation of students with disabilities in their organizations as solely for social purposes ("he just likes to draw and it keeps him calm," "they have fun going into the greenhouse"). A few CTE educators explained that, although they would like for more students with more significant disabilities to participate, these students were limited by their transportation that left immediately after school before many organizations met.

Few surveyed participants reported facilitating work experiences for students with disabilities, such as developing school-based employment experiences (26.8%), connecting students to unpaid work-based learning experiences in the community (26.4%), or connecting students to paid jobs in the community (17.9%). Yet, both survey and interview data suggested that, for districts in which students with disabilities were regularly placed in work-based learning experiences (i.e., Beam, Rose, Woodford, Daniels, Rieger, Weller), such experiences were developed by only one or two individuals (e.g., special educators and pre-ETS providers, paraprofessionals). Fewer surveyed administrators reported that staff sufficiently performed tasks specific to career-related experiences within their districts than in the previously described areas.

School Partnerships

Across districts, 40.9% of surveyed staff reported that they performed at least one of the six tasks related to school partnerships. Staff most frequently reported supporting families of students with disabilities to develop high expectations in their child's career development (31.9%). A Bard speech-language therapist pointed out that "most of our roles come from what parents expect their kids to do" when explaining how she prioritized (or did not prioritize) goals for her students. Yet, multiple interviewed staff discussed their struggles to increase the expectations that parents have for their child to include obtaining higher-paying jobs (or even jobs at all), citing that "we're fighting a lot of predetermined ideals from parents of what their students can do." They talked about the difficulty in "convincing parents" that postsecondary education programs, work opportunities, supports that could be provided, or available funding mechanisms were "legit" and "not just something the teacher made up" when parents "really didn't think it was real." A Forrester educator explained:

It's nice, as a parent, to have somebody that I can verify yes [regarding] what they are coming home with. Because kids definitely have the ability to hear what they want to hear, but to have an adult there to say it's legit. And that's where I've been fortunate knowing many of the parents and them calling me and saying, "Is this true?" "Yea, that's true. Tell him to come on down with his IEP and we can get started."

Multiple staff serving students with significant disabilities lamented that they struggled to educate families in expecting "anything at all" for their students after graduation.

Less than a quarter of surveyed staff reported developing partnerships with disability agencies (20.4%); local employers to provide work opportunities for students with disabilities (18.3%); or local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships to provide opportunities or referrals to students with disabilities (17.4%). In some districts, staff lamented that inconsistent agency staffing limited their ability to partner. They also cited school schedules – particularly for students included in general education courses – that made it "difficult to find a time during the day" to connect these students with agency representatives who "wanted to come in for multiple students at once, rather than just one person." In other districts, staff members admitted that they did not possess relationships with individuals from postsecondary settings and were "unsure of what kinds of help students get when they get to college." Special educators and paraprofessionals who described partnering with employers tended to do so using their own personal networks (e.g., "asking my family members and friends," "talking to people at my church") and without guidance from administration or collaboration with CTE staff from district work-based learning programs available to typical students. Yet, one Weller special educator explained that her ongoing collaboration with the work-based learning coordinator developing jobs for typical students had allowed her to tap into "well-developed" partnerships already in existence between the school and local employers.

Program Development and Improvement

Across districts, 40.9% of surveyed staff reported to perform at least one of the eight tasks related to program development and improvement. Staff most frequently reported that they selected resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for students with disabilities (24.3%). Interviewed CTE educators tended to report that their curricula were guided by state standards and administrator choices, but special educators often described these decisions to fall almost entirely on themselves. A Beam special educator said, "I'm just dreaming [curricula] up, brushing my teeth and going, 'Oh, maybe that would work.' And lots of times, honestly, I'll take the standard and break it up and start Googling. Seriously, seat of my pants." She later explained "there are times when I think to myself, 'surely, I'm reinventing the wheel. Surely, somebody somewhere has done all this.' I've even tried to put it on Pinterest thinking somebody's done this, but I can't find it anywhere, so I'm just making it up as I go along."

Very few surveyed staff reported involvement in any of the other tasks related to program development and improvement. There were multiple districts in which no surveyed staff (Forrester and Daniels) or one only staff member (Maker and Weller) reported receiving or providing training in career development. Across interviews, a few staff members described formal trainings they received from their district for providing accommodations in CTE courses, and district administrators reiterated a priority on providing professional development in this area. In contrast, several staff members – particularly paraprofessionals – expressed a desire for training or opportunities for understanding various diploma pathways, partnering with employers and agencies, and supporting students on the job. Likewise, fewer surveyed administrators reported that staff received sufficient training than in any other areas.

RQ2: How Do School Staff Come to Assume Their Roles?

Participants reported that they assumed roles related to career development for students with disabilities for a variety of reasons (see Table 4). A small percentage of surveyed staff (ranging from only 3.7% to 14.0% across all tasks) reported that they were unsure of how they came to perform career development tasks. The extent to which findings varied across districts is addressed under RQ6.

Table 4

Staff Reporting of How They Came to Assume Career Development Tasks (Across Districts)

		Percentage of staff who assumed task for selected reason[a]			
Task	No. staff who reported to perform task (*n*)	I chose to perform this task on my own	I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues	Someone else assigned me to perform this task	I am unsure of how I came to perform this task
Career Assessment and Goal Development[b]	**175**	**38.0**	**24.8**	**25.4**	**11.9**
Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans	222	56.3	17.1	16.2	10.4
Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans	177	33.3	26.0	27.1	13.6
Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development	184	38.6	28.8	22.8	9.8
Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD	170	35.9	25.9	29.2	10.0
Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning	183	36.6	24.0	25.1	14.2
Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD	163	34.4	26.4	27.0	12.3
Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills	147	37.4	23.1	27.2	12.2
Collect data on career development goals for SWD	156	31.4	26.9	28.8	12.8
Career-Related Instruction[b]	**162**	**43.6**	**27.7**	**22.2**	**6.5**
Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care)	187	48.7	29.4	18.2	3.7
Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work	172	39.5	24.4	29.7	6.4
Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal setting)	183	46.4	30.6	18.0	4.9
Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and their pre-requisite education and skills.	181	42.5	25.4	23.2	8.8
Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals	162	38.3	28.4	26.5	6.8
Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job)	141	44.7	22.7	22.7	9.9
Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD	142	46.5	28.9	19.0	5.6
Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class)	152	41.4	30.9	21.1	6.6
Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate	137	44.5	28.5	21.2	5.8
Addressing Collateral Skills and Needs for Employment[b]	**136**	**40.1**	**31.3**	**19.2**	**9.5**
Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings	177	42.9	33.3	17.5	6.2

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Task	N				
Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD	153	41.2	30.1	21.6	7.2
Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications)	148	45.9	28.4	18.9	6.8
Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD	132	39.4	30.3	18.2	12.1
Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare and work for SWD	131	37.4	30.5	16.8	15.3
Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education programs related to careers of interest	141	39.0	32.6	22.0	6.4
Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations)	116	37.1	32.8	20.7	9.5
Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD are working	90	37.8	32.2	17.8	12.2
Career-Related Experiences[b]	**110**	**41.2**	**28.5**	**18.1**	**12.3**
Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences	143	37.8	27.3	25.2	9.8
Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Future Health Professionals) or extra-curricular opportunities in the school	143	42.0	23.8	20.3	14.0
Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart)	101	38.6	32.7	14.9	13.9
Connect SWD to *unpaid* work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling)	105	42.9	30.5	15.2	11.4
Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest	121	47.9	24.8	15.7	11.6
Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites	81	38.3	29.6	18.5	13.6
Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers	114	36.8	28.9	23.7	10.5
Connect SWD to *paid* (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community	103	44.7	30.1	12.6	12.6
Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike)	77	41.6	28.6	16.9	13.0
School Partnerships[b]	**89**	**40.5**	**30.6**	**17.8**	**11.1**
Support families of SWD to develop high expectations in their child's career development	120	44.2	29.2	16.7	10.0
Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory)	78	44.9	29.5	14.1	11.5
Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, or other agencies	90	40.0	26.7	21.1	12.2
Develop partnerships with *disability agencies* (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) or *community organizations* (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school	85	37.6	32.9	18.8	10.6
Develop partnerships with local *employers* to provide work opportunities to SWD	83	41.0	33.7	16.9	8.4
Develop partnerships with local *colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships* to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD	79	35.4	31.6	19.0	13.9
Program Development and Improvement[b]	**83**	**36.8**	**27.1**	**23.9**	**12.2**
Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD	98	41.8	28.6	20.4	9.2
Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community	87	41.4	26.4	18.4	13.8
Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers	87	43.7	29.9	16.1	10.3
Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives	74	35.1	29.7	23.0	12.2
Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	107	27.1	29.0	30.8	13.1
Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs	73	37.0	23.3	26.0	13.7
Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students	72	30.6	23.6	33.3	12.5
Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	69	37.7	26.1	23.2	13.0

Note: SWD = students with disabilities.
[a]Percentage of school staff who reported to perform each task that reported doing so for the selected reason.
[b]Average percentage of school staff who reported to perform each task for the selected reason across items within the given category.

Assumption of Roles on Own

Across all areas of career development, more staff reported choosing to perform tasks on their own than for any other reason. The percentage of surveyed staff performing each task who did so on their own ranged from 36.8% to 43.6% across the six career development areas. The tasks that staff were most likely to choose to perform on their own were: having informal conversations with students with disabilities about their career plans did so on their own (56.3%),

teaching general employment skills (48.7%), connecting students to mentors or professionals in careers of interest (47.9%), developing curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills (46.5%), teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills (46.4%), and supporting students in preparing to obtain employment (45.9%).

After Recognizing a Need. During interviews, staff highlighted some reasons for which they self-decided tasks on their own. Multiple staff described instances in which they assumed roles after recognizing a need that was important for student career development that was not being performed by anyone in their district. For example, a Rose special educator explained that he scheduled times for all students to meet with VR counselors at their high school or else "it wouldn't happen." Others discussed performing tasks related to work-based learning on their own. For example, a Maker special educator reported that she took it upon herself to write grants to build a greenhouse and school coffeeshop to provide her students with work experiences:

> It was a need that I saw that my students needed something outside…I had
> students that love getting their hands dirty and loved being outside, but I also saw
> a need for my students who did not like that kind of thing and would be more
> interested in a possible restaurant experience.

Administrators in Beam, Woodford, Daniels, Rieger, and Weller affirmed that special educators and paraprofessionals in their districts were "a huge asset" in taking it upon themselves to "reach out to local businesses and create plans for work-based learning."

Several staff in various positions described taking on roles related to collaboration in their districts after recognizing a need to work with colleagues or others in their local communities without having any formal mechanisms to collaborate, such as professional development opportunities or common meeting times. For example, a Maker school counselor described her ongoing collaboration with special education teachers as needed: "She's just in my office probably 10 times a day, we need help with this. We need to do this. Can we be part of this

meeting?" Similarly, a CTE educator described her collaboration with other staff to gain support

for students who may have disabilities but for whom she had no formal IEP paperwork, saying:

> When there is a problem like [a student not making progress], I'll ask around with the other teachers to see if they notice the learning disabilities that I do, and then we will make the principal aware and the special ed teachers aware that, "Hey, there has been a child that might have slipped through the cracks."

In another example, a Forrester general educator who incorporated career exploration into her

ACT prep course described her decisions to support students with disabilities in career

development to fulfill broader community needs:

> I don't do it because it's my job. I don't do it because somebody is expecting it. And I'm not doing it to one-up someone else. I'm doing it because I live in a community that is dying. Our industry in our county is dying. If [the local factory] closes down in 2028 like they're planning on doing, [our county] will blow off the map. What can I do to educate these kids? I'm going to live here for the next, hopefully, 40 more years. I need a plumber. I might go to the nursing home, and I need someone to wash my hair every day and wipe the drool off my chin. I want us to have a society of working productive adults who pay taxes, who build our community. If every one of them leave because there is no job opportunity or they have nothing to come for, our county is going [to die]...I mean, we only have a county of 8,000 and it's dwindling every day. So, anything that I can do to help make a child's life and have the living that they want, as well as to give back to the community and hopefully water us to keep us from completely drying up. That is what pushes me at the end of the day.

Based on Previous Training or Experience. In some instances, interviewed staff

discussed how they assumed roles based on their previous training or experiences. A few staff

members described prior work experiences that had shaped the roles they play to serve students

with disabilities in career development. For example, a Bard special educator described

knowledge she gained on connecting with adult agency providers through a previous position in

a school district with robust connections and how this experience has motivated her to develop

similar connections in her current district: "[I wonder about] having outside agencies come. Who

do you have come in? What is involved? I am very used to making sure someone was at every

single IEP and that's not happening as much as I would like here. So that is something I'm

working on." Similarly, a Bard speech-language therapist discussed previous experiences

supporting students at school-based enterprises that had shaped her thinking about the skills that

she could support in future workplaces, saying:

> From that [school-based enterprise] experience, a lot of parents were ready for their child
> to have some type of job when they graduated high school…and I think that's where our
> roles came from…what they were wanting us to work on and what was expected.

A few educators described ways in which their previous experiences supervising

employees with disabilities in other industries, teaching technical college courses, or providing

vocational training had assisted them in identifying skills that students need for work and

strategies for teaching these skills to them. A Weller CTE educator explained, "So, I've actually

worked in a workplace with kids with disabilities, and maybe it's just the mindset that I have…I

don't have an issue having them in the classroom." These experiences also shed light on

opportunities or perspectives from outside the school system. A Forrester educator with a second

job at an employment agency described how she "saw how many programs that there were

available for students who have obstacles, whether it be a learning disability" after obtaining a

second job at a local employment agency and began supporting students in identifying and

applying for such programs. She said she came to learn "what they [at the employment agency]

were doing or needing at the high school and realized that I know how we can do that or seeing

how we can take the two worlds and we can find a way to mesh them together."

Staff also described how training from outside the district had informed their roles. A

Weller special educator described how the ongoing professional development she completed for

her work-based learning certification had shaped the roles she performs to support her students:

> With our recertifications, we actually get in a room and talk about the skills and what's
> expected for our students, and then you learn what's going on in other districts. So, I
> guess kind of some of those initial connections were through that…I took basically some
> information from the work-based learning packet I received that talks about this is what

work-based learning is, and this is about what it does for our students, and this is what they gain from it. And then formulated a letter that said, you know, we're asking you to partner with us to improve the quality of life for our students and going out and meeting with businesses and giving them the work-based learning information and talking about what we want our program to be and asking them to just give us an opportunity.

Additionally, a few staff described ways in which experiences with family members with disabilities had shaped their roles. For example, Rose CTE educator shared, "I have a nephew that's autistic…so I've been learning how to handle and identify help in that area…and so I'm pretty good about [understanding] the IEP." Lastly, a few staff described how their own parenting experiences have shaped the tasks they perform with students to prepare them for future success. A Maker paraprofessional said:

> A lot of time we'll get to talk to kids about what are you going to do, where you going to school, stuff like that that we get to help them with, but I think that's just coming from a mom wanting to talk to them, to see what their goals are.

Viewed as a Responsibility of Their Job. A handful of interviewed staff described circumstances in which they assumed roles because they felt it was their "responsibility." For example, a Weller CTE teacher stated that she provided accommodations to students with significant disabilities in her classroom because, "If they're in my classroom, then I feel that's my role as the teacher to make sure the student's getting what they need." A Forrester general educator described a broader sense of responsibility to her school district as a driving force of her assumption of a variety of roles related to career development, using the following metaphor:

> If I walk down the hallway and there's a piece of paper on the floor that someone dropped, it's not my role to clean up the floors, but I'm going to because it's my school. And I take pride in it, even though my role is not a custodian. I still take pride in being a part.

Nonetheless, these participants affirmed that these perceptions of their job responsibilities were their own, rather than communicated from a supervisor.

Roles Determined After Collaborating with Others

Staff also reported assuming roles across various areas of career development after collaborating with colleagues. The average percentage of surveyed staff performing each task who did so after collaborating with colleagues ranged from 24.8% to 31.3% across the six career development areas. Approximately one third of staff who reported developing school partnerships did so after collaborating with colleagues, such as partnering with local employers (33.7%), disability agencies (32.9%), and local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships (31.6%). Staff also reported developing work experiences after collaborating with colleagues. In an example from interviews, a Bard CTE educator explained how developing a school store position for a student with disabilities within her career exploration class occurred after a paraprofessional asked her, "Hey, do you think that he could come in your class first block to do some of this [career exploration] stuff?" In addition, some participants shared that they determined roles after collaborating with professionals outside of the district. For example, staff taught certain job-specific skills upon speaking with an employer or a technical school instructor about the skills they would value from a student. They cited that this collaboration was particularly crucial for ensuring that students could "actually" access job opportunities and technical programs that "were few and far between" in their rural areas.

Specifically, several staff described the knowledge of programs and opportunities within their district that resulted from their own collaborations to expand the roles they could play in preparing their students with disabilities for work. For example, a Weller special educator supporting students with significant disabilities described the value of "tapping into the guidance department" (i.e., school counselors and the college-career advisor) and "CTE director" at her district to identify opportunities with which she could connect her students:

Those are kind of those biggest go-to's because anything that's going on district wide, they're going to know about it. That college and career [advisor] is someone that any student, not just our students, can benefit from. And our CTE director is really good to pull information or be aware of things that are going on.

Staff also described their knowledge of local industry needs and employer expectations to influence their roles. For example, a Beam special educator described how, after recognizing that a local store needed assistance in organizing inventory to improve sales, she taught her students to create labels and reorganize the products, leading to the employer hiring the students for pay. She persisted, "We have to help the employer as much as the employer's helping us. It isn't all just warm and fuzzy. It has to actually help them in the job at that time on the site."

Delegation of Roles

Lastly, some surveyed staff also reported assuming roles across various areas of career development after someone else assigned them to perform such tasks. The average percentage of staff performing each task who did so after being assigned it from a supervisor ranged from 17.8% to 25.4% across the six career development areas. The most common example from interviews pertained to CTE educators and, at times, school counselors and related service providers sharing information about student skills or interests at their IEP transition planning meetings after being asked by an administrator. As a Woodford CTE educator shared, staff tended to characterize IEP transition meetings as "productive" and "open to input from all over the place." Yet, these staff agreed that their involvement was relatively limited. CTE educators shared that they were sometimes asked to attend IEP meetings for students who were not in their classes "simply to serve as the general education representative." In another common example, paraprofessionals reported that they were delegated the role of "gathering data" on career-related IEP transition goals, but "would like to be more involved with how [these goals] were written."

Additionally, some staff described instances in which they inherited roles "based on how things have always been done" by predecessors before them. Examples that emerged included bringing students to previously established work-based learning sites and teaching job-specific tasks that were performed by past students (e.g., folding pizza boxes, making greeting cards). Paraprofessionals and related services providers reported teaching students skills for IEP goals that "were already in place when I started with [the student]," even if they felt "there are more important things for them to be working on" for employment. A few administrators in Blanton, Rose, Daniels, and Rieger districts reported that certain staffing models or roles were developed by prior administrators but wondered if they were "the best way to do things." Examples included case management of students with disabilities, staff assignment to specific schools or classrooms, limited involvement of school counselors with students with disabilities, and dismissal of related services for high school students that could potentially support employment.

RQ3: How do School Staff View Their Roles and District Staffing Models?

Cross-case analysis suggested that staff roles in providing career development services to students with disabilities across rural Tennessee high schools were shaped collectively through the interactions of various staff-level, district-level, and community-level factors within each district. Staff views of their own roles and the staffing models adopted within their districts varied widely across districts as well as between administrators and staff within several districts. The following sections describe trends in staff views on role allocation and staffing models that emerged across the 10 districts. See Table 5 for a joint display of (a) quantitative survey data summarizing staff views, (b) qualitative findings on the unique district factors that explained these views, and (c) explanatory statements that emerged for each district through integration.

The extent to which findings differed across districts is further addressed under RQ6.

Table 5

Joint Display of Staffing and Role Allocation by District

District		Quantitative findings[a]				Qualitative findings	Integration
		Staffing is sufficient to prepare *all* students for employment	Staffing is sufficient to prepare *students with disabilities* for employment	Staff roles are clear for supporting *students with disabilities* in career development	Staff effectively prepare *students with disabilities* for employment	Emerged themes that explained views on staffing and roles	Explanatory statements
Woodford						• Staff had limited awareness of local resources	Many Woodford staff lacked awareness of local resources within other departments and cross-departmental collaboration, so the career development services they provided to students depended on their own networks and mindsets, and these varied across classrooms and schools.
	Admin	3.0 (0.7)	3.0 (0.7)	3.2 (0.5)	3.6 (0.6)	• District lacked cross-departmental collaboration	
	Staff	2.5 (0.7)	2.5 (0.7)	2.7 (0.7)	2.8 (0.7)	• Services varied across multiple high schools	
Rose						• Specialized staff clarified roles	Rose's district-wide transition specialist had provided training and resources that clarified roles for staff in various positions; but the staffing, CTE courses, and other career development services available varied widely across the five high schools and their distinct surrounding communities.
	Admin	2.6 (0.8)	2.7 (0.8)	3.0 (0.6)	3.0 (0.6)	• Services varied across multiple high schools	
	Staff	2.5 (0.6)	2.5 (0.7)	2.6 (0.8)	2.8 (0.7)	• Staff had varied awareness of local resources	
Maker						• Specialized staff clarified roles	Maker provided training on diploma types and allocated transportation and staffing to facilitate inclusion within CTE and imposed a case management model that clarified staff roles; but further administrator support was needed for staff to provide work-based learning for students with IDD.
	Admin	2.1 (0.8)	2.3 (0.7)	2.5 (0.9)	2.6 (0.7)	• Staff had limited awareness of local resources	
	Staff	2.8 (0.8)	2.7 (0.8)	2.7 (0.7)	2.8 (0.8)	• District lacked partnerships	
Blanton						• Specialized staff clarified roles	Blanton employed college-career advisors, allocated staff across schools, and partnered with local employers for programs that included students with HID; but the limited collaboration and partnerships of self-contained special educators limited the services they provided to students with IDD.
	Admin	3.1 (0.7)	2.9 (1.1)	2.7 (1.0)	3.1 (0.7)	• District had partnerships	
	Staff	2.8 (0.8)	2.6 (0.8)	2.6 (0.7)	2.9 (0.8)	• District lacked cross-departmental collaboration	
						• Staff had limited administrator involvement	
Weller						• Staff were aware of local resources	Weller's professional development on collaboration and strong partnership between self-contained special educators and CTE work-based learning staff cultivated robust work-based learning experiences for students with IDD; but limited staffing was available to explicitly prepare students with HID for work.
	Admin	3.1 (0.7)	2.7 (1.0)	3.1 (0.4)	3.0 (0.6)	• District had cross-departmental collaboration	
	Staff	2.7 (0.8)	2.6 (0.9)	3.0 (0.7)	2.9 (0.9)	• District had partnerships	
						• District lacked specialized staff	
Rieger						• District lacked staffing	Rieger trained staff mentors to provide career-planning and partnered with the community to provide career-related opportunities to students; but staffing models for case management and academic intervention in response to limited staffing hindered students with HID from accessing many of these services.
	Admin	2.0 (0.0)	2.2 (0.5)	2.6 (0.9)	2.8 (0.8)	• District had infrastructure that facilitated career development but limited access for students with disabilities	
	Staff	2.5 (0.9)	2.4 (0.9)	2.7 (0.8)	2.9 (0.7)		
Daniels						• Specialized staff had unclear roles	A Daniels transition specialist was newly hired to develop career-related experiences for students with disabilities, but he was unclear on his own roles and was incumbered by few local job opportunities and the limited knowledge or involvement of the new special education supervisor; the case management staffing model hindered the participation of classroom special educators in career planning for their students.
	Admin	2.5 (0.7)	2.5 (0.7)	3.5 (0.7)	3.5 (0.7	• Staff had limited administrator involvement	
	Staff	2.3 (0.8)	2.3 (0.8)	2.5 (0.7)	2.7 (0.6)	• Limited jobs were available in the local community	
						• District had infrastructure that limited career development for students with disabilities	
Bard						• Specialized staff clarified roles	Bard's college-career counselor and transition specialist helped to clarify roles for all staff; but the limited awareness of staff regarding postsecondary options and supports, coupled with limited local job opportunities, hindered students with disabilities who were not pursuing postsecondary education from accessing adequate planning or work-based learning.
	Admin	2.5 (0.6)	2.5 (0.6)	3.0 (0.0)	3.3 (0.50	• Staff had limited awareness of local resources	
	Staff	2.9 (0.7)	2.8 (0.8)	2.6 (0.7)	2.9 (0.7)	• Limited jobs were available in the local community	
						• Staff had limited administrator involvement	
Forrester						• Specialized staff had unclear roles	Forrester had limited staffing and offered few CTE courses so a general educator had recently begun embedding career exploration in her ACT prep course, but students with IDD were excluded; a transition specialist conducted career planning with all students with disabilities but was unclear of her own roles and unsure of developing work experiences for students.
	Admin	2.4 (0.7)	2.6 (0.5)	2.6 (0.5)	3.0 (0.5)	• Limited jobs were available in the local community	
	Staff	2.4 (0.9)	2.6 (0.7)	2.6 (0.5)	2.9 (0.3)	• District lacked cross-departmental collaboration	
						• District lacked partnerships	
Beam						• District had infrastructure that	Recently in Beam, the special education supervisor designated a transition teacher, provided transportation
	Admin	2.5 (0.7)	2.5 (0.7)	2.5 (0.7)	3.0 (0.0)		

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District		Quantitative findings[a]				Qualitative findings	Integration
		Staffing is sufficient to prepare *all* students for employment	Staffing is sufficient to prepare *students with disabilities* for employment	Staff roles are clear for supporting *students with disabilities* in career development	Staff effectively prepare *students with disabilities* for employment	Emerged themes that explained views on staffing and roles	Explanatory statements
	Staff	2.7 (0.8)	2.8 (0.7)	2.9 (0.6)	3.0 (0.5)	facilitated career development • Staff had administrator involvement • District lacked cross-departmental collaboration • Limited jobs were available in the local community	to job sites, hired job coaches using grant funds, and provided professional development on collaboration to address the career development needs of students in light of limited staffing and few local job opportunities; but these recent staffing changes resulted in some unclear staff roles.

Note: CTE = career technical education; IDD = intellectual and developmental disabilities; HID = high-incidence disabilities.
[a]Mean response agreement (standard deviation) of participants regarding given statement on staffing and role allocation: *strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, agree = 3, strongly agree = 4.*

Views on Staffing

Preparing All Students for Employment. Across districts, the mean response agreement that staffing was sufficient to prepare all students for employment was 2.6 ($SD = 0.8$) for administrators and 2.6 ($SD = 0.8$) for staff. Throughout interviews, administrators and CTE educators generally affirmed that there was an adequate number of CTE educators to provide a variety of CTE options for all students. In contrast, some participants suggested that there were limited staffing to support students in developing and monitoring meaningful career plans. For example, participants from multiple districts and positions brought up that having few (often only one) guidance counselor within a high school who was "overwhelmed with testing and graduation" hindered individualized career exploration and planning from being available to all students. As a result, as a Rieger school principal said, "we have to use our teachers for part of that [career planning]." Several participants expressed that their districts needed additional personnel to monitor skills for career preparation for all students beyond "just getting good attendance." A Forrester general educator suggested, "we need a student career coach" who "doesn't have to have a master's degree in guidance counseling."

Preparing Students with Disabilities for Employment. Across districts, the mean response agreement that staffing was sufficient to prepare *students with disabilities* for

employment was 2.6 (*SD* = 0.7) for administrators and 3.0 (*SD* = 0.6) for school staff. Throughout interviews, special educators and CTE educators reported having adequate paraprofessionals for supporting students with IDD in CTE courses. Most participants said these students only accessed CTE courses with the support of a paraprofessional, but it was unclear how many students were not participating in any CTE courses and may have required additional staffing to do so. Similarly, Woodford educators and paraprofessionals in a transition program for students with disabilities aged 18-21 described having adequate staffing for their students; however, staff noted that the number of students placed into this program was capped, so it was unclear whether staffing was adequate for supporting all students with disabilities in the district who could benefit from such a program. Moreover, the desire for additional specialized staffing was reiterated frequently with specific regard to students with disabilities, as many staff called for the addition of a transition specialist as "that one other person that's facilitating more of the employment things." In multiple instances, participants mentioned that the availability of sufficient special educators and paraprofessionals varied by year depending on the number of students with disabilities who were enrolled. Administrators from both Rose and Rieger mentioned their desire to move staff amongst middle schools and high schools from year to year to address this issue, but they did not do so due to staff preferences.

Views on Own Roles

In addition to reporting their views of the sufficiency of available staffing, staff expressed views of their own individual roles. Across districts, staff addressed the extent to which they understood their own roles and felt confident in performing them.

Clarity of Roles. Surveyed participants tended to describe staff roles as clear for

supporting students with disabilities in career development. The mean response agreement that

roles were clear for preparing students with disabilities for employment was 3.0 ($SD = 0.6$) for

administrators and 2.8 ($SD = 0.7$) for staff. Of those staff who said that their roles were clear,

several attributed this clarity to the fact that their districts were small with few staff members and

many roles to be performed. In interviews, several staff members shared the sentiment of a

Maker special educator who said, "…most of us are doing double and triple duty anyway, so

there's just not a lot of overlap because if anything, we need more bodies because we're all

wearing many hats." In many instances, these small rural districts only employed one or two

individuals with expertise in certain areas related to career development. A Bard CTE educator

also serving as the CTE director and teaching some academic core content pointed out: "for

college and career, they're all my roles…nobody else wants to mess that up."

Yet, some staff members said that their roles were unclear for various reasons. Staff

expressed unclarity regarding the expectations of others' roles – particularly as it related to

students with disabilities with widely varied needs – which caused them to feel unsure of how

these roles impacted their own. For example, a Forrester transition specialist described ongoing

confusion regarding her own roles in relation to a CTE educator teaching career exploration to

all students within a district program funded through a non-profit organization:

> I had this CTE educator saying "You're doing some of the stuff I'm doing, so why are
> you here?" But, I'm doing it with a select population [of students] to reinforce because
> they're going to need more than what you're able to give in their senior year.

The Daniels transition specialist who also participated in an interview echoed these experiences.

Although most staff spoke solely to the roles of colleagues in their district or school

building, a few special educators and paraprofessionals referenced unclarity concerning the roles

of partners from outside their districts with whom they collaborated. For example, a Beam

special educator explained that the pre-ETS provider who came in weekly from an employment agency to support her students was "doing a lot of what I'm doing across the board at different times," highlighting the value in repetition for her students but also admitting, "I get confused between the two programs a bit. Who is doing what?" She went on to also describe her struggle to train paraprofessionals in understanding their own roles in supporting students in work-based learning experiences at local businesses in relation to those of other employees at the business who could provide natural supports on the job. The special educator emphasized the importance of paraprofessionals understanding these roles because "I cannot be everywhere all the time."

Confidence in Roles. Across interviews, staff overwhelmingly described the altruistic intentions of their district administrators and the willingness of their colleagues to collaborate within "a family atmosphere where everyone cares" to foster their own confidence in having the support needed to perform their roles well. For example, a CTE educator coordinating several career-related programs that included students with disabilities expressed her confidence in accessing necessary supports to fulfill all her roles:

> It all gets done. Even if I've got to go and beg people, "Hey, can you help me with this? Can you do this?" It generally gets done. I have yet to have to choose to do one thing and not another.

Because of the support he received from coworkers and administration in providing his students with work-based learning opportunities, a Rose special educator emphasized, "I love it here. It'll take the National Guard to get me out!" More specifically, multiple staff members expressed confidence in teaching their career-related content, building relationships with students with disabilities, and accessing help from colleagues within their districts as needed.

In contrast, staff frequently expressed a lack of confidence in a number of areas throughout interviews. Many CTE educators and paraprofessionals reported that they were

unconfident with supporting students' emotional and behavioral challenges, particularly when they worried that such behaviors could affect the safety of those students or their peers. CTE educators reported mixed views in the extent to which they felt confident providing accommodations to students. Some felt certain about their ability "to just know when a student is struggling and needs something more," but others characterized this role as "a bit of a struggle," wondering "how much leeway do I get?" when modifying assignments or exams or determining how to accommodate students "who are also just acting lazy." Moreover, many special educators and administrators expressed limited confidence in identifying and developing partnerships with agencies and opportunities to support students with disabilities after high school (e.g., VR, postsecondary education programs, informal supports), citing a lack of training or information on these supports. Ultimately, several staff expressed confidence in some of their roles and skepticism in others. For example, a Daniels transition specialist explained:

> As far as training [students] to do things and finding stuff for them to do physically and hands on and things of that nature, I feel pretty confident with that. Now I feel confident with saying, "Hey, let's look this up and see what's available." But as far as bringing that home specifically, "What can this student do in this area for training? What can this student do to get the education they need to be successful?" When that student graduates on Friday night, what are they doing Monday morning? [This] is what I would love to come up with.

In some instances, staff described feeling confident in their abilities to perform their roles as they were currently defined but felt limited by the extent to which such roles effectively prepare students with disabilities to successfully access employment. These participants commonly cited a lack of time to limit the effectiveness of the roles they were expected to perform. For example, case managers and school counselors desired "more time to meet with individual students," saying "there's so much more that needs to be done" to ensure that students successfully obtained employment than what was expected by their administrators. Other

participants – particularly paraprofessionals and special educators - discussed feeling limited by the low expectations of families or other staff (e.g., "there is very little expected of my students"); poor-quality instructional materials they were provided with to support students ("a lot of the books that we're using are very old," "an old analog clock," "computers that do not turn on"); or their lack of knowledge of "better programs out there." Several participants also described feeling limited by what they were safely able to do to support students in work experiences in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Feeling Overwhelmed by Roles. Multiple staff members explained that, although they understood their own roles and how to perform them, they were simply overwhelmed by the extensiveness of their roles. In many of these instances, staff described feeling overwhelmed by all the effort it took to ensure that students with disabilities were sufficiently prepared to work. A Weller special educator expressed:

> I wish there was a curriculum. I wish somebody would say, "Here, this is what you need to teach for work-based learning. This is what they need to be able to do this." But it's, I guess, too encompassing because there's so many things…so what's the most important? I guess sometimes, [it would help] just knowing that I'm on the right track.

In a few instances, participants described feeling overwhelmed by the expectations of their supervisors and even worried about retaining their positions considering the difficultly of addressing extensive student needs and developing experiences when few opportunities existed in their rural communities ("I hope I can stay in this transition job; "I don't want to let on what I don't know;" "If they ask me back next year…"). These sentiments were more prevalent among staff new to their positions, describing roles as "just keeping your head above water and staying a day ahead." Of the 39 interview participants, seven administrators and five staff had started their current position in the last year, but the majority had held previous positions in the district.

RQ4: To What Extent Do Roles Vary by Staff Position?

The career development tasks that staff performed for students with disabilities also varied by their position (see Table 6). Several participants echoed that staff having a wide range of roles often "happens in small rural districts where you don't have so many people to do so many specific jobs." As a result, multiple staff suggested that they were solely responsible for "a cornucopia of things" across broad areas, such as all tasks with "something to do with career and college," "everything when it comes to transition," and "making sure [students] have something to do that keeps them off the couch." Even those with specialized responsibilities for career development (e.g., transition specialists, college-career advisors) characterized their roles to be dispersed across large caseloads or even all students within an entire school when "every student is different, and their needs are different." The following sections characterize trends in roles by staff position. The extent to which findings varied across districts is addressed under RQ6.

Table 6

Staff Reporting of Their Performance of Career Development Tasks (by Staff Position)

Task	Staff position[a]					
	Special educators ($n = 68$)	School counselors ($n = 21$)	CTE educators ($n = 57$)	Paraprofessionals ($n = 54$)	Related service providers ($n = 17$)	Others[c] ($n = 18$)
Career Assessment and Goal Development[b]	**91.2**	**90.5**	**80.7**	**68.5**	**58.8**	**77.8**
Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans	88.2	71.4	61.4	61.1	41.2	72.2
Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans	64.7	57.1	38.6	38.9	23.5	27.8
Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development	64.7	42.9	42.1	38.9	17.6	38.9
Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD	75.0	47.6	36.8	27.8	5.9	38.9
Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning	61.8	14.3	47.4	40.7	5.9	33.3
Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD	66.2	57.1	22.8	27.8	5.9	50.0
Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills	41.2	9.5	49.1	31.5	17.6	33.3
Collect data on career development goals for SWD	61.8	9.5	31.6	29.6	17.6	27.8
Career-Related Instruction[b]	**98.5**	**71.4**	**87.7**	**64.8**	**52.9**	**66.7**
Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care)	82.4	14.3	80.7	51.9	35.3	50.0
Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work	83.8	4.8	70.2	63.0	11.8	61.1
Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal setting)	83.8	19.0	70.2	50.0	35.3	44.4
Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and their pre-requisite education and skills	70.6	38.1	61.4	33.3	5.9	38.9
Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals	72.1	57.1	49.1	29.6	0.0	33.3
Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job)	63.2	4.8	64.9	40.7	5.9	27.8
Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD	64.7	9.5	63.2	18.5	5.9	27.8
Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class)	60.3	19.0	64.9	18.5	0.0	27.8
Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate	55.9	14.3	68.4	11.1	0.0	22.2
Addressing Collateral Skills and Needs for Employment[b]	**86.6**	**76.2**	**73.7**	**64.8**	**64.7**	**61.1**
Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at	75.0	33.3	59.6	55.6	35.3	38.9

	Staff position[a]					
Task	Special educators (*n* = 68)	School counselors (*n* = 21)	CTE educators (*n* = 57)	Paraprofessionals (*n* = 54)	Related service providers (*n* = 17)	Others[c] (*n* = 18)
work settings						
Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD	61.8	9.5	54.5	51.9	58.8	33.3
Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications)	58.8	19.0	50.9	31.5	11.8	27.8
Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD	51.5	4.8	47.4	44.4	5.9	11.1
Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare and work for SWD	50.0	33.3	43.9	33.3	5.9	22.2
Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education programs related to careers of interest	45.6	57.1	35.1	20.4	5.9	38.9
Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations)	51.5	14.3	26.3	13.0	5.9	16.7
Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD are working	27.9	4.8	24.6	11.1	0.0	16.7
Career-Related Experiences[b]	**70.6**	**52.4**	**80.7**	**50.0**	**11.8**	**33.3**
Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences	58.8	33.3	45.6	35.2	11.8	16.7
Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Future Health Professionals) or extra-curricular opportunities in the school	33.8	28.6	68.4	20.4	5.9	5.6
Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart)	44.1	9.5	31.6	22.2	0.0	5.6
Connect SWD to *unpaid* work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling)	42.6	14.3	28.1	20.4	0.0	16.7
Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest	39.7	14.3	31.6	18.5	0.0	11.1
Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites	33.8	4.8	24.6	16.7	0.0	5.6
Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers	33.8	14.3	19.3	11.1	0.0	16.7
Connect SWD to *paid* (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community	32.4	9.5	19.3	9.3	0.0	11.1
Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike)	32.4	9.5	14.0	16.7	0.0	5.6
School Partnerships[b]	**66.2**	**42.9**	**42.1**	**18.5**	**11.8**	**33.3**
Support families of SWD to develop high expectations in their child's career development	55.9	28.6	31.6	13.0	5.9	27.8
Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory)	32.4	4.8	26.3	14.8	0.0	22.2
Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, or other agencies	41.2	0.0	21.1	13.0	0.0	11.1
Develop partnerships with *disability agencies* (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) *or community organizations* (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school	35.3	23.8	19.3	7.4	5.9	16.7
Develop partnerships with local *employers* to provide work opportunities to SWD	33.8	4.8	21.1	11.1	0.0	5.6
Develop partnerships with local *colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships* to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD	25.0	28.6	21.1	7.4	0.0	11.1
Program Development and Improvement[b]	**48.5**	**47.6**	**52.6**	**29.6**	**5.9**	**33.3**
Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD	33.8	4.8	33.3	16.7	5.9	22.2
Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community	27.9	23.8	24.6	14.8	5.9	16.7
Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers	26.5	23.8	26.3	14.8	5.9	11.1
Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives	27.9	23.8	19.3	11.1	5.9	16.7
Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	25.0	23.8	12.3	20.4	5.9	11.1
Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs	25.0	19.0	26.3	7.4	0.0	11.1
Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students	20.6	9.5	15.8	5.6	0.0	16.7
Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD	16.2	9.5	8.8	11.1	5.9	5.6

Note: CTE = career technical education; SWD = students with disabilities.
[a]Percentage of staff in given position who reported to perform task daily, weekly, or monthly.
[b]Average percentage of school staff in given position who reported to perform at least one task within the category daily, weekly, or monthly.
[c]Staff in additional staffing positions who met inclusion criteria (e.g., general educators teaching employment skills; graduation coaches).

Special Educators

Special educators reported greater involvement than any other surveyed staff group for four of the six areas of career development tasks for students with disabilities. The average number of tasks completed regularly (i.e., daily, weekly, or monthly) by a single special educator was 24 (range 1-48). Some were designated as case managers who wrote IEP transition plans for all students in Maker, Rieger, and Daniels; and one special educator served as a designated transition teacher in Beam. Of all surveyed special educators, 51.5% indicated that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment was a primary role of their job. In an interview, a Weller special educator explained her prioritization of career development:

> My primary role is to help the students be ready for life after high school. And part of that is that career exploration and job attainment. I want them, when they leave high school, to have the skills necessary to hold either a part-time or full-time job, or at least have an idea of what their area of interest is or what their abilities and their interests will allow them to do even in our own small community.

On the other hand, 42.6% of surveyed special educators identified this role to be secondary. These educators most commonly reported teaching academic content and simply "getting students through their classes" to "make sure they graduate" (e.g., "learning basic sight words," "survival math") as more important roles. Additionally, they described preparing students for exams (e.g., state-mandated "end of course" tests, "ACT preparation," "alternate assessment," "just educating for test scores"); teaching functional and social emotional skills (e.g., "mobility, speaking, and communicating" "life skills," "preparing for life"), and other roles indirectly supporting students (e.g., "IEP paperwork," "lesson plans," "showing growth toward student goals," "ensuring students receive accommodations") as taking priority. Alternatively, specialists were employed by districts with state funding to provide pre-ETS services in Woodford, Daniels, Bard, and Forrester; and funded through the state in Woodford, Daniels, Bard, and Forrester.

Some of these specialists were licensed special educators, but others were not.

Special educators particularly highlighted the great extent to which their own roles encompassed "a balancing act" of tasks well beyond career development, such as managing student behavior, providing emotional support, and addressing students' basic needs (e.g., "having a clean piece of fabric on their backs"). A Rose special educator said:

> [Special educators] are a combination of a teacher, counselor, psychiatrist, drill sergeant…all things wrapped into one…If I ruled the world, I think every teacher would spend at least a year working in special ed, so they can understand exactly what we do, what we deal with on a daily basis.

Others also defined their roles to go "beyond a regular teacher relationship," serving as "almost like a parent," "a friend," and "a mentor…a real one, not just what all teachers say they are." Nonetheless, multiple special educators assigned to a classroom or program with a particular emphasis on career development explained that, with few competing responsibilities, they felt that they were able to focus upon completing a few primary tasks with their students. For example, a Beam special educator who was recently designated the district's "transition teacher" and was no longer responsible for teaching academics or managing a caseload called this new staffing model "brilliant." She reflected on her previous experiences:

> The reason why I do [transition planning for all students] willingly is because it's far less than the gazillion balls I had in the air before. I was staying until 7:00 or 8:00 at night before, and I wasn't a very happy camper for eight years. I feel like I've got it down to habit. I still stay late working on the lessons, but I don't have that kind of pressure anymore, or angst about doing too much. This is much better, but you would take someone else and put them in this situation, and they would think it was a lot…I could not have done this [transition planning] on top of everything else.

Surveyed special educators most frequently reported performing tasks in the areas of career-related instruction, career assessment and goal development, and addressing collateral skills and needs for employment. Throughout interviews, some specifically described writing IEP transition plans; however, multiple staff emphasized that, without explicitly teaching

students employment skills or providing them with career-related experiences, these plans did not actually lead to employment. A Beam special educator explained, "I'm trying to take that plan that they have in their IEP and flesh it out to where it's real, because this is from A to D, and they have to have a plan A and a plan B and a plan C." Most interviewed special educators described their roles in career-related instruction within the context of self-contained special education courses or work-based learning experiences. The same Beam special educator teaching three separate transition-related courses with separate course codes described her planning of instructional objectives to be fluid across courses, rather than specific to each of the three:

> I'll tell you, in all honesty, if I get a whole bunch done for the [transition to work course], everyone's doing it [in all my classes]. Then I might do a whole bunch for the self-determination [course], and I think, 'Oh, I know how to do this in the post-secondary [course].] And I'm going through all the standards and trying to get sections of them accomplished, and everyone gets it, because I figure, sooner or later, they'll all take everything. It'll all be fine.

Although special educators mentioned that their students were included in CTE courses, they typically characterized the aim of these experiences to be for social inclusion and did not often speak of specific career-related instruction that students received in those settings. Surveyed administrators' reporting on special educator roles in these areas seemed to align with the data provided by surveyed special educators. Across districts, 100% of administrators reported that special educators in their districts have informal conversations with SWD about career plans, share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings, and provide input regarding high school diploma pathways. A vast majority of administrators (i.e., 83.9-98.2% across tasks) reported that special educators performed other tasks in these areas.

Fewer special educators, while still more than half, reported performing at least one task in the areas of career-related experiences and school partnerships. Across interviews, multiple special educators – primarily those teaching students with high-incidence disabilities – explained

that an overemphasis on college preparation inadvertently limited career-related experiences for students. A few mentioned contacting VR counselors or that their students received pre-ETS, but they cited challenges with students' schedules and inconsistent staffing at these agencies to make "it kind of hard to make time" for partnerships. In contrast, several educators of students with IDD tended to discuss roles in partnering with adult agencies ("I relied pretty heavily on VR") but did not necessarily report spending time collaborating with these individuals. A Woodford educator mentioned, "[the pre-ETS provider] is teaching lessons and she takes over and sometimes I might be writing an IEP or helping certain students and I'm working on something else." They were more likely to report later "reiterating" skills that pre-ETS providers taught or "tying them into our lessons" after the fact. However, special educators and transition specialists sometimes described feeling unaware of the opportunities available to their students. For example, a Forrester transition specialist described how her lack of knowledge of opportunities in the community limited the time she could allocate to directly supporting students:

> I struggle with: do I spend time with a student, or do I spend time in preparation? And I feel like it's going to have to be a balance because I need to spend time with the students to even know what they're needing, but I also have to stop and say, I'm going to take a day or two and not see a lot of students so that I can…give myself enough time to get those things organized and learn what all I have here and how I can use it.

Many of these educators described roles establishing work-based learning sites at local businesses. While most of these experiences were described to be unpaid, two special educators from Beam and Weller reported establishing paid jobs for their students, one through state-funding that could eventually lead to employer pay and the other solely through employer pay. Both educators described their own roles in honoring student interests while addressing employers' needs. The Weller educator pointed out, "I want the students to have different experiences, but then I also don't want to overburden my community partners." Although fewer

special educators reported performing tasks in these areas, most surveyed administrators reported that special educators in their districts performed tasks associated with career-related experiences (i.e., 75.0-91.1% across tasks) and school partnerships (i.e., 67.9-94.6% across tasks).

Of all career development areas, the smallest percentage of surveyed special educators reported performing any tasks related to program development and improvement (48.5%). A small handful of special educators described their involvement in school-wide career development initiatives, such as a Weller special educator collaborating with the CTE work-based learning coordinator to establish worksites and a Beam special educator starting to reach out to the district vocational school for resources. Yet, many special educators instead tended to express a lack of knowledge of district-wide programs. Multiple special educators echoed a Woodford educator's uncertainty: "our district has a work-based learning program, but I don't know how it works, like if students find their own jobs or what?" Nonetheless, many administrators (53.6-83.9% across tasks) reported that special educators were involved in this area. Two special educators serving as case managers reported that their position required them to work "much more closely with administration" than other special educators.

CTE Educators

CTE educators also reported involvement across all areas of career development tasks for students with disabilities, more than any other surveyed staff group for two of the six areas. The average number of tasks completed regularly by a single CTE educator was 19 (range 0-45). Among the 57 surveyed CTE educators, 31.6% identified supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment as a primary role of their job, 40.4% reported it to be a secondary role, 21.1% reported that they were unsure if the area was part of their job role, and

7.0% reported that it was not part of their job role. Multiple CTE educators pointed out that they do not view this specific area as a primary role of their job because they supported all students in their courses and only a small percentage had disabilities. They most commonly cited preparing and teaching content aligned with state standards ("my entire class doesn't revolve around preparing for jobs"), teaching foundational academic skills needed for success in their courses (e.g., "reading and doing basic math," "basic computer skills"), caring for course-related equipment, and completing tasks related to CTE events and extra-curricular activities for which they were responsible ("running the school greenhouse," "planning career success days") as tasks that took priority. Nonetheless, multiple CTE educators cited other primary aims – rather than employment preparation – to take priority for their students with disabilities, such as "safety skills," "social skills", and "life skills." One Rose CTE educator reported on the survey:

> Nothing is more important than seeing any child succeed. The reality is though that my students with disabilities will never be in law enforcement. So, I make them part of the class in different ways such as taking daily notes.

More than three quarters of surveyed CTE educators reported performing tasks in the areas of career-related instruction, career assessment and goal development, and career-related experiences (more than any other staff group). Throughout interviews, they frequently described teaching general employment skills (e.g., "soft skills," "how to be a good employee") and job-specific skills within their respective industries (e.g., agriculture, robotics and computers, health sciences, cosmetology, construction) to students with high-incidence disabilities included in their courses and extra-curricular organizations (e.g., Future Farmers of America). Multiple educators described the successes of their students with learning disabilities in mastering these skills in their courses because activities were "more hands-on" and "balance out the bookwork where they may struggle." Yet, CTE educators tended to describe their roles to be fundamentally

different with respect to students with IDD, describing the primary objectives of their course to be more focused on socialization with typical peers ("it's a place where he can get loved on by the regular students," "simply to be in a surrounding of their peers) and developing "life skills" but "not necessarily to prepare them for the workforce." For example, one Woodford CTE educator teaching students with IDD in his agriculture courses explained:

> I want to teach them life skills…Everybody's going to live somewhere where they've got a yard. So when we do landscaping, I want them to learn some basics because it's going to help them wherever they live and then same with animals…if we can talk to them and teach them how to take care of their pets…proper grooming and, and what to feed them, those kinds of things that that I don't necessarily think it's going to be a career for them. But I think they're going to be involved with animals and have a yard no matter where they live…that's kind of the way I view my job working with kids with disabilities like that.

Although several CTE educators promoted safety skills as essential for students with disabilities to access their courses (e.g., passing a safety test), they tended to describe safety preparation to be a role of paraprofessionals or a pre-requisite of even enrolling in their courses ("safety should trump special ed [inclusion in CTE courses]"). Similarly, CTE educators often described provision of accommodations for students with disabilities in their courses but varied in the extent to which they considered this to be their own task. Multiple educators ascribed this role to paraprofessionals in their classes or special educators serving as students' case managers. A Bard educator said, "when we take a test, I need [the paraprofessional] to make sure they're walking around and checking on them and asking, 'Is there anything that you don't understand? Are there words that you don't understand?'" In contrast, a few CTE educators described accommodation to be their own role, even for students with more significant disabilities, saying "I'm pretty good about understanding how the IEP is worded and knowing [how to provide accommodations] or "[students] working at their own pace, and I grade them with what their capabilities are." One Weller robotics teacher explained, "If I end up with a major issue of trying

to get a point across to a student, then it's my role to get the special ed teacher or seek out somebody else who can help me with what I'm having a problem with."

Fewer CTE educators reported involvement in (a) developing school partnerships or (b) program development or improvement related to career development for students with disabilities, but they did participate in the latter more than any other staff group. Less than a quarter reported partnerships with local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships local employers; or disability agencies for providing opportunities or referrals to students with disabilities. Yet, 53.6% of surveyed administrators reported that CTE educators partner with employers and 39.3% reported that they partner with local colleges. Multiple CTE educators reported that they were unsure of their students with disabilities' success in technical programs during or after high school or reported inaccurate perceptions ("they get to keep their IEPs when they go to college"). Nonetheless, a few discussed their ongoing partnerships to ensure the successes of students with disabilities after graduation. For example, one Weller robotics teacher discussed her collaboration with the local technical school:

> I had made mention of a couple students who were planning to go there and about issues that I knew they were going to have, so that there was an awareness of the students coming. This is how we can overcome that. I think having the connection between high school and the instructors for the [technical school] made a world of difference for those two particular boys because they were given the extra time and where we would find that you have to like repeat things over and over. They don't get it the first 20 times. But after that, when the instructor realized that and worked with them on it, these kids have come out with industrial maintenance degrees and they're making a decent living now.

Similarly, although more than half of administrators reported that CTE educators recruited students with disabilities to participate in career development programs with their typical peers, only 26.3% of CTE educators reported doing so. CTE educators tended to describe the enrollment of students with high-incidence disabilities in their courses as being done by a school counselor in accordance with students' selected career pathway and described enrollment of

students with IDD to have occurred after special educators or paraprofessionals "came to me and said, 'Hey, do you think that he could come in there and be part of that?'"

Lastly, some CTE educators – particularly those with leadership roles in their department (i.e., lead agriculture teacher; CTE chair) – described roles that indirectly supported career-related instruction or experiences for students, such as "ordering and purchasing [materials]," "reporting industry credentials and other info to the state," "creating the [course] schedule," "starting new programs," "applying for grants," and hosting events (e.g., career fair). Although these roles did not consist of direct support for students with disabilities, staff consistently reiterated the importance of "knowing what [resources and opportunities] are out there," "figuring out what [students] are going to find valuable," and "putting them into contact" to ensure that students received opportunities and supports imperative to their career development.

Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals reported varying involvement across areas of career development tasks for students with disabilities. The average number of tasks completed regularly by a single paraprofessional was 12 (range 0-31). Among the surveyed 54 paraprofessionals, 40.7% identified supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment as a primary role of their job, 35.2% reported it to be a secondary role, 16.7% reported that it was not part of their job, and 7.4% reported that they were unsure if the area was part of their job. They most commonly cited the following roles to take priority over preparing students for employment: providing and ensuring accommodations in general education courses ("reading tests and giving them additional prompts and assistance," "being sure that the teacher follows the IEP," "inclusion") and teaching academics ("basic math," "English," "reading comprehension," "state

standards") and other skills ("social skills," "tell time and how to count money," "washing dishes and cooking," "basic transitional care for themselves and their environment"). They also mentioned ensuring that students complete coursework needed for graduation ("keeping students up-to-date in classes," "making sure they reach their goal of a high school diploma"), supporting student engagement, behavior, and well-being in such courses ("keeping them calm and focused on classwork," "emotional support due to family situations," "mental health"). A few paraprofessionals pointed out that they were currently supporting students in courses in which "our subject does not focus on employment," and some expressed that preparing students for employment was not a goal for some of their students ("part of my students will never have a full-time job," "some don't know if college or employment is in their future").

In interviews, paraprofessionals most frequently reported teaching students functional academic or technology skills needed for work and having informal conversations with students about their career plans. They described roles to vary by the settings in which they supported students. Those serving students in general education tended to focus discussion heavily on providing accommodations to students with disabilities in CTE courses and highlighted more informal discussions with students related to career plans (explaining the results of a transition assessment; "talk to kids about what are you going to do, where you going to school"). A Maker paraprofessional reported supporting general educators in determining accommodations using standards for her student's specific diploma pathway. She said, "If a teacher came to me and said, 'Hey, how is this child going to do this, then I could say okay well, these are the standards…she actually does this or doesn't do this." Paraprofessionals persisted to "make sure that special ed children have [the accommodations] they need," despite being "the lowest paid in the building," considered to be "always wrong," and "never wanting to step on anybody's toes."

Paraprofessionals working in self-contained classes often talked about teaching students general employment skills (e.g., time management) within the classroom or throughout the school building (e.g., hallways, cafeteria) that could apply to future work settings. However, they often reported that their students were not participating in work-based learning in community settings. Alternatively, an interviewed Woodford paraprofessional working in the district transition program for students with disabilities aged 18-21 described spending most of her job in highly focused roles providing on-the-job supports to students in jobs in the community. In addition to transporting students to work, collaborating with employers, and providing on-the-job supports, she reported supporting students in applying for paid jobs at their work-based learning sites ("show them where the office is, how to fill out the application") and initially "shadowing" hired students and "making sure they can do it because I don't want them to fail."

All interviewed paraprofessionals discussed instances in which special educators delegated them tasks for addressing specific skills targeted in students' IEP goals. They tended to describe focused roles when it came to collecting data on student progress, particularly in self-contained or transition program settings. They described circumstances in which they determined skills to address with students that they felt would benefit them in the future or that students wanted to know. Yet, except for the participant at the transition program, paraprofessionals tended to emphasize self-care skills ("brushing teeth;" "how to put your lip gloss on,") or other daily living skills ("eating properly with a fork," "ordering at a restaurant") much more extensively than employment-related skills. Many who worked with students with significant disabilities suggested that their students were not expected to obtain a job in adulthood or that they were unsure of what supports were available to facilitate future employment; therefore, they tended to characterize their roles as limited with respect to career development, describing their

tasks to be solely for "making sure students can pass their classes" or "behave appropriately" without identifying work to be an eventual goal of these efforts. A Maker paraprofessional explained that she felt that the academic-related tasks she was delegated were not the most important to prioritize with her students but was unsure of what to expect for their future:

> I can read them stories…but I wonder where they're going to go when they're 22 and they leave me. They're not going to sit around reading worksheets, you know, they're going to be doing normal things…but, they're not very dependable… I don't know what kind of career I would steer them towards having.

Moreover, half of surveyed paraprofessionals reported performing tasks for career-related experiences, and fewer reported tasks in the areas of school partnerships or program development and improvement. However, some interviewed paraprofessionals described their own self-decided efforts to expand opportunities for students in the community, such as reaching out to personal contacts to develop job opportunities, requesting to go to community events to increase local awareness of their work-based learning program, and applying for grants to create community-based trips for their students. Paraprofessionals provided several examples of times when they could choose the roles they performed (e.g., toileting students, working at various work sites) but also spoke of tasks they were required to perform for their position [e.g., maintaining a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) to drive students to work; working at a specific school]. They consulted other staff in their school for support in performing their roles (e.g., asking a general educator about content knowledge, consulting a school counselor on a student's mental health) and particularly cited their collaborations with other paraprofessionals in determining their roles. Yet, they generally described taking initiative in providing support to students themselves because ("our children trust who they're with all of the time").

Some administrators also reported that paraprofessionals in their districts performed the described tasks. However, they generally reported very limited involvement of paraprofessionals

in career development. For example, less than 25% of surveyed administrators reported that paraprofessionals taught general employment skills, provided input and intervention on communication skills, or taught self-advocacy and self-determination skills. In contrast, 50% or more of paraprofessionals themselves reported performing these tasks.

School Counselors

School counselors reported involvement across all areas of career development tasks for students with disabilities. The average number of tasks completed regularly by a single school counselor was 10 (range 0-22). Among the 21 surveyed counselors, 81.0% identified supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment as a secondary role of their job, 9.5% reported that it was not part of their job, and 9.5% said they were unsure if it was part of their job. School counselors most commonly cited tasks related to student schedules (e.g., "make sure that all students meet all graduation requirements," "all students are taking the correct courses for postsecondary work or training/schooling," "reviewing academic records") as more important roles. They also provided direct counseling to students to address "issues that hinder educational and life situations" (e.g., mental health needs, truancy, "parent issues," deficits in accommodations, academic struggles) and scheduling exams (e.g., ACT, Advanced Placement, end-of course exams). Multiple counselors highlighted large caseloads, being "pulled in many diverse directions" to support all students, and the fact that students with disabilities have access to case managers and adult service agencies as reasons for why their involvement was secondary to other priorities. They tended to describe their roles as quite diverse. For example, a Bard counselor said, "I probably spend 60% of my time doing logistical things, scheduling…dual enrollment things that aren't necessarily one-to-one counseling….I would probably spend 25% of

my time, um, with students and then the rest of the time doing other duties."

School counselors tended to report limited or no training for supporting students with disabilities in career development ("I had to learn a lot more than what was in my Master's program"). Yet, their survey responses indicated that they performed many tasks for career assessment and goal development and addressed collateral skills and needs for work (more than any other staff group other than special educators). Generally, all interviewed counselors described roles in ensuring all students complete coursework in selected career pathways to meet graduation requirements. Many administrators reported that school counselors conducted formative assessments to identify strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of students related to career planning (50%) and supported students in exploring different career pathways and their pre-requisite education (64.3%). However, several counselors reported that students completed career assessments and selected these pathways during middle school before beginning high school. They shared that students with high-incidence disabilities were included in these initiatives but that students with IDD in self-contained classes typically were not. Counselors also described ways in which they indirectly supported students with disabilities by finding ways for them to access CTE courses or work-based learning during their schedules or ensuring that they received their accommodations in their classes. The latter task was more commonly done for students with 504 plans as those with IEPs received this support from their case managers. Nonetheless, counselors tended to characterize the primary goal of their efforts to be for students with disabilities to earn credits to graduate – and sometimes – complete requirements for enrolling in postsecondary education with minimal reference to subsequent employment.

A few counselors described providing direct support to students with disabilities that supplemented the instruction and support they received from special educators, such as providing

counseling services mandated by their IEPs on social skills needed for work. Yet, other counselors reported that they "don't have eyes on IEPs." A Beam counselor described the direct and indirect supports she provides for students with IDD who participate in work-based learning:

> My role as school counselor has been to work with the special education teacher to understand what students need to be successful at their work sites and basically supporting them with anything they need. If they need clothing to wear to their job sites, I have resources to help get them appropriate clothing. And setting up their schedule to allow for their work-based learning to fit in….How can we help them?

Although more than three quarters of surveyed administrators reported that school counselors had informal conversations with students with disabilities about their career plans, several counselors reported during interviews that they do not have the time to meet individually with every student on their caseload. A Blanton counselor reported that she serves students from multiple high schools within her district, which leads her to play varying roles at each school and limits her time to meet directly with students. On the contrary, a Bard counselor shared that she "talks extensively [with students with disabilities] about 'these are the classes you need, here's your four-year plan…how we're going to get those classes so they can get a regular diploma" because she knew they needed that direct support in developing and maintaining their career plans. Multiple counselors described collaborating with special educators to provide these supports, such as identifying courses aligned with student interests and support needs. A Rieger principal explained, "the case manager will usually lay out what the student needs and then the counselor will take care of making sure the schedule is set for that student and they receive those things." Counselors also described ways in which these collaborations allowed for college and career planning supports to address the specific needs of students with disabilities. For example, a Maker school counselor described how she identified the need to support students with IDD in applying for postsecondary financial aid upon collaborating with a special educator:

The first couple of years we did FAFSAs [i.e., Free Application for Federal Student Aid], I did not seek out the students [with IDD], but [a special educator], thankful to him, said, "Oh no, there's opportunities that they could have that the state could possibly fund." So now I make sure every single student has filed a FAFSA.

School counselors discussed their work supporting students with disabilities in identifying courses that aligned with their career goals and ensuring that they accessed courses required for their selected diploma pathways. They also frequently discussed collaborations with students' families related to college and career plans. A Blanton counselor pointed out that families often contact her with concerns related to student plans or accommodations because her phone number is listed on the district website, while other educators' numbers are not.

Fewer surveyed school counselors reported performing tasks related to program development and improvement or school partnerships for career development of students with disabilities. The exceptions were specialized college-career advisors, identified throughout interviews to support all students in preparing to attend college programs aligned with their career goals. More specifically, state-funded advisors provided college planning services for all students in Weller and Daniels, and advisors were funded through a local philanthropic foundation focused on improving employment opportunities for community members at nearby Blanton and Bard. In some instances, these counselors were said to have developed partnerships with nearby inclusive postsecondary education programs and supported students with IDD and their families in applying to these programs. School counselors consistently reported to "have really good teamwork" with these specialized advisors to ensure that students were prepared for postsecondary education. They identified these supplemental personnel as particularly beneficial to students, saying "if any [of the roles each of us perform] is ever redundant, it's helpful."

Related Service Providers

Related service providers reported the least involvement of all staff groups across areas of career development tasks for students with disabilities. The average number of tasks completed regularly by a related service provider was 4 (range 0-24). Among the 17 related service providers surveyed, 23.5% identified supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment as a primary role of their job, 35.3% reported it to be a secondary role, 35.3% reported that they were unsure if the area was part of their job, and 5.9% reported that it was not part of their job. Providers cited evaluating students with various deficits for services, supporting them in achieving academic success (e.g., "accessing the curriculum," "improving functional gross motor skills in the school environment," "knowing how to utilize assistive listening devices," "ensuring all students have an effective communication mode in school,") and "consulting with teachers and parents" to take priority over preparing students for work. They pointed out that "working in a rural school district requires each person to wear many hats," particularly for staff with specialized expertise who are the sole providers of their services for entire districts and have limited time with each student. Thus, providers reported that the skills they are teaching students (e.g., "self-advocacy," "communication," "functional life skills") "may or may not benefit them in employment," but this is "not my direct goal."

Of the six areas of career development, the largest percentages of related service providers reported performing tasks for addressing collateral skills and needs for work and career assessment and goal development. In an interview, a Bard speech-language therapist suggested that any of her roles for supporting career development were driven by the opportunities students were provided within their classes and the expectations of educators and families for their future:

> [After students participated in work-based learning experiences], a lot of parents were ready for their child to have some type of job when they graduated high school…and I think that's where our roles came from…what they were wanting us to work on and what was expected.

When these experiences were not provided, however, she reported that she often felt unsure of how she could support her students with respect to career development:

> [When it comes to supporting students in achieving future goals], I feel like I have to be nosy about it. Say it is a student's last year and he's going to graduate. Well, what is his next step? What is there for him? Are there programs that he can go to?

Less than a quarter of surveyed related service providers reported performing tasks in any of the remaining five areas of career development. Although related service providers reported in surveys and interviews to contribute to IEP paperwork by "just putting speech goals in" or giving input on "how often I see [the student]," only one surveyed provider reported sharing information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings.

Likewise, throughout interviews, several administrators and staff further affirmed that related service providers were rarely involved in career development. Administrators from multiple districts asserted that they "were not sure" of how providers could be very involved in career development "based on how they currently serve students" and given that "their services are very specific." They reported that many students with disabilities were typically dismissed from related services by high school due to "a lack of progress." Alternately, a Daniels special education supervisor expressed that she "would love for related service providers to be more involved in preparing students to transition to work after high school," but "the biggest problem we have with this is the [lack of] funds needed to provide the staff for these positions." One special educator reported that they consult related service providers to determine "what we can do to make this job easier or more accessible" for students, such as supporting "a student who's having to package and they're struggling with those fine motor skills." Yet, educators collectively agreed that "this doesn't happen a lot." A Bard special education supervisor pointed out that, although she could not envision how the roles of providers in her district "could be

extended in this area [of career development]," she was confident that they would be "willing participants if needed." Indeed, a Rose transition coach described how the district audiologist and vision itinerant in her district began "tying in transition better" within their services only after sitting near her, observing her tasks, and "learning about transition through osmosis." She insisted that, otherwise, "they wouldn't know much [about career development] at all."

Administrators

Administrators primarily described playing indirect roles that did not involve contact with students with disabilities but supported their career development in essential ways. All administrators who participated in initial interviews mentioned providing guidance to educators for "overseeing that our students are offered the transition opportunities that they need" and "making sure things get scheduled and going." They reported monitoring the compliance of IEP transition plans (e.g., "spot-checking plans," attending IEP meetings to ensure compliance). Administrators also reported "keeping communication" between educators and pre-ETS providers and sharing information with educators about tools or supports that could facilitate students (e.g., uploading "transition assessments and toolkits" within a shared folder; "passing on information about trainings and resources"). Some followed up with educators to ensure that procedures were followed to connect students with postsecondary education programs and adult agencies. Additionally, a few discussed specific initiatives they had undertaken. For example, a Rose transition coach mentioned that she provided virtual training on various work-related topics as needed with individual special educators and with larger groups after identifying areas that were "continually a problem." In another example, the Woodford special education supervisor described efforts to increase the inclusion of students with IDD in CTE courses:

I'm going to fight for my kids…advocacy is number one. [There is a] myth that for the CTE classes, if [students with disabilities] can't pass a safety test, then they can't participate, which isn't true. And so last year I went to both high schools and discussed that [CTE educators] were breaking the law if they told a student that. And I mean, I was just perfectly frank. I said, "You're breaking the law if you don't allow a student in your class because they can't pass the safety test."

Yet, these roles were not true for all administrators. Of those surveyed, only 50% reported that school or district administrators in their districts evaluate the inclusion of students with disabilities in schoolwide career development initiatives, and just 37.5% reported that administrators provide training to staff on career development. The percentage of administrators who reported that school or district administrators in their district completed other tasks related to program development and improvement ranged from 26.8% to 46.4% across tasks.

During interviews, some district administrators discussed how they depend on building-level administrators (i.e., principals, assistant principals) to perform tasks for scheduling students with disabilities in CTE courses and evaluating the performance of educators ("I give expectations, [but] they are there every day"). Administrators also expressed an intention for school staff – particularly special educators – to be self-sufficient in supporting the career development of their students with disabilities, but also admitted that some staff were not performing tasks to the extent that they would hope. A Rose transition coach said:

I've given [special educators] lots of tools to function on without me. Sure. I mean, I'm still very involved and encouraging them to get the pre-ETS enrollment paperwork done and keeping that rolling, but I keep directing them to go to [resources] for assessments and things like that. So really, they can function without me being so involved. It's just that some don't.

Some administrators characterized their own involvement in career development to be quite limited. For example, a Blanton special education supervisor admitted, "to be honest with you, the only role that I played in transition last year was just keeping communication between the [pre-ETS providers] and the teachers." Administrators across districts described "being pulled in

many directions" with various roles dispersed across many areas that often take priority over career development, such as monitoring IEP compliance, submitting data reports to the state, budgeting and purchasing, and selecting curricula and progress monitoring materials. In fact, some administrators responsible for special education also had roles in unrelated areas (e.g., federal programs that support students in poverty, migrant families, and homeless students). Still, some administrators emphasized the importance of career development in their job roles and struggled with having so many responsibilities at once. A Beam special education supervisor said, "transition services for students with disabilities are just as important to me as ensuring that three-year [IEP re-evaluations] are getting the attention they are needing. Everything is a priority." Multiple administrators did mention that their roles in transition and career development had "become more of a priority" as recent state audits focused more on the compliance of IEP transition plans and postsecondary outcomes achieved by graduated students.

Others

Eighteen other staff members completed the survey after meeting the inclusion criterion of supporting at least one student with disabilities in preparing for employment. They included general education academic educators (e.g., English teacher, biology teacher), graduation coaches, and school health staff. The average number of tasks completed regularly by a single staff member in this group was 12 (range 0-31). Most of these participants (72.2%) reported that supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future work was a secondary part of their job. They most commonly cited teaching academic content, addressing student health needs, and "preparing students for graduation" to take priority over preparation for work. Multiple participants reported that they have large numbers of students – with and without disabilities – to

support ("I have over 30 students in my class") and limited amount of time available to work with them. These participants most frequently reported performing tasks related to career assessment and goal development, career-related instruction, and addressing collateral skills needed for employment. More specifically, 72.2% of participants in this group reported having informal conversations with students with disabilities about their career plans.

In some interviews, these other individuals described playing career development roles when other staff could not perform them to the extent necessary. For example, a Forrester English teacher embedded a career exploration unit within her ACT preparation course after recognizing that the one school counselor in her district "has so many hats to wear" and "not enough hours in the day" to meet directly with all students about their career plans. Valuing the importance of students "fixing for the future" during high school, she talked about meeting with students regularly to follow up on their career plans. She asked students, "What are you going to do when you grow up? You've got to have a Plan A and a Plan B." She went on to describe how she provided students with the materials and contacts they needed to work towards those goals (e.g., applications, "copies of old tests," "setting up meetings with VR"). Although these procedures "take up a lot of time" within her class, she recognized that she needed to be "more hands on" with students with disabilities than merely directing them towards information.

Additionally, 61.1% of surveyed participants reported teaching students with disabilities functional academics or technology skills needed for work, and 50.0% reported teaching general employment skills. The same English teacher described the importance of teaching test-taking strategies to her students who were not planning to pursue traditional college pathways:

> We prepare everybody for college, [but] out of a hundred students, maybe 30 will go, and only about 20 will ever graduate. So what my concern is what are we doing for the other group? …you're not going to take the ACT, but how many of you want to work at [a local factory]? How many of you want to work at [another local employer]? …And did you

realize that even though you're not needing to take the ACT, you have to take the keys WorkKeys [assessment], or you have to take an [Edison Electric Institute assessment] you have to take some type of Accuplacer [assessment], to put you in there?

Few surveyed staff in this group reported performing other tasks, and few surveyed administrators (1.8-12.5% across tasks) reported that other school staff members contributed to any of the 48 career development tasks. Nonetheless, more than a quarter of administrators reported that professionals from outside the district (e.g., pre-ETS providers, VR counselors) had informal conversations with students about their career plans (44.6%), developed partnerships with disability agencies (39.3%), educated students and families about managing government benefits (30.4%), supported students in accessing transportation options for work (30.4%), or provided training to other staff about career development for students with disabilities (26.8%).

RQ5: What are the Strengths and Gaps Regarding Career Development Programming Within Rural School Districts?

A variety of district-level strengths and gaps in career development programming for students with disabilities emerged across the 10 districts. The following sections describe themes that arose across districts, with each theme organized within by strengths and gaps. The extent to which findings varied across districts is addressed within the subsequent section on RQ6.

Availability of Career Development Services for All Students

Strong Career Development Services for All Students. In many interviews, staff described examples of robust career development services available for preparing all students in their district for employment. Staff from multiple districts described district-wide supports for career planning (e.g., vocational assessment, selection of a career pathway, counseling on career

planning, career speakers, job shadowing) that began as early as middle school and support students in "taking ownership of their future." For example, a Bard special educator described collective efforts from several staff members in her district in this area:

> We have a [college and career counseling] office in our school…and it's all taken out of my hands on stuff like that. The kids know who they have to meet, they know what they have to do…They have stairsteps [to meet in career planning]and they've researched the job they want. The [counselors] come and get their information down and that stuff is so nice… it seems like kids are, are pretty prepared. I mean, they work with every single student to make sure they know what they're doing and where they're going. Four-year plan is developed in the middle school and it's, you know, every year addressed where we're doing all of that stuff. So I'm pretty impressed with all of that….And then, our [district-employed pre-ETS] instructor…she'll address [plans] individually and then they can come in here and those students generally need reinforcement of those plans here too.

Staff described district-wide efforts to provide students with ongoing career planning support ("looking at a 360 view of that career") even when a counselor was unavailable. For example, a Rieger district administrator described initiatives to connect all students with other staff in the district to mentor them on career planning throughout high school. A Forrester general educator described how the district had supported a career exploration unit within her ACT preparation course for all junior students. Several staff also described a wide variety of CTE courses and career-related certifications available to students before graduation (e.g., Occupational Safety and Health Administration certification, work ethics distinction on their diploma).

Across multiple districts, staff cited administrative support that reflected their "passion for career preparation." For example, staff cited specific programs that administrators had acquired that allowed for increased career development opportunities for their students, such as securing funds to hire college-career counselors or develop a career exploration course for students facing barriers to work. Staff also named administrative support to be vital to their own personal pursuits for their students with disabilities. A Weller special educator who described several successes in connecting her students with significant disabilities to unpaid and paid work

experiences named administrative support as essential:

> The program would continue without me. This is not me—it's our community. It's our staff, our educational assistants who are going out and supporting us on the job sites and supporting the students. It's administration. It's knowing that it's important for our students to have this. So, yeah, I certainly think it would continue without me. I think it would just require somebody that has that same passion though, to, to keep it going.

Some administrators themselves emphasized that career development was "the overall goal" for all students. In regard to providing students with robust career development in light of impending pressure from the state to increase ACT scores and college enrollment, a Rieger principal went as far to say, "I really don't care what the [state] thinks…I will do whatever I think the kids need."

Moreover, several staff members said the opportunities, expectations, and supports present within their local community facilitated career development services for students and shaped roles they could play in this area. The most common examples pertained to partnerships with nearby businesses, technical schools, community colleges, and universities for offering dual-credit courses. When these partnerships were present, staff reported that they could then better prepare students to be successful in such programs. For example, a Woodford CTE educator teaching agriculture described a multi-pronged approach for supporting students in developing skills needed to pursue a career in this area through coursework and an agricultural extra-curricular club with opportunities to participate in competitions at the local university. As a result of this partnership, students used their experiences on the college campus and speaking with college faculty to better inform their career goals. The CTE educator "has a lot of interaction with the college professors that teach agriculture" and had become aware of the skills and knowledge students would need to be successful in those postsecondary courses.

Limited Career Development Services for All Students. In contrast, some interviewed staff characterized the district-wide career development services available to all students in their

districts to be limited. Staff in most districts reported that school counselors did not have the time to meet regularly with every student, and as a result, some students "slipped through the cracks" when it came to preparing for future work. Moreover, multiple Forrester staff described the CTE course offerings in their district to be "very minimal" or not aligned with local industry needs. A district administrator concluded, "the issue is not students with disabilities being denied access…we simply don't have the offerings at our high school for any student."

In some instances, staff said that a lack of administrative support for career development hindered the services provided to all students. They described their administrators' focus on academic proficiency, test scores, and college preparation to overshadow the career development supports their students needed. For example, a Rose special educator described the closing of his district's vocational school – which provided a much more extensive offering of CTE courses than what was available in the school buildings – as "a huge disservice to our students." Similarly, a Forrester general educator pointed out, "we prepare you at high school for college, but what are we doing for the other 80% who will go straight to the workforce?" Indeed, when asked on the survey about the areas that must take priority over career development in their districts, administrators cited "preparing [students] for postsecondary training/education," "meeting graduation requirements so [students] may earn a diploma," student safety and well-being, and social and behavioral skills. Several administrators shared the sentiment of one Forrester administrator who said, "unfortunately, state assessments and the ACT must take priority because of accountability." A Woodford administrator pointed out, "we are just trying to catch students up from pandemic challenges to our [school] system in the last two years." Special educators, CTE educators, and others expressed a strong desire for administrators to support them in developing career-related instruction and work-based learning experiences. A Forrester

general educator explained, "I don't need another assistant. I don't need you to buy me a new program. I need the time to implement or to create or to water what I've already been given."

A handful of staff also cited inadequate opportunities and supports in the local community to hinder career development for students and inhibit their own roles in this area. Staff from multiple districts reiterated points raised by a Beam school counselor that, "we live in such a rural area where jobs are very tough to come by for everybody" and "the nearest technical school is one county over." As a result, staff reported feeling helpless in their efforts to prepare students for fruitful careers knowing that limited job opportunities were available within a practical commuting distance ("she won't have someone to drive her there every day"). Alternatively, a few staff explained that their knowledge of these limited opportunities for technical school only further reinforced their efforts to facilitate students in accessing certifications available through district CTE programs or prompted them to carve jobs within their own districts for students to get "better pay and benefits than anywhere else in the county."

Sometimes, opportunities or supports existed within the district or local community, but staff lacked understanding of them. Across districts, several special education administrators and staff admitted to having limited awareness of the supports (e.g., vocational assessments, procedures for selecting a career pathway) or opportunities (e.g., CTE work-study programs; "Will they help a kid find a job or do they need to do it themselves?" "Is busing there?") available for all students from other departments. At the same time, administrators and staff in general education often expressed uncertainty of the career development activities special educators conducted with students. A Rieger school principal pointed out that "it is typical for the state" to "funnel down" legal requirements and other information pertaining to students with disabilities solely through channels accessed by special education administrators and staff,

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limiting the contributions of other staff members (i.e., building administrators, school counselors, CTE educators). For example, multiple counselors reported limited understanding of various high school diploma types developed by the state for students with disabilities (i.e., occupational diploma, alternate academic diploma), citing that professional development opportunities related to this topic were solely disseminated by the state to special educators and administrators. As a result, counselors without an adequate understanding of the diploma types could not add courses necessary for students with disabilities to pursue various diploma pathways to school schedules.

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Career Development

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities. Throughout the interviews, several staff described how students with disabilities were included in career development opportunities available to all students. Within this realm, staff most commonly described the inclusion of students – both with high-incidence disabilities and those with IDD – within CTE courses. Many CTE educators, special educators, and school counselors cited the "hands on" and "project based" nature of CTE courses to be more conducive to the skills and preferences of students with disabilities than academic courses "requiring a lot of bookwork." More specifically, CTE educators teaching career exploration reported that their courses focused more on "self-discovery" and "introspection" in which "there is not a right or wrong," and they pointed out that "everyone can contribute something about what they would like to be when they grow up." Districts were particularly likely to report that students with IDD – including those with more significant disabilities – were included in CTE courses when paraprofessionals were available for providing direct support within those courses.

Many staff members pointed out that students with disabilities "had the opportunity" to

access "anything that was available for typical kids" when it came to career development (e.g., work-study program, college and career fairs, career-related extra-curricular activities). However, they rarely described specific instances in which students with disabilities successfully participated in those opportunities. Multiple staff said that staff supported students with disabilities in participating in vocational assessments with accommodations, reviewing their course of study in relation to postsecondary career plans, and applying for financial aid, such as FAFSA; staff consistently highlighted the value in students with disabilities "getting double the strength" of these services when included in general education initiatives and also receiving supplemental support from a special educator.

Sometimes, staff characterized intentional supports that were "constantly emphasized from an administrative level" to reflect that the district "really has a heart" for students with disabilities accessing employment preparation and facilitated their inclusion in district-wide initiatives. Broadly, staff cited "a culture that has been established by our administrators" that promoted (and sometimes mandated) the inclusion of students with disabilities in CTE courses. More specifically, staff talked about efforts in which administrators have provided training on accommodating CTE course safety tests, promoted inclusion to be flexible "based on the needs of student" (i.e., inclusion for part of a class period or part of a semester), and ensured that students with more significant disabilities have the support of paraprofessionals in their courses, providing CTE educators with a "sense of security" that students will be safe and successful in their courses. In these very districts, special educators expressed gratitude that "the system itself wants [career-related] experiences for students with disabilities."

Exclusion of Students with Disabilities. On the other hand, staff also described several instances in which students with disabilities were excluded from career-related opportunities

available to their typical peers. Many of these instances involved the exclusion of students with IDD, particularly those with the most significant support needs or who were deemed to require "someone sitting with them at all times" (e.g., "not being verbal," "having behaviors that disturb others or are unsafe," "not being able to sit there in class"). In many of these instances, it was not that staff expressed an intentional effort to exclude students with IDD from district initiatives; rather, staff did not consider these students when developing career-related activities or events, making statements like, "I'm unsure if [students with IDD] are involved in that," or "this happens in all regular English classes…[students with IDD] may or may not be included because of scheduling or whatever." Other times, staff reported being unsure of how to accommodate students in such activities ("I'm unsure of how that would look [for students with IDD to participate]"). Sometimes, staff cited the physical segregation of these students in self-contained classes or "being so far away in the building from everyone else" to limit their integration within district-wide career development opportunities and hinder the extent to which staff could support these students in achieving their career goals. For example, a Maker paraprofessional expressed a desire for increased interactions with general educators who could support her in teaching students with significant disabilities core content that could prepare them for work. Finally, staff often reported that students with IDD who were included were not gaining the work-related benefits that their typical peers were. A Bard CTE educator described this phenomenon as "participation, but not productivity." In other words, staff in various positions described the aim of students with IDD participating in CTE courses as "simply to be in a surrounding of their peers" but that instruction was "not necessarily going to prepare them for the workforce."

Nonetheless, staff also described instances in which students with high-incidence disabilities were excluded from accessing career development services. Staff almost exclusively

reported developing work experiences for students with IDD. Although students with high-incidence disabilities in many districts could work during the school day through traditional work-study programs, staff tended to report that few of these students actually participated in these programs because they were not provided with adequate supports to do so (i.e., assistance in obtaining a job, transportation to work). Several special educators described the services available for students with high-incidence disabilities to participate in district programs as "barely a drop in the bucket in terms of what needs to be done" for them to be successful and agreed that "there needs to be more training for special ed students" who are being "pushed along without really grasping these skills." Yet, staff explained that special educators supporting students with high-incidence disabilities were "overwhelmed with their caseload and the inclusion and the academics that…it's just almost more than they can handle" to develop work-based learning experiences for these students. As a result, a Beam counselor described a disparity in services that students with high-incidence disabilities received in career-related experiences:

> [For students with IDD], the work-based learning opportunity is already set up for them if they have that transition class. [The teacher] has already set it up for them, so they're good. They know what they're doing; they know what to expect. We prepare that, you know, if they need clothes, we prepare them for them…[but], students in the regular ed setting, they may have a work based learning opportunity, but nobody is actively finding those work-based learning opportunities for them and saying, "Hey, this is what you're going to do."…We do have a CTE teacher that works with our students in work based learning, but he's not actively going out and trying to find opportunities for students. And I wish that we could do more of that.

Moreover, staff from a few districts described how supplemental academic intervention periods needed to support students in successfully completing their core general education courses inadvertently excluded them from taking a variety of CTE courses like their typical peers.

Staff sometimes cited a lack of administrative support for including students with disabilities in career development. They explained that work preparation was not always seen as

important by administrators and was often separated from a priority on academic success. Indeed, survey results revealed that career development for students with disabilities received mixed priority amongst administrators. Specifically, 35.7% of administrators identified supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future work as a priority of their district, 35.7% identified it to be a secondary priority, and 28.6% reported that they were unsure how much of a priority this area was in their district. Several special educators echoed the point of a Weller educator, who said "you've got to have that value from the district level, and everybody has to see that value [in students with disabilities working]," so it could be difficult to provide pathways for these students "if you don't have the buy-in from everyone" that came down from administrators. Specifically, special educators expressed a desire for administrators to create intentional times for them to collaborate with CTE educators to plan and support inclusion. A staff said they felt as if "we get put on a back burner because our kids are less important" when they are forced to repeatedly approach administration to gain supports for their students.

Collaboration and Partnership

Collaboration within Districts. Throughout interviews, staff from all districts described collaboration within and across departments that fostered career-related instruction and experiences for students with disabilities. Within departments, special educators and paraprofessionals talked about working together to access transition assessments and resources ("we made a policy and procedure manual") and develop work-based learning experiences. Staff also described collaborations between special educators and (a) school counselors for placing students with disabilities in CTE courses and (b) CTE educators to support the success of students with disabilities in such courses. A Weller special educator described her successful

collaborations to facilitate the inclusion of her students with significant disabilities:

> We support CTE in understanding that, certainly through modifications and accommodations, they can meet the needs for most of those students, but we've had some that we've attempted in a CTE course that for whatever reason, it just, wasn't a good mix. And I can honestly say I've had conversations with the CTE teachers and we've not had any issues. I've told them if I place a student in your class and there's any concerns, come to me. Let's try to work it out. If it's a situation they're not able to pass the task, let me work with them, let our [paraprofessionals] work with them. If it's a matter of safety, then let's come up with a safety plan of, you know, they have to be within so many feet of the adult while in the shop or, you know, whatever we have to do to keep everybody comfortable with those students being included.

Multiple special educators specifically named the personal relationships they developed with CTE educators as mechanisms for providing access to CTE courses for their students with disabilities and providing CTE educators with coaching and support that would ensure students' success. A Woodford special educator of students with significant disabilities explained how her personal network had allowed for her to collaborate with CTE educators:

> I figured out how to develop relationships with those teachers and work with them and let them know like, "Hey, I'm here to support you. I'm not here to dump these kids in your room and leave." And so, I've always had great success with it, and I've not had any issues, but I think that, [CTE educators] get frustrated when there is not that support there.

Meanwhile, a CTE educator from that same district also echoed the value of staff networks, saying that working in the district for "so long" had allowed him to develop "informal trust" with special educators. He explained that these relationships "really, really do help" him in supporting students with disabilities in learning agriculture content more than district-provided professional development on supporting students with disabilities because "I don't think you get the interaction in those formal meetings that we have that you need."

Additionally, staff described more informal collaborations for addressing students' basic needs (e.g., mental health, family supports, clothing and food) necessary for achieving future work. Some CTE educators, school counselors, and related service providers mentioned

attending IEP transition planning meetings to provide input on "how the student is doing in my area" and were made to feel that "we're all a part of an IEP team;" yet, they rarely reported partnering with special educators to develop or monitor student goals for employment.

A Lack of Collaboration within Districts. Interviewed staff sometimes described a lack of collaboration in their districts around career development for students with disabilities. Many of these instances centered on a lack of communication between departments, such as special education and CTE or special education and school counseling. Staff cited a lack of time dedicated to collaboration as a primary barrier to such partnerships and pointed out that "whenever you start at the top and start giving information to certain people, things get lost." They suggested that joint trainings across departments for supporting students with disabilities in planning for their futures could be useful to ensure that "everyone is on the same page." At times, staff desired increased collaboration at broader system levels. For example, a Beam special educator called for increased special education-CTE collaboration at the state level:

> [We need] a state event where all those different entities come together at a workshop and are taught about the sameness and how they can help each other and be a group for all of our students. We have some resources that are the same, and we have some worries and concerns that are the same, and we could collaborate.

A few staff also characterized ongoing collaboration in their district to be ineffective. For example, a handful of CTE educators spoke negatively of special educators and administrators "dumping" students with disabilities in their courses, or they referenced unwelcomed legal mandates for inclusion. They explained that, without "a meeting to really talk about concerns and questions" that "could have gone along way," educators and administrators made them feel "reprimanded" and "really set a bad tone for the relationship" between departments.

Strong School Partnerships. In addition to collaborations within districts, staff described partnerships with entities outside of their district that enabled them to support students

with disabilities in career development. Of these examples, staff most often cited their own partnerships with local employers "who have really embraced our kids" to be critical for students to work. Several special educators spoke of the importance of "advocating for students" to employers and "letting them know how much I believe in [students'] abilities to succeed at their business." Staff also discussed their partnerships with disability agencies – primarily VR counselors and pre-ETS providers – to give students "extra supports that I may not have the time to teach them." More broadly, CTE educators and school counselors spoke of partnerships with local technical schools and employers that allowed them to prepare students with disabilities "specifically for the skills and expectations of those environments" and give these personnel "a heads up about what works for the student" so that they could support them after graduation.

Staff overwhelmingly agreed that they were most successful in preparing all students for success in local industries and receiving monetary supports for doing so when "we do what we can for the community and the community does what they can for us." Multiple special educators and paraprofessionals described having personal networks beyond the district to have facilitated their development of work-based learning experiences. Staff identified connections within their families ("my ex-husband runs an auto shop;" "my brother-in-law works at [a local church]") and social networks ("friends that own businesses;" "this lady that goes to church with me") that have led them to "identify needs in the community our students could serve." Lastly, a few staff mentioned instances in which their personal relationships with staff from other departments (e.g., the CTE work-based learning program; the guidance department) or districts ("other teachers in my work-based learning certification class") made them aware of resources ("a letter to provide to potential employers") and funding opportunities ("scholarships available through local organizations") of which they could then educate their students and families.

Some staff also described partnerships with students' families to have supported them in facilitating career development. Multiple staff expressed frustration by their struggles to increase the expectations that families had for their students with disabilities to pursue meaningful work; yet, a few special educators pointed out that, when they were able to place students in work-based learning and capture data that reflected success, they witnessed "parents believe their kid could work for the first time ever." Moreover, a Weller special educator highlighted the importance of directly supporting families to pursue postsecondary options. She said, "if I sent this application home to the parents, it would never happen, so I typically will have parents come in and sit down with me and go through that application process because it's overwhelming."

Limited School Partnerships. On the other hand, several staff described nonexistent or ineffective partnerships beyond their districts. Special educators commonly cited inconsistent staffing at disability agencies as a primary barrier to effective partnership. A Forrester transition specialist lamented, "whenever I have a contact, they either retire or leave and we are back at stage one again." Moreover, some staff expressed hesitance in partnering with local employers, explaining that they were unsure of how to arrange work-based learning experiences with employers, or – in a few cases – uncertain of who would be willing to collaborate. Staff also reported a lack of time for making these connections, sharing a Rieger case manager's sentiment that, "I just wish there was time set aside where someone could actually help students contact people [at postsecondary workplaces or programs] to get the ball rolling." More broadly, some staff spoke to a need for "our state programs and our school system to have a better way of communicating." Staff suggested that limited interagency communication or planning occurred even when school partnerships were put into place. For example, nearly every special educator who reported that pre-ETS providers were providing services to their students characterized

these services to be provided in isolation while educators were "working on something else."

Several staff members also characterized partnerships with families of students with disabilities to be limited for supporting career development. They spoke frequently of an overall lack of involvement from families in their students' career planning, particularly when they were raising several children, struggling financially, or did not expect their student to work, viewing employment planning and support as "just another thing added to their plate when they're already exhausted." Staff from some districts described struggles to facilitate a "real world connection between what they're learning in school and what it's really going to be like in the workforce" for students with families who were not working themselves or were uninterested in their students pursuing postsecondary education or employment. A few staff cited limited English proficiency or a lack of parent education to hinder communication with families.

District Infrastructure

Supportive Infrastructure. Across interviews, staff from multiple districts cited district-wide infrastructure (i.e., policies for staffing, scheduling, physical spaces, and transportation) that supported the career development of students with disabilities. Staff in multiple districts pointed out that, when their districts applied for grants to fund specialized transition staff or develop career exploration programs meant to support marginalized populations, these efforts created infrastructure that "made it easier" to prepare students with disabilities for work. Regarding transportation, staff reported district busing that transported students to CTE courses in other buildings or policies that ensured transportation to work-based learning sites (e.g., purchasing a van, requiring paraprofessionals to earn a CDL license). Finally, staff discussed policies on the allocation of physical spaces, such as a separate building for a transition program

that could "make [older students] feel like they are not just going back to high school." Lastly, staff expressed appreciation for scheduling structures that enabled career development activities, such as block scheduled periods that "allowed more time to get out to work-based learning and actually work" and "advisory periods" that could be used for pre-ETS services.

Limiting Infrastructure. In contrast, staff from multiple districts cited district-wide infrastructure that resulted in "incomplete" career development services for students with disabilities or expressed a desire for increased infrastructure to support such. They often described limited policies for ensuring collaboration that intentionally facilitated career development for students with disabilities. This included collaboration within departments (e.g., transition specialists supporting special educators in integrating career instruction within classes) and across departments (e.g., related service providers collaborating with special educators on student career goals, special educators and CTE coordinators planning work-based learning experiences, school counselors communicating with special educators about alternate diploma requirements). Finally, some staff expressed policies that (a) hindered students with disabilities from accessing school-wide career programs, such as pre-requisite criteria for participating in work-study programs (e.g., minimum grade point average, disciplinary record) or (b) fell short in providing support these students needed (e.g., assistance finding a job, transportation to work).

Staff Attitudes Regarding Career Development

Willingness to Improve Career Development Services. Nearly all staff who participated in interviews expressed a strong willingness to improve career development services provided to students with disabilities. Staff most commonly discussed their desire for students to participate in more work-based learning experiences, particularly as they approached graduation

or continued to receive services between the ages of 18 and 22. Educators described going to great lengths to increase opportunities for their students, such as "being very visible in the community and with the school board and director, and most important, the superintendent" so "they are willing to support new things for my students." They described "hounding students after school hours to fill out their paperwork so they have the greatest chance at receiving financial aid available to them." Some even reported recruiting graduated students who could still quality for special education services to re-enroll and benefit from new opportunities to work for pay in the community while still receiving special education support. Multiple staff members echoed a desire to (a) increase a focus on career development for their students in place of some of the emphasis being placed on academics and state assessments and (b) pursue positions in their district that focused on this area (e.g., transition teacher, career exploration teacher).

In some instances, staff expressed attitudes regarding students with disabilities that expanded their opportunities for career development. For example, a Bard CTE educator described how her own confidence in students' abilities had prompted her to include students with disabilities within her career exploration course:

> Most important thing that I have always said and will continue to say until I am no longer able to say anything… we cannot treat them like they have a disability. We cannot expect less out of them. We cannot water down and "baby" what we expect of them because they have a disability. We have to expect the same thing. We have to have high expectations of them, and we have to push them to the next level. So what if they're on a first grade reading level? You're still going to do senior level work. I'm just going to really, really have to scaffold for you. But if they're never pushed, they're never going to get better. And if we don't have high expectations, when they go to the workplace, those employers are not going to care that they can't read because they have a reading disability they're going to be expected to still do their job.

Viewing Career Development as a Limited Priority. Despite an overwhelming desire to improve career development services for students with disabilities, a handful of staff characterized career development as a lesser priority or cited instances in which other staff held

this perception. Frequently, this tension related to district or state pressure for students to succeed in end-of-course or standardized assessments and reflected a belief that succeeding academically and preparing for employment were distinctly different objectives. Staff described feeling overwhelmed by the demands of addressing academics for their students and ensuring they earned credits needed for a diploma. Some highlighted a hesitance to "pull students from academic classes for employment services" or prioritized academic intervention periods over CTE courses to make sure that students could "do well in their classes and prepare for the ACT." A handful of staff described the reluctance of special educators to provide work-based learning opportunities based on personal preferences or concerns for student safety and liability. For instance, one Woodford special educator explained that, although students in her class worked in the community, students in the next-door classroom did not, concluding that "it is very frustrating that it's up to this teacher for whether or not a kid is going to have these experiences."

A handful of staff suggested that a "mindset and cultural change" was needed in their district and surrounding community for staff to value employment as the ultimate goal of education for all students, including those with the most significant disabilities. The same Bard CTE educator who described efforts to include students with IDD in her courses cited "being verbal" and "being able to sit there in class" as necessary for students to be included in her course, stating that students with more intensive support needs (i.e., complex communication challenges, challenging behaviors) may be "too wild" to "leave the self-contained classroom" and join district initiatives. Low expectations for students with significant disabilities were echoed across multiple participants, including CTE educators and paraprofessionals who questioned if career-related experiences would "even be meaningful" for these students or worried that students could get hurt or be taken advantage of "without the supervision of a

teacher at all times." As a result, CTE educators expressed hesitancy for including students with significant disabilities in their classrooms or assigned a paraprofessional to "do their own thing with them" during career development activities.

RQ6: How Do Staff Roles and District Profiles Vary Across Districts?

This section addresses district variations regarding (a) the extent to which staff performed roles in career development for students with disabilities, (b) staff views on district staffing and their own roles, and (c) district-wide strengths and gaps in career development programming for students with disabilities. Within each area, I describe how district-and community-level factors emerged within each of the 10 districts. See Table 5 for explanatory statements that contextualize staff views on staffing models and role allocation within each district.

District Variations in Staff Roles

Career Assessment and Goal Development. Districts varied in the extent to which staff reported performing tasks in most areas of career development regardless of district size or location. For example, with respect to career assessment and goal development, only 55.6% of surveyed Forrester staff reported performing at least one task in this area, whereas 93.3% of Beam staff reported performing at least one task. More specifically, only two Forrester staff members reported summatively assessing students' employment-related skills or supporting them in developing and monitoring long-term career plans. Similarly, the percentage of staff who reported performing at least one task for addressing collateral skills and needs for employment ranged from 63.6% to 87.0% for nine of the districts, but this percentage was only 44.0% in Forrester. Only three Forrester staff members reported supporting students with disabilities in

developing resumes, mock interviewing, or applying to jobs; even fewer educated students and

families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities (22.2%) or managing government

benefits (11.1%), and 11.1% supported students in applying to postsecondary education

programs. In an interview, the Forrester transition specialist described challenges in finding the

time to digest available assessments and meaningfully assess students all on her own, saying:

> I feel like we're getting a foundation, if that makes sense. A teacher applied for a grant, so
> we had money to buy a lot of resources, curriculum assessments, those types of things.
> But, what I've struggled with is having the time to really sit down and go through a lot of
> that.

Staff also cited scheduling to affect the roles they could play in assessing and supporting students

with disabilities. Staff from Forrester, Rose, and Woodford indicated that their district's use of

block scheduling provided the time needed for transition specialists to provide career assessment

and goal setting supports to students, and Rieger staff found that advisory periods built within

their schedule provided time for these supports. Nonetheless, staff from Daniels and Weller cited

their bell schedules and testing schedules to inhibit students with disabilities in general education

from receiving pre-ETS services like those in self-contained classes. Alternatively, Bard and

Beam staff reported difficulty providing pre-ETS services to students with high-incidence

disabilities because these students were ashamed to be "seen as special ed."

Career-Related Instruction and Experiences. Districts also varied with respect to

career-related instruction. The percentage of surveyed staff within each district that reported to

plan career development classes in ways that students with disabilities could participate ranged

from 6.7% in Daniels to 60.0% in Beam. Staff from Beam reported in interviews that busing

available to transport students with and without disabilities to CTE courses at their vocational

building facilitated career-related instruction in several CTE pathways. Moreover, because Beam

had used state grant funds to hire job coaches for work-based learning, paraprofessionals were

freed to support students in CTE courses. This resulted in greater inclusion in these courses.

Relatively few surveyed staff reported having involvement in facilitating work experiences for students with disabilities across any of the districts. Nonetheless, at least one staff member from six districts (i.e., Beam, Rose, Woodford, Daniels, Rieger, Weller) shared in interviews that they provided work-based learning in the community; the remaining districts did not. The positions of individuals developing work experiences and partnerships differed by district, but each individual's position was specialized in some way. In Rose, Woodford, Rieger, and Weller, special educators teaching self-contained classes facilitated work experiences for their students with IDD. Although these self-contained classes also existed in the other districts, administrators and staff reported that very limited or virtually no work-based learning was provided in those districts. Maker administrators said a lack of transportation prevented these experiences, and administrators from Bard and Forrester pointed to a lack of businesses in their local community at which students could work to prevent these experiences. Alternatively, a Blanton special education supervisor reported that she was still acclimating to her position and was unaware of what work-based learning "would look like." In Daniels, a grant-funded transition specialist developed work-based learning experiences. Although specialists funded through the same grant were also employed in Forrester and Bard, they did not perform this role. In Beam, a special educator designated as a transition teacher developed student work experiences. Similarly, in Woodford, a special educator and paraprofessionals who worked with students aged 18-22 in a district transition program performed this role.

Staff varied widely across districts in the extent to which they cited opportunities, expectations, and supports (or a lack thereof) in their surrounding communities to influence the roles they played in providing career-related experiences to students. Participants in Blanton,

Forrester, Bard, and Daniels tended to describe very limited opportunities for employment in their counties that held them back from providing work-based learning in the community that was aligned with the interests and goals of their students with disabilities. Even though Forrester and Daniels employed transition specialists, they said that student opportunities were limited to school-based experiences. Bard and Blanton described a new joint initiative to place students in jobs at the leading factories in their communities, but they did not anticipate much involvement of students with disabilities in these opportunities due to criteria on minimum grade point average or credit completion that could hinder their participation. On the contrary, multiple staff from Beam reported that job opportunities were "tough to come by" in their remote mountain community, but special educators and counselors cited identifying and addressing the specific needs of those few local employers to be crucial for creating sustained paid jobs for their students with disabilities. For example, a Beam special educator taught her students the specific skills needed to increase sales at a local store, which prompted the employer to "see the value" in the students' work and offer them paid positions, and school counselors supported these students in accessing clothing and addressing hygiene for work. Some staff from districts with multiple high schools (i.e., Blanton, Rose, Woodford, Maker) referenced distinct variations between the various communities served by their districts (e.g., local businesses, industry needs, accessibility for transporting students within the community) that resulted in career-related experiences being provided in some high schools but not others. These staff collectively suggested that different supports (e.g., school personnel, community partnerships) were needed for different high schools to account for these variations in communities and meaningfully prepare students for success.

Staff also deemed transportation needs to influence their roles in career-related experiences to various extents across districts. Beam staff described scheduling rides with district

busing being used to transport students to the vocational building to also bring students with disabilities to work-based learning sites. Staff from Rose, Woodford, and Weller indicated that paraprofessionals have been required to earn a CDL to drive students to work. On the other hand, Maker staff indicated that a lack of transportation was the primary barrier keeping them from providing work-based learning experiences in the community for their students with disabilities.

School Partnerships. Regarding school partnerships, a handful of interviewed staff from Beam, Forrester, Rose, Maker, and Weller described initiatives from administrators to develop district-wide partnerships with agencies, particularly pre-ETS providers or VR counselors. For example, Rose special educators shared that the district transition coach had established an ongoing relationship with the local pre-ETS provider and regional VR office, but they were responsible for corresponding with these staff to schedule services for their students. Similarly, staff from Blanton, Bard, and Weller reported that students with disabilities – including those with significant disabilities – were referred to inclusive higher education programs and supported in applying for college accommodations as a part of their regular meetings with college-career advisors in the district who were hired with funds from state or local programs.

The extent to which surveyed administrators agreed that career development tasks were performed sufficiently in their districts varied across the 10 districts. Views were particularly mixed in the area of school partnerships, for which the within-district mean response agreement across tasks ranged from 2.5 ($SD = 0.3$) in Maker to 3.7 ($SD = 0.4$) in Daniels. Similarly, the within-district mean response agreement across tasks in addressing collateral skills and needs for employment ranged from 2.7 ($SD = 0.1$) in Rieger and Maker to 3.6 ($SD = 0.4$) in Daniels. Counties with fewer staff members performing tasks in these areas tended to also reflect lower administrator agreement that tasks were performed sufficiently. Lastly, the within-district mean

response agreement across tasks related to career assessment and goal development ranged from 2.6 ($SD = 0.3$) in Rieger to 3.4 ($SD = 0.2$) in Daniels. In some districts in which 75% or more of staff reported involvement in this area, administrators agreed that tasks were performed sufficiently (i.e., Rose, Woodford, Daniels, Weller). Conversely, in other districts where most staff reported to perform tasks in this area, administrators disagreed that tasks were performed sufficiently (i.e., Blanton, Beam, Rieger). Nonetheless, in Forrester, only five staff reported involvement in this area, but administrators still agreed that tasks were performed sufficiently.

Staff Views on Staffing and Roles

Staffing by District. Staff views with respect to district staffing and their own individual roles certainly varied by district. The mean response agreement of surveyed administrators that staffing was sufficient to prepare all students for employment ranged from 2.0 in Rieger to 3.1 in Blanton, and the mean response agreement of surveyed school staff varied from 2.3 in Daniels to 3.0 in Woodford. Blanton staff reported that some school counselors and CTE educators served students at both high schools in the district in order to address staffing needs; yet, a Rieger administrator reported that she was hesitant to move special educators and paraprofessionals between the middle school and high school against their wishes even though staffing needs changed at the schools from year to year. Moreover, in some districts (i.e., Woodford, Bard, Rieger, Maker, Weller), agreement between staff and administrators varied by a difference of 0.3 or more. In each of these counties other than Woodford, a greater percentage of staff expressed agreement that staffing was sufficient to prepare all students for work than did administrators.

Districts also varied in staff views of available staffing for preparing students with disabilities for work. The mean response agreement of surveyed administrators that staffing was

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sufficient to prepare students with disabilities for employment ranged from 2.2 in Rieger to 3.0 in Woodford. The mean response agreement of surveyed school staff varied from 2.3 in Daniels to 2.8 in Beam and Bard. Across districts, agreement between administrators and school staff on staffing for students with disabilities varied more (i.e., in total, 2.6 for administrators and 3.0 for staff) than it did for all students. Still, in half of districts, administrators expressed greater agreement (i.e., Blanton, Rose, Woodford, Daniels, Weller). Administrators and staff from Daniels, Beam, Rieger, and Weller reported difficulty filling several staff positions, including special educators, CTE educators, paraprofessionals, and related service providers.

Nonetheless, staff from Beam and Weller praised their districts' designation a special educator as a "transition teacher" for students with IDD as an efficient solution for providing these students with effective employment preparation. These staff also desired the same type of position for students with high-incidence disabilities. In another common example, participants from Blanton, Weller, and Maker called for a separate transition program focused on work-based learning and community instruction for 18-21-year-old students with disabilities, such as the one that existed at Woodford. A Blanton administrator commented, "I just want what [students are] doing at 19 to look different than what they're working on at 14"). Yet, participants reported a lack of staffing for developing such a program. A Weller special educator explained:

> We're so short staffed right now, we don't even have enough [paraprofessionals]. I mean, honestly, I think there's two positions currently open, and we're struggling to keep students covered in their inclusion settings, enough staff to carry them to job sites. So, at this point we simply don't have enough for a person extra to do that.

Student Preparation for Employment by District. Participant views on the extent to which their districts prepared students with disabilities for work were quite mixed across districts but similar between administrators and staff. The mean agreement that the district effectively prepared students with disabilities for future employment was 2.8 ($SD = 0.7$) for surveyed

administrators and 2.7 (*SD* = 0.7) for surveyed staff. Administrators tended to agree that their district effectively prepared students in Daniels (3.5), Woodford (3.2), Weller (3.1), Rose (3.0), Bard (3.0); fewer expressed agreement in other districts. Administrators expressed much greater agreement than staff in Rose, Woodford, Bard, and Daniels.

  Case Management Models. There were some instances during interviews in which participants named advantages or disadvantages to specific staffing models established by their districts and discussed their implications for effectively preparing students with disabilities for employment. The most common example related to the allocation of IEP case management roles to special educators, which varied widely across districts. In Beam, Forrester, Rose, Woodford, and Bard, special educators typically served as IEP case managers for students they taught. Administrators in Weller highlighted their attempt to assign students the same case manager throughout their high school career, "allowing them to build relationships over time." Sometimes, case managers were assigned by grade level, as administrators reported that "staff prefer it this way." In Blanton, these models varied by school. Nonetheless, in Maker, Rieger, and Daniels, a special educator served as the case manager for the district. These individuals wrote all components of IEPs – including transition plans – for all students with disabilities but did not teach any courses. Several administrators praised this model to specialize roles for both case managers and classroom educators, saying "the case managers love that they're not teaching…and the teachers love that they can just teach and not focus on the paperwork, [so] it allows everybody to focus on what they're really good at." Additionally, they claimed that this model allowed for "getting much more accurate [IEP] paperwork" and "consistency" with fewer staff to train in IEP writing. It also prevented districts from "having to pull teachers from class for IEP writing or meetings." Indeed, special educators at districts that used this staffing model

characterized their roles to be more focused, whether that be case management or classroom

teaching. A Rieger case manager explained her struggles before the district shifted to this model:

> We had all [the IEP paperwork] to do during an hour planning, plus our planning time for class, plus your everyday academic stuff [like] grading and all that. There for sure wasn't any time to even think about, or any time to talk to students [about career plans]…[Now], I can focus more on the IEPs and how to serve students in that way. And teachers can focus more on the students in the classroom and not have [IEPs] in the back of their heads.

Likewise, a Maker special educator who was solely responsible for classroom teaching reported

that he felt "absolutely spoiled rotten" by no longer having to write IEP transition plans and

proclaimed that he would "even consider living under a bridge before I would go back to that

model [where he was writing IEPs] because I hate paperwork with a passion."

In contrast, one Maker special education coach pointed out that classroom teachers "don't

get as hands-on with their paperwork" as they may not always be able to access IEP transition

plans and were not as aware of student goals, saying "I can't imagine not being right in my kids'

files." More specifically, the Rieger special education supervisor – while generally in favor of

this model – admitted that having a case manager write all IEPs presented a particular problem

with the quality of transition plans. She reported that, while the case manager used a

standardized curriculum-based measure for writing and monitoring academic goals, "transition is

definitely a place where we need assistance…the transition goals are not as specific as I would

like…we use a questionnaire that basically mimics the questions in the postsecondary section of

the IEP…. [but] it's very cookie cutter." Indeed, the Rieger case manager explained that, given

her responsibility to complete IEP paperwork for all students with disabilities at the school, she

felt limited in developing and monitoring meaningful goals that supported student employment:

> Hopefully by senior year, [students] know what college they want to go to…but, really, there's no specific time they could really work on that in school. I just have it as a goal that they will be searching the internet…and we can get the information, but there's so

much more that needs to be done. I wish there was more time to talk one-on-one with the students and actually work on these things.

This case manager explained that she was "not comfortable" writing transition plans for students with IDD being served in self-contained classes because, "I do not feel like I know them well enough." Thus, she solely developed plans for students served in general education, and classroom special educators wrote plans for students in their self-contained classes. Yet, the extent to which the case manager "knew" those students in general education was unclear.

Supplemental Academic Intervention Services. In another example, both Blanton and Rieger staff described a staffing model that maximized inclusion of students with disabilities in general education for academic content but limited their participation in CTE courses. In these districts, special educators provided services for students with disabilities who were in general education core classes during supplemental academic intervention periods. As a result, these extra course periods prevented students from fitting CTE classes aligned with their courses of study within their schedules. Multiple special educators insisted that students benefitted from having the additional time to receive support for their academic classes. Likewise, administrators asserted the importance of keeping those students in general education classrooms as the "least restrictive environment." Nonetheless, multiple participants lamented that this model was "a disservice" to students with disabilities who were then "unable to explore a [CTE] focus area outside of one" to "really determine what they want to do" like their typical peers, who were often completing CTE courses in two or three focus areas. Rieger administrators reported that they had attempted a different staffing model in which special educators pushed into general education core content courses, but the district supervisor of curricula explained:

> Here's the problem with pushing in: we don't have enough sped teachers to do that. We don't have enough, we can't find and have sped teachers, even if we had the positions available…we have difficulty finding that funding and then when we fund the teachers,

we don't have the applicants for it.

Staff Role Clarity. Participants generally agreed that staff roles were clear for supporting students with disabilities in career development. However, this agreement varied by district, particularly from the perspective of administrators, as the mean agreement that staff roles were clear ranged from 2.6 in Maker to 3.6 in Woodford for surveyed administrators. Agreement in this area was much more consistent across districts for surveyed staff (i.e., 2.7 to 3.0). Further, while agreement tended to be similar between administrators and school staff within districts, it varied widely between these groups (i.e., a difference of 0.3 or more) in Woodford, Bard, and Daniels, each with administrators agreeing more than staff that roles were clear.

Administrators in both Forrester and Daniels generally agreed that staffing was clear, and they reported that staff played multiple roles given their small schools. Yet, transition specialists who were funded through state-allocated funds in both these districts reported a great deal of unclarity on their own roles in this new position within the context of "what is everybody else already doing." Both specialists shared the sentiment that "I am just now beginning to understand what the job entails," even after holding the position for several months (Daniels) or years (Forrester). They partially attributed this unclarity to a lack of administrators understanding the program or possessing the necessary information from the state to clearly define and delegate roles, making statements like, "the principal would be more than happy to help but has limited knowledge as well." The Forrester transition specialist said, "we're literally building a program…. we're building this plane while we're flying it."

District-Wide Strengths and Gaps

Although common patterns certainly emerged with respect to the district-wide strengths

and gaps in career development programming for students with disabilities, specific district factors contextualized the roles that staff played and the extent to which these assets and limitations prevailed within each of the 10 districts (see Table 5). The sections that follow summarize the degree to which strengths and gaps emerged within each district.

Availability of Career Development Services for All Students. Staff reported that students with disabilities met regularly with college-career advisors hired through state or local funds in Blanton, Weller, and Bard, and students met regularly with an assigned staff mentor in Rieger. Nonetheless, these tended to be students with high-incidence disabilities in general education rather than those with IDD in self-contained classrooms. Students with various disabilities met regularly with a transition specialist in Daniels and Forrester, and Beam students took career-related courses with a designated special education transition teacher. Students were not reported to participate in regular career planning meetings with staff in Woodford, Rose, or Maker. Moreover, staff tended to characterize the CTE offerings in their districts to be robust, but Bard and Forrester staff shared that their small districts had very limited CTE options for any student, and Rose staff described CTE offerings to vary widely across their five high schools.

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Career Development. All districts reported that students with disabilities were included in CTE courses, but staff in half of districts tended to report that few students with IDD were included in these courses. Nonetheless, in Rose, Weller, Rieger, Forrester, and Beam, CTE educators and school counselors received training on providing accommodations and modifications to students with more significant disabilities in CTE classes. In Woodford, the special education supervisor instructed all CTE educators to include students with IDD in their classes, but staff reported that, due to ongoing concerns over student safety and lingering contention between the special education and CTE departments,

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only some students with IDD were included in CTE classes. Staff in Maker, Blanton, Daniels, and Bard expressed a desire for more students with IDD to be included in CTE. Moreover, staff in Rose, Woodford, Weller, and Beam reported that more explicit supports were needed for students with high-incidence disabilities to participate in district-wide work study programs.

      Collaboration and Partnership. Staff generally reported strong collaboration in their districts, particularly within their own departments. Nonetheless, Weller was the only district from which staff described specific opportunities for joint professional development and collaboration time provided by their district to facilitate cross-departmental collaboration. Conversely, Woodford staff particularly described collaboration and trust between special education and CTE to be challenging. Staff reported to partner with VR or other agencies for students to receive pre-ETS services in Woodford, Blanton, Weller, Rieger, Beam, and in some schools in Rose. Students with IDD tended to receive pre-ETS more often than students with high-incidence disabilities, except for Forrester, Daniels, and Bard, at which transition specialists provided these services to all students with disabilities. Students did not receive pre-ETS in Maker, and staff reported to have little or no contact with VR in Maker, Bard, Daniels, or Rieger. Regarding work-based learning, staff at Woodford, Rose, Weller, Rieger, Daniels, and Beam reported to partner with local employers to provide work experiences for students with disabilities. Staff received work-based learning training in Weller. In Beam, staff were hired to serve as student job coaches at community work experiences. Finally, district-wide efforts for school-family partnerships were mixed across districts. Staff reported events focused on career development for families of students with disabilities – such as transition fairs and information nights – in Weller and Forrester, but staff in Woodford, Rose, and Maker particularly reported struggles with eliciting parent involvement and buy-in for their students working.

District Infrastructure. With respect to district infrastructure that had implications for career development for students with disabilities, staff shared that their administrators had applied for grants that would supply funding or personnel within this specific area at Weller, Daniels, Bard, Forrester, and Beam. Staff reported that their administrators provided transportation for students with disabilities to get to work-based learning sites at Woodford, Rose, Weller, Rieger, and Beam and to access CTE courses in other buildings at Maker and Beam. Moreover, Woodford staff were provided with a separate facility for supporting 18–22-year-old students in their transition program. Finally, staff in Forrester, Rose, and Woodford cited block scheduling in their district to be advantageous for providing pre-ETS services, and Rieger staff used advisory periods within their schedule for career-planning. Alternatively, staff cited existing policies that limited students with disabilities from participating in career development, such as work-study criteria that inadvertently excluded many students with disabilities (Woodford, Rose, Maker, Blanton, Weller, Bard) and academic intervention periods that hindered students from participating in multiple CTE courses (Rieger, Blanton).

Staff Attitudes Regarding Career Development. Staff expressed value for career development in all districts. Nonetheless, staff in Rose, Bard, and Forrester cited that their districts prioritized college preparation over career development, and this resulted in students who were not college-bound to need additional courses, supports, and experiences. Staff in Woodford, Rose, Maker, and Bard suggested that a shift in mindset was needed for staff to expect students with IDD to work and provide them with services that supported this goal.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

Understanding the roles that various high school staff play in supporting career

development for students with disabilities is essential for appraising their collective delivery of

employment preparation services within the context of rural school districts. In the remainder of

the paper, I synthesize key findings with respect to each of the six research questions, address

limitations of this review, and discuss important implications for research, practice, and policy.

What are the Roles of School Staff in Career Development for Students with Disabilities in

Rural Districts?

Collectively, rural staff played a wide variety of roles in career development. They most

frequently performed tasks in the areas of career-related assessment and goal development,

career-related instruction, and addressing collateral skills and needs. These roles included the

direct support of students with disabilities (e.g., teaching skills, administering assessments) as

well as tasks that indirectly fostered their career development (e.g., scheduling courses,

developing events that would facilitate work). Nonetheless, the extent to which staff played roles

in these areas varied widely by district. In some districts, there were tasks performed by only a

few staff members or even none at all, such as developing partnerships with local postsecondary

education programs regarding students with disabilities or supporting students in accessing

transportation options for work. Districts could benefit from guidance on (a) the areas pertinent

for their programming to address for ensuring all students with disabilities are prepared for

employment and (b) the roles that staff in various positions could play to account for each of these areas. Multiple participants from this study remarked that they had previously never even considered various career development areas with respect to students with disabilities.

Nonetheless, staff across districts reported limited involvement in program development and improvement regarding career development for students with disabilities. Less than a quarter of staff assumed roles in evaluating the inclusion of students with disabilities in career development programs with their typical peers, evaluating the alignment of such programs with standards or industry needs, or promoting these programs to the local community. The literature suggests that better integration of disability-specific and generically available programs is needed (Trainor et al., 2020). Districts can integrate services more effectively and widen the inclusion of students with disabilities in opportunities available to all students by building the capacity of their staff, developing common understanding and commitment, and adopting a team structure with communication procedures that promote accountability to inclusion and program evaluation (Agran et al., 2019). It is also especially important in rural districts for administrators and staff to ensure that the career development of all students align with local industry needs, given that employment opportunities may be scarcer in these communities (Mahiko, 2017). Within these efforts, districts should ensure that staff access quality training on career development for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2020). Yet, less than 20% of staff reported receiving training on work preparation for students with disabilities and even less reported providing such training to colleagues, affirming previous literature that suggests limited availability of professional development focused on career development for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2010; Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014). Staff who did report receiving training in this area within their district (e.g., accommodating students with disabilities in CTE

courses) or informal supports from colleagues in special education (e.g., identifying postsecondary opportunities students with disabilities could access) cited these experiences to prompt many of the roles they played in the career development of students with disabilities.

How Do School Staff Come to Assume Their Roles?

Staff primarily reported that they self-decided roles in career development for students with disabilities rather than being delegated tasks by an administrator. This may account for the wide variety in tasks performed amongst districts. Special educators vary widely in their preservice training, prior professional development, perceived responsibilities, and abilities to recognize district needs for career development (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016), and other professionals often possess less knowledge or experience related to students with disabilities in this area (e.g., Milsom, 2002; Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014). For example, few staff (and in some districts, none) reported involvement in developing career-related experiences or partnerships that support students with disabilities. Those who assumed roles in these areas indicated that their work was heavily informed by their own personal relationships within and beyond their small districts. Several studies suggest that special educators struggle to collaborate for providing their students with employment services (Carter et al., 2020) and work experiences (Awsumb et al., 2022), reporting that they may be unaware of potential partners, their offerings, or preferred modes of communication (Bumble et al., 2021). Districts should provide professional development focused on career development with specific consideration for students with disabilities.

Staff also reported that they assumed roles after collaborating with others but reported few formal mechanisms to collaborate. They cited collaborations between special education staff

and professionals from other departments (e.g., CTE, school counseling, related services) to be vital for students to access the limited job opportunities and postsecondary education programs available in their rural communities (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019). Other collaborations that staff identified extended beyond the school (e.g., asking employers about industry needs). Yet, staff in various positions from across all districts reported that they were rarely (if ever) provided with opportunities from administrators to collaborate for these purposes. Therefore, these collaborations only occurred when they developed personal relationships with colleagues and initiated collaboration independently. They expressed a desire for cross-departmental training and common meeting times that would intentionally facilitate these collaborations for all staff, as recommended in previous studies (e.g., Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014; Schutz et al., 2021).

How do School Staff View Their Roles and District Staffing Models?

Within multiple districts, administrators and staff expressed varying views on staffing. These groups expressed different levels of agreement that staffing was sufficient for supporting students with disabilities. Sometimes, administrators lacked knowledge of staff roles in other departments despite being in very small rural districts. For example, special education supervisors lacked understanding of CTE educators' support for students with disabilities participating in work-study programs. It was possible that administrators perceived staffing to be sufficient for addressing the needs of students with disabilities without understanding the roles that staff did or did not actually play in these areas. On the contrary, in some instances, administrators characterized staff to be limited in their roles, but those staff actually reported more extensive roles. For example, many administrators described paraprofessional roles as no more than providing accommodations and addressing student behaviors, but paraprofessionals in

these same small rural districts also said they developed work-based learning sites and trained employers. Moreover, administrators and staff expressed varying agreement that students with disabilities were effectively prepared for work. Sometimes, administrators cited that IEP transition plans were "compliant" in addressing employment, but their staff described these plans to be "simply fiction because they do not ever actually happen." In contrast, some administrators insisted that, although plans had been found to be non-compliant by the state, their staff were effectively preparing students for employment. Future research is needed to understand administrators' expectations and perceptions regarding quality career development for students with disabilities and the sources of information they draw upon to come to such conclusions.

Staff generally characterized their own roles to be clear for supporting students with disabilities in career development, but transition specialists were an exception to this pattern. In multiple districts, transition specialists felt uncertain of how their own roles related to those of their colleagues, and other staff also reported that it was difficult to discern how the tasks of transition specialists differed from other special educators, school counselors, or CTE educators teaching career exploration. These depictions align with the Lillis and Kutscher (2021) study, in which transition coordinators characterized their roles as ambiguous and called for more clearly defined and well-supported roles. Ironically, several participants from districts without transition specialists persisted that staffing such a position in their district would supplement existing services in clearly defined ways. If administrators develop transition-specific positions, they must make sure roles are clear and delineated in relation to other staff (both in and outside of special education) within multi-tiered systems of support (Morningstar et al., 2015).

To What Extent Do Roles Vary by Staff Position?

Special educators played highly dispersed roles and could benefit from increased contributions from their colleagues regarding career development for students with disabilities. On average, surveyed special educators performed 24 different career development tasks monthly, weekly, or daily; and some special educators reported performing up to all 48 presented tasks. They often described feeling overwhelmed by duties in many other areas, such as academic instruction, test preparation, social-emotional support, and "preparing students to be valuable members of society." These findings align with previous studies that characterize special educators' tasks to be extensive (e.g., Eisenman et al., 2011), and having limited staffing in small rural districts could certainly exasperate struggles to meet all student needs. Many of these educators described having "way too much going on" to prepare all students for work, and those who characterized their pursuits to be prosperous cited the contributions of CTE educators, school counselors, paraprofessionals, administrators, and others to be crucial. Related service providers reported very limited roles in career development but suggested that they were often left out of transition planning and could perform more targeted roles when educators designed work experiences that directly facilitated their involvement. In some instances, counselors or paraprofessionals described more active roles in supporting work preparation for students with disabilities, such as facilitating students in completing requirements for the diploma that aligned with their career goals and addressing basic needs for workplace success. Special educators should tap into the expertise, skills, and networks of their colleagues, and administrators should provide training and collaboration opportunities that directly facilitate these contributions.

At the same time, a variety of school professionals without obvious responsibilities for supporting students with disabilities or facilitating career development could contribute in extended ways. Participants from many districts reported challenges with maintaining sufficient

staffing in several positions given the limited availability of qualified individuals within their rural communities. Additionally, staff reported that special educators and school counselors "wear many hats" and may not be able to adequately support all students in preparing for employment. In a few instances, participants reported creative ways in which they have addressed these staffing gaps. Rieger administrators developed homeroom periods in which general educators provided vocational assessment and career planning and trained other staff in the district to serve as career mentors to students. In Forrester, a general educator fostered career exploration within her ACT preparation class. Staff described tight-knit relationships within their small rural schools, resilient commitment to their districts and communities, and many supports from the community that could reasonably enable and sustain career development for their students, as suggested in previous literature (Rowe et al., 2020). Administrators and staff should consider ways in which other school personnel or community members (e.g., general educators, administrative staff, athletic coaches) may contribute to career development for students with disabilities and elicit the contributions of these individuals using strategies that gather the ideas of multiple stakeholders, such as community conversation events (Schutz et al., 2021).

Although staff outside of special education served students with disabilities in various capacities, they often did not view employment as an ultimate goal of their services. Many CTE educators discussed their inclusion of students with IDD in courses to be solely for socialization, rather than for employability. Moreover, many school counselors identified "passing classes" and "getting credits for graduation" to be the primary objectives of their supports for students with high-incidence disabilities, feeling "unsure" of how these students pursued jobs after graduation, received necessary supports, or experienced long-term success. Meanwhile, related service providers focused on supporting academics without considering students' future goals.

For instance, a speech language therapist described having very little knowledge of her students' career goals, the opportunities available to them, or the career-related experiences being provided at school; as a result, she "rarely ever even think[s] about transition." At the conclusion of her interview, however, she characterized the mere prompting of interview questions on how her roles could relate to work preparation as "some good reflection time" that "has given me lots to think about for my students' life after school and some new things to focus on."

Staff may require a shift in mindset to view employment as an end goal of services for students with disabilities. Administrators are well-positioned to develop infrastructure that intentionally communicates this mission to all staff and can increase their involvement in doing so. For example, a special educator in Weller – the only district in which most students with IDD were working for pay – cited the value of her administrators to be "absolutely integral" to her development of work experiences. She described administrators' support to be evident through their (a) development of bus routes to work-based learning sites with existing district transportation, (b) application for funding for a transition specialist, and (c) training of CTE educators and school counselors on supporting career development for students with disabilities. Yet, these efforts were not described in other districts.

What are the Strengths and Gaps Regarding Career Development Programming within Rural School Districts?

Staff tended to share a variety of career development services available in their districts but reported mixed perspectives on the extent to which students with disabilities accessed these services. These patterns varied with respect to disability type. For students with high-incidence disabilities who spent most of their school day in general education, several staff characterized

the "hands on" nature of CTE courses to be more accessible than academic classes. They often emphasized that these students "tend to be the hardest workers," could complete postsecondary technical programs, and had the capacity to obtain lucrative careers in these areas. Yet, multiple staff members admitted that – although these students were not excluded from district-wide opportunities – a host of barriers kept them from actually participating in these opportunities along with their typical peers. Academic interventions left limited time available for CTE coursework, and pre-requisite requirements for accessing work experiences excluded many students with disabilities from taking advantage of these important opportunities.

Students with high-incidence disabilities may need more explicit support in (a) accessing work experiences during high school (e.g., assistance with identifying and applying for jobs, securing transportation to work experiences) and (b) ensuring that necessary supports sustain after graduation (e.g., assistance with accessing accommodations in postsecondary programs). Many staff called for more work-based learning and collateral skill development (e.g., resume development, mock interviews) to be provided as part of these students' special education services. Nonetheless, few staff reported performing these roles with students with high-incidence disabilities. This finding aligns with previous literature suggesting that schools may lack initiatives beneficial for students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., Carter et al., 2010) and that these students may require additional support in self-advocacy to be prepared for future employment (Trainor et al., 2016). Additional research is needed to better understand the extent to which students with high-incidence disabilities meaningfully participate in district-wide career initiatives, the barriers that hinder their participation, and solutions to address these barriers.

The portrait was different for students with IDD. Several staff expressed value for students with IDD receiving work preparation during high school, and in multiple districts, staff

described extensive roles they played to address these needs through work-based learning. However, in some districts, staff reported that students with IDD were minimally included in district-wide career assessment, planning, or coursework, aligning with the findings of Carter et al. (2010) that reported mixed participation of students with severe disabilities in various career development activities. In other districts, multiple participants reported that students with IDD who received most services in self-contained classes were also included in CTE courses, but several staff expressed challenges in ensuring that such inclusion successfully supported student career goals. Staff commonly cited concerns related to students passing safety assessments to hinder their inclusion. Some staff also explained that inclusion was challenging when paraprofessionals were unavailable to accompany students in CTE courses and support CTE educators in feeling comfortable, aligning with previous literature (Harvey et al., 2007). In many of the instances in which students with IDD were included, they were described to be placed with CTE educators known to be accommodating, in classes in which they could more readily learn "life skills," or at times at which paraprofessionals could support multiple students within the same classroom. Staff minimally described these placements to align with students' career goals or to result in them developing skills that would increase their employability.

Districts should conceptualize the intentions of including students with disabilities in CTE and other career activities to go beyond their overall inclusion and focus upon facilitating strong employment outcomes for these students, just as is prioritized for their typical peers. Administrators should foster a school culture of high expectations for employment for students with disabilities. They should support staff in using transition assessment data to inform student placement in CTE and other instructional experiences (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018). As long suggested in the literature (e.g., Harvey et al., 2007), administrators can train CTE

educators on providing accommodations and modifications to students that support their mastery of career-related content, including preliminary safety assessments. Multiple staff called for efforts to ensure that CTE educators, school counselors, and special educators were provided with the time and support to develop relationships that would facilitate student inclusion. In some instances, staff described a lack of trust and understanding between departments to cause a breakdown in inclusion. In others, they cited strong relationships to foster such inclusion. Districts should develop infrastructure that supports, rather than limits, the opportunity for students with disabilities to participate in district-wide opportunities. When limited career development opportunities do exist in the district, staff may have to act creatively in developing new opportunities for students with disabilities, as done so in a few districts in this study.

Participants tended to report strong partnerships with various entities in their local communities, but rarely described ways in which these collaborations benefitted students with disabilities in career development. Positive efforts for collaboration included hiring staff with specialized roles for supporting career development, ongoing partnerships between their districts and local postsecondary education programs, and avenues for CTE staff and school counselors to collaborate with employers and community members through work advisory groups. Yet, staff often reported that these partnerships were minimally or never focused on students with disabilities, as these students was likely "not even on the radar" of such partners. Districts should utilize collaborative strategies to gain information about existing district partnerships and brainstorm ways in which such may be used to better support students with disabilities in accruing career-related knowledge, experiences, and linkages. For example, they may host community conversation events to gather ideas from a variety of local stakeholders and develop school advisory boards focused on work-based learning for students with disabilities.

How Do Staff Roles and District Profiles Vary Across Districts?

The portrait of staff roles and district-wide strengths and challenges with respect to career development for students with disabilities varied widely across districts. Several factors emerged across districts as seemingly subtle nuances regarding infrastructure, personnel, staffing models, and staff mindsets or networks that data suggested to have unique implications on the roles staff played and the services students received (see Table 5). For example, in some cases, the presence of specialized staff who directly supported career development allowed their colleagues to focus on other important priorities. Yet, in other cases, the role ambiguity of these specialized staff hindered the services provided. Moreover, the number of high schools within a district presented varying logistical advantages or disadvantages with respect to transportation, facilities, and other factors that impacted these roles and services. Ensuring that students with disabilities are prepared for postsecondary employment is a complex phenomenon; thus, administrators and staff must understand their districts' own unique needs to improve their career development services.

Sometimes, administrator-imposed infrastructure with intensions to adhere to the guidance of state and federal mandates for special education services inadvertently hindered the career development of students with disabilities. For example, in many districts, administrators explained that students with high-incidence disabilities were educated in general education classes for all core academic classes because this maximized their inclusion; nevertheless, having few special educators and schedule constraints for providing services directly within general education classes, administrators instead provided supplemental academic intervention periods for these students to receive academic services in place of career technical education courses that could assist them in career exploration and planning. In these cases, inclusion efforts trumped

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access to career development services. In another example, administrators designated specially-trained special educators as case managers who wrote IEP transition plans for all students with disabilities in an attempt to increase the compliance of these plans with state and federal mandates; nonetheless, these case managers lamented that they had little time to work directly with students to assess their skills and goals and address necessary steps (e.g., applying for jobs or college programs, completing paperwork to receive postsecondary accommodations) for ensuring that these goals actually manifested after graduation. In these cases, the compliance of IEP transition plans was prioritized over the quality of such plans.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations to this study suggest areas for future research. First, although this study captured the perspectives of staff across multiple positions in special education and general education, not every staff member within these positions participated from every district. It was possible that there were educators, counselors, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and administrators who did not participate but played unique roles unaccounted for in study findings. Additionally, although data from administrator interviews were used to inform purposive sampling of staff, there may have been other professionals in these districts who played relevant roles of which administrators were unaware. Future research is needed to fully summarize the involvement of professionals outside of special education with respect to career development for students with disabilities. The extent to which students with disabilities have been included in the CTE literature has been studied (see Lombardi et al., 2018), but a review that examines the extent to which the career development of students with disabilities has been addressed in related services, school counseling, and school administration could be beneficial in understanding how employment preparation for students with disabilities is considered in these bases of literature.

Second, although our study included 10 rural districts spanning across Tennessee that differed in size, staffing, and surrounding communities, this sample cannot fully represent all rural school districts across the United States. This line of inquiry should be extended to other locales that differ in local industries, youth and community demographics, available resources, and prevailing state or local policies for special education and CTE. Research conducted with a larger base of rural districts and participants is needed to identify relationships between particular district characteristics (e.g., the presence of a transition specialist, student access to a school counselor, staffing models for case management), the career development services students receive, and the postsecondary employment outcomes they achieve.

Third, although this study collected perspectives from staff with varying vantage points through both quantitative and qualitative measures, all data was gathered through self-report. Staff perceptions may not fully reflect their actual practices or the factors to which they attributed their roles. Participants may have made assumptions about practices in their districts or possessed inaccurate understanding of policies, particularly in other departments. Therefore, future research is needed to fully characterize the extent to which students with disabilities participate in district-wide initiatives for career development and develop competencies that predict their employment outcomes. Additional studies that identify specific barriers that may be hindering student participation (e.g., Awsumb et al., 2022) and potential solutions are warranted.

Fourth, the timing of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had implications for the roles that staff played (or did not play) in career-related experiences at the time of this study, particularly regarding community-based experiences. At times, it was difficult for staff to speak to roles they performed prior to the pandemic in connecting students to work, versus their present practices in light of limitations imposed due to safety and recent staffing challenges presented by the

pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for school practices subside, subsequent studies will be important for characterizing staff roles and district practices in career development for students with disabilities within the "new normal" of education and society.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have important implications for practice and policy related to career development and transition programming in rural school districts. Identifying the roles that staff play in preparing students with disabilities for work and how their collective efforts result in strengths and gaps in district programming – and the absence of necessary processes and procedures for ensuring high-quality transition planning – are important initial steps for developing strategic role allocation and staffing that addresses the unique needs of rural districts in preparing students for employment after graduation.

Implications for Practice

Districts should provide staff with training on career development for students with disabilities and, when possible, facilitate staff in training one another. Few staff in this study reported receiving any professional development or training on work preparation for students with disabilities. Yet, those staff who were heavily involved in providing career-related experiences or developing partnerships that resulted in jobs for their students tended to report that these tasks were self-decided, as suggested by previous research (Harvey et al., 2020; Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014). Administrators should develop trainings and opportunities that support special educators in disseminating information to CTE educators, school counselors, and related service providers on the postsecondary goals of their students and the competencies

necessary for addressing these goals within their local communities to which each of these

stakeholders could contribute. CTE educators could also benefit from training on understanding

disabilities, interpreting IEPs, and using strategies to support the needs of their students with

disabilities to prepare for success within the industries of their rural communities (Hall, 2007). In

exchange, CTE educators and school counselors may provide training and information to special

educators and paraprofessionals on opportunities available within the district, as well as ways in

which their own tightly-knit partnerships within their rural communities may further support

student goals. Districts should assess staff knowledge in developing partnerships and provide

training for partnering with employers, agencies, inclusive higher education and other college

programs, and others with whom they are already closely connected or could potentially connect

to in order to increase staff knowledge of how to broaden their networks for providing students

with work experiences (Bumble et al., 2021). This could serve as a starting point for ensuring

that all students with disabilities – rather than just those accessing a special educator with a large

personal network or with experience in developing partnerships – consistently receive career-

related experiences throughout high school that align with the industry demands of the very

communities in which they plan to live and work after graduation.

Moreover, administrators should provide staff with opportunities to collaborate across

departments and with the community to facilitate roles that lead to employment for students with

disabilities. Staff overwhelmingly reported having close personal networks within their rural

school communities and tended to cite their collaboration with others – particularly colleagues in

other departments or individuals outside districts – to prompt many of the important roles that

they played in preparing students with disabilities for work. Yet, they were rarely, if ever,

provided with time for cross-departmental collaboration. This limited partnership may explain

why staff members in a variety of positions expressed a lack of knowledge on policies,

programs, and practices that existed within their small district but were outside of their area of

expertise, as revealed in previous literature (e.g., Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014). Districts can

address this gap by developing cross-departmental collaboration time during professional

development days or staff planning periods (Carter et al., 2020; Harvey et al., 2020).

Further, administrators from within and outside of special education should jointly collect

information from their staff to map efforts and opportunities across departments and address the

needs of staff in various positions. Districts varied in their inclusion of students with various

disabilities in career development activities. Data suggested that, in many districts, the missing

link to this inclusion concerned staff unawareness of the priorities of other departments – even in

small districts with only one high school – and a lack of comprehensive program evaluation with

respect to students with disabilities. Administrators can address this gap in feasible, cost-efficient

ways by creating multidisciplinary teams with representation from various departments and

members of the local community for developing and evaluating career development programs

that lead to employment for all students, including students with disabilities (Harvey et al.,

2020).

Implications for Policy

Special education policymakers should ensure that the ways in which they evaluate the

quality of transition planning and inclusion for students with disabilities incentivizes rural

districts to utilize individualized transition planning and career development that is tailored to the

interests and preferences of each student with disabilities, rather than sacrifice quality for mere

compliance. Many of the decisions of administrators and staff in these districts regarding staffing

and role allocation were said to be made to act in compliance with state and federal mandates for special education. However, in some cases, these attempts to act in compliance – or support staff without having the necessary information on what services were actually being provided – inadvertently resulted in a lack of quality career-related instruction, planning, or experiences for the very students with disabilities these mandates are in place to protect. State department representatives should ensure that transition goals focused on employment and other areas of adult life are not only written in compliance with legal guidelines (e.g., specific, measurable, time-bound) but are also accompanied by a feasible plan for IEP team members who have regular access to the student to employ evidence-based practices for actually meeting such goals. Additionally, state leaders should provide training to district leaders that (a) clarifies the intentions of compliance mandates, (b) supports them in organizing their programs and allocating their staff to address these mandates through best practices, and (c) provides them with the means to increase the involvement of related service providers and others in career development. It is important to ensure that even the smallest rural districts in the most remote corners of the state can access quality training and information dissemination so that they can best support all students, including those with disabilities, in transitioning to employment.

Conclusion

Strategic role allocation and staffing in high schools is essential for ensuring that students with and without disabilities access career development services for postsecondary employment. This is especially important in rural districts, who often face greater staffing shortages, few formal disability agencies within their vicinities, and limited local job opportunities. The results of this mixed methods study provide insight into the roles of school staff preparing students with

disabilities for work, how staff come to assume these roles, and the ways in which roles collectively result in programmatic strengths and gaps within and across 10 rural Tennessee districts. Findings suggest that – although special educators and paraprofessionals perform many tasks within this area – CTE educators, school counselors, related service providers, administrators, and others can contribute to career development for students with disabilities by connecting them to opportunities and supports available in the school and local community but that are rarely tapped into for these students. Further, data indicate that staff tended to self-decide their own roles or take on tasks upon collaborating with others; these findings suggest that training and time allotment for cross-departmental collaboration and community partnership could ensure that staff develop capacity to prepare all students with disabilities for work. Future research is needed to fully characterize the extent to which students with disabilities participate in district career development activities and the ways in which staff beyond special educators could contribute within this area.

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APPENDIX A

District Administrator Agreement Checklist

This checklist provides a description of all procedures that will be followed to support your district in understanding the strengths and areas for improvement around career development for students with disabilities, as well as potential recommendations for staffing models and role allocation.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you will:
- ❑ Provide information about your district in an interview via Zoom, which will last no longer than 60 minutes.
- ❑ Complete a 40-item survey about staffing in your district that should take about 20-25 minutes.
- ❑ Ask/encourage your staff (high school special educators, paraprofessionals, related service providers, school counselors, CTE educators) complete a voluntary, 60-item anonymous survey about their own roles. This survey should take them about 20-25 minutes. To get a complete picture of staffing in your district, we will need to survey at least 75% of these staff members. As a thank you for completing the survey, every staff member (including you) who completes the survey will receive a $10 gift card to a store of choice.
- ❑ On the survey, school staff (and you) will have the opportunity to express interest in participating in an in-person focus group with colleagues that will allow us to collect more in-depth information about staffing and role allocation in the district. As a thank you, every staff member who participates in a focus group will receive a $25 gift card.
- ❑ Participate in a follow-up interview via Zoom to share your perspectives of the process and findings.

Likewise, we agree to do all the following:
- ❑ Develop a constructive and easy-to-understand summary of findings and recommendations specific to your district and across the state.
- ❑ Meet with you or other staff – through a method of your choice – to share this summary with you and answer questions.
- ❑ Treat all findings professionally and respectfully, maintaining the confidentiality of your district and all who participate in any writing or discussion or our findings.

Semi-Structured District Administrator Interview Protocol

Welcome and Overview (5-10 minutes)
Thank you for your interest in our study and for taking the time to talk to me today. My name is Michele Schutz, and I am a doctoral candidate in special education at Vanderbilt University. This project has two aims: (a) to understand the roles that different school staff members play in preparing high school students with disabilities for employment and (b) to identify strengths and gaps across your districts to make recommendations for improvement in programming. In today's interview, I would like to gather some more information about your district, the staff that are involved in preparing students with disabilities for employment, and the types of tasks that they perform. What you share about your district will help our team to determine who to talk to from your district and what to ask your staff about their roles, so that we may get a clearer picture of the roles that staff play, understand the strengths and gaps in your district's programming, and make recommendations for programming that will lead to improved employment outcomes for students with disabilities in your district.

Before we begin recording, I want to assure you that your name or your district name will not be used when we talk or write about this study. The recording will be transcribed and de-identified so that any reference to people or places will be removed.

Any Questions? We will now begin recording.

Section 1: District Background Information (5-10 minutes)
1. How many high schools are in your district?
2. Does your district have a separate transition program for students aged 18-22?
   a. Is this housed within a typical high school or in a different setting?
   b. Is this program staffed by different staff than the high schools or does it use the same staff?
3. Does your district have any self-contained programs for students with more severe disabilities, such as intellectual disability or challenging behaviors? Tell me about these programs.
   a. Is this housed within a typical high school or in a different setting?
   b. Is this program staffed by different staff than the high schools or does it use the same staff?

Section 2: Administrator Background Information (5-10 minutes)
4. What is your job title?
5. Tell me about your primary job responsibilities, particularly those related to students with disabilities and career development.

Section 3: School Staff Roles Related to Career Development (25-30 minutes)
6. In your district, who is primarily responsible for career development for students *without* disabilities?

     a. [*If responded that it is all staff's job*]: Great, I agree. But, of all educators and staff, list one or two staff who you believe play the biggest role in career development.

     b. [*After they initially respond*]: Are any of the following staff members involved in career development?

         i. Career technical education (CTE) educators?

         ii. School counselors?

         iii. Other general educators (e.g., STEM teachers)?

         iv. Other administrators beyond yourself?

7. What types of tasks do each of these staff members perform to help prepare students for employment?

     a. [*After they initially respond*]: Does anyone in your school perform tasks?

         i. Assess student skills related to work and develop goals?

         ii. Teach career-related skills?

         iii. Provide career-related experiences to students?

         iv. Develop or participate in school partnerships with employers, colleges, or families?

         v. Participate in initiatives for program evaluation and improvement?

8. In your district, who is primarily responsible for career development for students *with* disabilities?

     a. [*If responded that it is all staff's job*]: Great, I agree. But, of all educators and staff, list one or two staff who you believe play the biggest role in career development for students with disabilities.

     b. [*After they initially respond*]: Are any of the following staff members involved in career development?

         i. Special educators?

         ii. Related service providers (i.e., occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, speech-language therapists, itinerant teachers, assistive technology specialists)?

         iii. Paraprofessionals?

         iv. Other administrators beyond yourself?

     c. Are there different staff responsible for different types of students with disabilities, such as:

         i. Students with more significant cognitive disabilities?

         ii. Students with severe challenging behaviors?

     d. Does your school have a person specifically dedicated to transition or career development for students with disabilities, such as a transition coordinator?

9. What types of tasks do each of these staff members perform to help prepare students for employment?

     a. [*After they initially respond*]: Does anyone in your school perform tasks?

         i. Assess student skills related to work and develop goals?

         ii. Teach career-related skills?

         iii. Provide career-related experiences to students?

         iv. Develop or participate in school partnerships with employers, disability agencies, college or training programs, or families?

         v. Participate in initiatives for program evaluation and improvement?

      vi.   IEP development and monitoring?
10. Tell me about how staff are assigned tasks and roles when it comes to career development for students with disabilities.
    a.   Who determines their roles?
    b.   How are roles designed?
    c.   How are roles communicated to staff?
    d.   How did this process come to be?
11. *[If more than one high school]:* Do different schools in your district have different staffing models?
12. Do these staffing models differ based on what types of disabilities students have? If yes, how so?
13. Based on your observations and experiences, how is the current staffing model working thus far in your district?
    a.   What is working well?
    b.   What do you wish could be changed?
14. To what extent are students with disabilities being adequately prepared for employment?
    a.   What do you feel are your district's greatest strengths?
    b.   What do you feel are your district's greatest areas for improvement?

Section 4: Logistical Information (5-10 minutes)
15. What would be the best way for our team get a survey out to your staff?
    a.   We would like to disseminate the survey to staff. How may we access their email addresses?
    b.   Would you like to send an email to staff "vouching" for the survey?
    c.   Are there any upcoming staff meetings where we could speak to staff about the project?
16. Is there anything you feel we need to know before we proceed with reaching out to your staff to ask them about their roles in working with students with disabilities?
17. What would be your recommendations for grouping staff in focus group interviews to ensure that they feel comfortable sharing their opinions honestly and openly?

APPENDIX C

Administrator Survey

Transition
TENNESSEE

Welcome! We invite you to take part in the Rural Transition Administrator Survey. This survey addresses the roles different educators and school leaders play in preparing students with disabilities for employment. The feedback you share through this survey will help us develop new resources and guidance for improving transition programs and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities living in rural communities across Tennessee. We hope to hear from 100% of staff at your school! The survey takes about 20 minutes to complete. We will provide you a $10 gift card to thank you for your time. We will also provide you and your district with an overall summary of what we learned later this spring. Although you will have to add your name and contact information to receive the gift card, your individual responses will not be shared publicly or with your school. Your district has approved this survey. However, your responses will be kept confidential, and it will be impossible to trace any findings back to you. The survey is voluntary, and you may close it at any time. Completing this survey indicates your consent to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Michele Schutz, M.Ed. at michele.a.schutz@vanderbilt.edu or at (847) 852-0940. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject-including questions, concerns, or complaints, or to offer input-you may contact the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll-free at (866) 224-8273. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest responses are appreciated. Thank you! Michele Schutz, Doctoral Student & Erik Carter, Ph.D., Professor Transition Tennessee Vanderbilt University

Survey Code: 9A

SECTION 1: INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please tell us a little about you. This information will allow us to understand who we are hearing from, but it will not be linked to your answers when we are sharing findings with your district.

Do you have leadership responsibilities related to special education and knowledge of transition programming?

○ Yes
○ No

Please provide your job title.

_____

Which of the following best describes your position?

○ District-level administrator with responsibilities related to students without disabilities AND students with disabilities
○ District-level administrator with responsibilities related to ONLY students with disabilities
○ School-level administrator with responsibilities related to students without disabilities AND students with disabilities
○ School-level administrator with responsibilities related to ONLY students with disabilities
○ Other

Please describe your primary job responsibilities.

At what school(s) do you currently work?

What is your gender?

○ Female
○ Male
○ Prefer to self-describe
○ Prefer not to answer

What is your gender?

What is your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.

☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
☐ Hispanic/Latino/Latina
☐ White
☐ Other or prefer to self-describe
☐ Prefer not to answer

Please describe your race.

What is your highest level of education?

○ Bachelor's degree
○ Master's degree
○ Master's degree + additional education
○ Educational specialist (Ed.S. or S.Ed.)
○ Doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.)
○ Other
○ Prefer not to answer

Please describe your level of education.

Which of the following describes the students that you serve in your job? Select ALL that apply.

☐ Students without disabilities
☐ Students with mild disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, emotional/behavioral disorders)
☐ Students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (i.e., Down syndrome or intellectual disability, Autism, multiple disabilities)

SECTION 2: YOUR VIEWS ON STAFFING IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Describe the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sufficient staffing is available for preparing ALL students in my district for future employment.	O	O	O	O
Sufficient staffing is available for preparing students with disabilities in my district for future employment.	O	O	O	O
Staff roles are clear in my district for supporting students with disabilities in career development.	O	O	O	O
My district effectively prepares students with disabilities for future employment.	O	O	O	O

To what extent is supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment a priority of your district?	O This is a primary goal of our district. It is more important than most of our other responsibilities. O This is a secondary goal of our district. It is important, but there are many other responsibilities that are more important. O I am not sure how much of a priority this is in our district. O This is not a goal of our district.
Please describe other areas of your district that must take priority over preparing students with disabilities for employment.	---

SECTION 3: CAREER DEVELOPMENT TASKS IN YOUR DISTRICT

This next section contains 48 tasks, organized by different areas of career development. This information will help us understand the extent to which different tasks are performed in your district and which staff members are responsible for them.

In these questions, SWD = students with disabilities.

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
1. Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans.	O	O	O	O	O
2. Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning.	O	O	O	O	O
3. Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development.	O	O	O	O	O
4. Collect data on career development goals for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
5. Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills.	O	O	O	O	O
6. Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans.	O	O	O	O	O
7. Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Collect data on career development goals for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

CAREER-RELATED INSTRUCTION

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
9. Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
10. Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class).	O	O	O	O	O
11. Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate.	O	O	O	O	O
12. Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and necessary pre-requisite education and skills.	O	O	O	O	O
13. Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care).	O	O	O	O	O
14. Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job).	O	O	O	O	O
15. Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal-setting).	O	O	O	O	O
16. Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work.	O	O	O	O	O
17. Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals.	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER-RELATED INSTRUCTION

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and necessary pre-requisite education and skills.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal-setting).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

ADDRESSING SKILLS AND NEEDS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYMENT

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
18. Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings.	O	O	O	O	O
19. Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
20. Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
21. Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare as it relates to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
22. Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications).	O	O	O	O	O
23. Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education/college programs related to careers of interest.	O	O	O	O	O
24. Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations).	O	O	O	O	O
25. Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD is working.	O	O	O	O	O

ADDRESSING SKILLS AND NEEDS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYMENT

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare as it relates to work for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education/college programs related to careers of interest.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD is working.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCES

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
26. Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest.	O	O	O	O	O
27. Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., SkillsUSA, FFA, FCCLA, DECA) or other work-related extra-curricular opportunities in the school.	O	O	O	O	O
28. Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart).	O	O	O	O	O
29. Connect SWD to unpaid work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling).	O	O	O	O	O
30. Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers.	O	O	O	O	O
31. Connect SWD to paid (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community.	O	O	O	O	O
32. Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences.	O	O	O	O	O
33. Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites.	O	O	O	O	O
34. Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike).	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCES

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., SkillsUSA, FFA, FCCLA, DECA) or other work-related extra-curricular opportunities in the school.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Connect SWD to unpaid work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Connect SWD to paid (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike).	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
35. Develop partnerships with local employers to provide work opportunities to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
36. Develop partnerships with local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
37. Develop partnerships with disability agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) or community organizations (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school.	O	O	O	O	O
38. Support families of SWD to develop high expectations and get involved in their child's career development.	O	O	O	O	O
39. Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, other agencies.	O	O	O	O	O
40. Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory).	O	O	O	O	O

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop partnerships with local employers to provide work opportunities to SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop partnerships with local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Develop partnerships with disability agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) or community organizations (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Support families of SWD to develop high expectations and get involved in their child's career development.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, other agencies.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district:

Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory).

☐ Special educators
☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers
☐ School counselors
☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists)
☐ School or district administrators
☐ Paraprofessionals
☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor)
☐ Other

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

To what extent is the following true for each task:
This task is performed SUFFICIENTLY in my district for SWD to ultimately obtain their employment goals after graduation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A in our district
41. Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students.	O	O	O	O	O
42. Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs.	O	O	O	O	O
43. Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives.	O	O	O	O	O
44. Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
45. Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
46. Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
47. Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community.	O	O	O	O	O
48. Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers.	O	O	O	O	O

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other
Select ALL of the following individuals who perform this task in your district: Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	☐ Special educators ☐ Career-technical education (CTE) teachers ☐ School counselors ☐ Related service providers (school psychologists, social workers, therapists) ☐ School or district administrators ☐ Paraprofessionals ☐ Professionals from outside of the school (e.g., pre-ETS provider, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor) ☐ Other

GIFT CARD INFORMATION

Thank you for completing the survey!

Please provide your contact information below to receive your gift card. This information will not be shared publicly. All of your responses will be kept confidential. If you do not wish to provide contact info, select "I do not want a gift card."

Would you like your gift card?	○ Yes, I would like my gift card. ○ No, I do not want my gift card.

First Name

Middle Name

Last Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Street and Address Number

City/Town

Zipcode

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

As part of this research study, we are also conducting focus group interviews with a small group of survey
participants to hear about views in more depth. Interviews would last 1.5 hours and occur at a time and place (may be virtual) that works for you and your schedule! If you are selected to complete an interview, you will receive a $25 gift card. Please note below whether or not you would like to be contacted to participate in an interview.

Are you interested in participating in a focus group interview with your colleagues to talk about your views in more depth?	○ Yes, I am interested in being in a focus group with my colleagues to share more information ○ I would like to share more information but will only do so in an individual interview without my colleagues present. (NOTE: This may not be presented as an option.) ○ No, I am not interested in being in an interview.

Please select ALL of the following weekday dates/times for which you are typically AVAILABLE to participate in an interview.

	Afternoon (4:00-5:30)	Evening (5:00-6:30)	Late (6:00-7:30)
Mondays	☐	☐	☐
Tuesdays	☐	☐	☐
Wednesdays	☐	☐	☐
Thursdays	☐	☐	☐
Fridays	☐	☐	☐

Please select ALL of the following weekend dates/times for which you are typically AVAILABLE to participate in an interview.

	Early morning (9:00-10:30)	Late morning (11:00-12:30)	Early afternoon (1:00-2:30)	Late afternoon (3:00-4:30)	Evening (5:00-6:30)	Later than 6:30
Saturdays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sundays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX D

School Staff Survey

Transition
T E N N E S S E E

Welcome! We invite you to take part in the Rural Transition Staff Survey. This survey addresses the roles different educators and school leaders play in preparing students with disabilities for employment. The feedback you share through this survey will help us develop new resources and guidance for improving transition programs and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities living in rural communities across Tennessee. We hope to hear from 100% of staff at your school! The survey takes about 20 minutes to complete. We will provide you a $10 gift card to thank you for your time. We will also provide you and your district with an overall summary of what we learned later this spring. Although you will have to add your name and contact information to receive the gift card, your individual responses will not be shared publicly or with your school. Your district has approved this survey. However, your responses will be kept confidential, and it will be impossible to trace any findings back to you. The survey is voluntary, and you may close it at any time. Completing this survey indicates your consent to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Michele Schutz, M.Ed. at michele.a.schutz@vanderbilt.edu or at (847) 852-0940. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject-including questions, concerns, or complaints, or to offer input-you may contact the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll-free at (866) 224-8273. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest responses are appreciated. Thank you! Michele Schutz, Doctoral Student & Erik Carter, Ph.D., Professor Transition Tennessee Vanderbilt University

Survey Code: 8B

SECTION 1: INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS

Please tell us a little about you. This information will allow us to understand who we are hearing from, but it will not be linked to your answers when we are sharing findings with your district.

Which of the following best describes your position?

○ Special educator
○ Transition specialist/coordinator
○ Career technical education teacher
○ School counselor
○ School psychologist
○ Physical or occupational therapist
○ Social worker
○ Speech language therapist
○ Transition School to Work specialist (must be employed by school)
○ Pre-employment transition services provider (must be employed by school)
○ Paraprofessional
○ Administrator
○ Other

Please provide your job title

In the last year, have you in any way - directly or indirectly - contributed to supporting at least one student with disabilities aged 14 or older in preparing for employment?	○ Yes ○ No
At what school(s) do you currently work?	....
What is your gender?	○ Female ○ Male ○ Prefer to self-describe ○ Prefer not to answer
What is your gender?	....
What is your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.	☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native ☐ Asian ☐ Black or African American ☐ Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ☐ Hispanic/Latino/Latina ☐ White ☐ Other or prefer to self-describe ☐ Prefer not to answer
Please describe your race.	....
What is your highest level of education?	○ Bachelor's degree ○ Master's degree ○ Master's degree + additional education ○ Educational specialist (Ed.S. or S.Ed.) ○ Doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) ○ Other ○ Prefer not to answer
Please describe your level of education.	....

Please answer the following questions about the students with whom you work at your job.

Which of the following describes the students that you serve in your job? Select ALL that apply.	☐ Students without disabilities ☐ Students with mild disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, emotional/behavioral disorders) ☐ Students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (i.e., Down syndrome or intellectual disability, Autism, multiple disabilities)
How many students are on your caseload?	....
In what type of settings do you primarily provide services to students?	○ Self-contained special education classes ○ General education classes
What percentage of your students take the alternate assessment?	○ None ○ Less than 25% ○ 26-50% ○ 51-99% ○ 100%

SECTION 2: YOUR VIEWS ON STAFFING IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Describe the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sufficient staffing is available for preparing ALL students in my district for future employment.	O	O	O	O
Sufficient staffing is available for preparing students with disabilities in my district for future employment.	O	O	O	O
Staff roles are clear in my district for supporting students with disabilities in career development.	O	O	O	O
My district effectively prepares students with disabilities for future employment.	O	O	O	O

To what extent is supporting students with disabilities in preparing for future employment a part of YOUR job role?	O This is a primary role of my job. It is more important than most of my other job roles. O This is a secondary role of my job. It is important, but there are many other job roles that are more important. O I am not sure if this is part of my job role. O This is not part of my job role.
Please describe other roles of your job that must take priority over preparing students with disabilities for employment.	--

SECTION 3: YOUR JOB ROLES

This next section contains 48 tasks, organized by different areas of career development. This information will help us understand which staff members are performing which tasks in your district.

In these questions, SWD = students with disabilities.

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
1. Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans.	O	O	O	O	O
2. Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning.	O	O	O	O	O
3. Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development.	O	O	O	O	O
4. Collect data on career development goals for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
5. Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills.	O	O	O	O	O
6. Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans.	O	O	O	O	O
7. Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT

How did you come to perform this task?	
Have informal conversations with SWD about their career plans.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Conduct formative assessments to identify the strengths, interests, needs, and preferences of SWD related to career planning.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Develop short-term goals for SWD related to career development.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Collect data on career development goals for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Conduct summative assessments to evaluate SWDs' mastery of employment-related skills.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in developing and monitoring long-term career pathways/plans.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Share information related to career development in IEP/transition planning meetings for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Provide input regarding high school diploma pathways for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

CAREER-RELATED INSTRUCTION

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
9. Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
10. Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class).	O	O	O	O	O
11. Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate.	O	O	O	O	O
12. Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and necessary pre-requisite education and skills.	O	O	O	O	O
13. Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care).	O	O	O	O	O
14. Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job).	O	O	O	O	O
15. Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal-setting).	O	O	O	O	O
16. Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work.	O	O	O	O	O
17. Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals.	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER-RELATED INSTRUCTION

How did you come to perform this task? Develop curricula or lessons for teaching employment skills to SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Ensure that SWD can access challenging career development classes (i.e., pass safety test and other pre-requisites to get into class).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Plan career development classes in ways that SWD can meaningfully participate.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in exploring different career pathways and necessary pre-requisite education and skills.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Teach SWD general employment skills (e.g., soft skills, attendance, social skills, organization, time-management, self-care).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Teach SWD job-specific skills (e.g., performing typing tasks for computer job).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Teach SWD self-advocacy and self-determination skills (e.g., decision-making, goal-setting).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Teach SWD functional reading, writing, math, or technology skills needed for work.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in identifying high school courses that align with their career goals.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

ADDRESSING SKILLS AND NEEDS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYMENT

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
18. Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings.	O	O	O	O	O
19. Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
20. Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
21. Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare as it relates to work for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
22. Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications).	O	O	O	O	O
23. Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education/college programs related to careers of interest.	O	O	O	O	O
24. Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations).	O	O	O	O	O
25. Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD is working.	O	O	O	O	O

ADDRESSING SKILLS AND NEEDS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYMENT

How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in regulating challenging behaviors that present issues at work settings.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Provide input and intervention on mobility or physical skills related to work for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Provide input and intervention on communication skills (including augmentative and alternative communication) related to work for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Provide input and intervention on physical/mental healthcare as it relates to work for SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in preparing to obtain employment (e.g., develop a resume, mock interviewing, fill out job applications).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support students with disabilities in applying to postsecondary education/college programs related to careers of interest.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Educate students and families about the shift in their rights and responsibilities upon graduating and entering the workforce or postsecondary education (e.g., learning about the Americans with Disabilities Act and getting accommodations).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Educate students and families about managing government benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) while SWD is working.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCES

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
26. Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest.	O	O	O	O	O
27. Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., SkillsUSA, FFA, FCCLA, DECA) or other work-related extra-curricular opportunities in the school.	O	O	O	O	O
28. Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart).	O	O	O	O	O
29. Connect SWD to unpaid work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling).	O	O	O	O	O
30. Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers.	O	O	O	O	O
31. Connect SWD to paid (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community.	O	O	O	O	O
32. Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences.	O	O	O	O	O
33. Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites.	O	O	O	O	O
34. Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike).	O	O	O	O	O

CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCES

How did you come to perform this task? Connect SWD to mentors or professionals in careers of interest.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in participating in career and technical student organizations (e.g., SkillsUSA, FFA, FCCLA, DECA) or other work-related extra-curricular opportunities in the school.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Develop school-based employment experiences for SWD (e.g., school jobs, school store, school coffee cart).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Connect SWD to unpaid work-based learning experiences in the community (e.g., volunteering, job shadowing, internships, job sampling).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Plan or participate in job/transition fairs that connect SWD to potential employers.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Connect SWD to paid (part-time or full-time) jobs in the community.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in identifying and accessing accommodations and modifications in courses or work experiences.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Provide direct on-the-job support to SWD at work-based learning/job sites.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support SWD in accessing transportation options for work (e.g., driving, public transportation, rideshare, walking, riding bike).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
35. Develop partnerships with local employers to provide work opportunities to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
36. Develop partnerships with local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
37. Develop partnerships with disability agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) or community organizations (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school.	O	O	O	O	O
38. Support families of SWD to develop high expectations and get involved in their child's career development.	O	O	O	O	O
39. Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, other agencies.	O	O	O	O	O
40. Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory).	O	O	O	O	O

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

How did you come to perform this task? Develop partnerships with local employers to provide work opportunities to SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Develop partnerships with local colleges, universities, technical programs, training centers, or apprenticeships to provide opportunities or referrals to SWD.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Develop partnerships with disability agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) or community organizations (e.g., American Job Centers) that support career development for SWD after high school.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Support families of SWD to develop high expectations and get involved in their child's career development.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Write summary reports of SWDs' skills (e.g., Summary of Performance) related to career development needed for postsecondary settings, such as colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, other agencies.	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.
How did you come to perform this task? Evaluate potential settings for work-based learning or paid employment (e.g., ecological inventory).	○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task. ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues. ○ I chose to perform this task on my own. ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

For each task, please tell us HOW OFTEN you have performed the task in the last year for students with disabilities (if at all). You may see many tasks that you do not ever perform as part of your job - that is okay. For those tasks, select "Never." For the tasks that you do perform, you will be asked to select how you came to perform this task.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
41. Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students.	O	O	O	O	O
42. Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs.	O	O	O	O	O
43. Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives.	O	O	O	O	O
44. Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
45. Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
46. Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD.	O	O	O	O	O
47. Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community.	O	O	O	O	O
48. Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers.	O	O	O	O	O

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

How did you come to perform this task?

Collect information on the postsecondary outcomes of SWD who have graduated to inform school programs for current students.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to peform this task?

Participate in evaluating the alignment of career development programming with local, state, or national standards or industry needs.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you perform this task?

Participate in evaluating the inclusion of SWD in schoolwide career development initiatives.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to perform this task?

Receive training from other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to perform this task?

Provide training to other staff or professionals about career development for SWD.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to perform this task?

Make decisions about selecting resources, materials, curricula, or equipment related to career development for SWD.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to perform this task?

Promote school career development programs that include SWD to the surrounding community.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

How did you come to perform this task?

Recruit SWD to participate in career development programs with their typical peers.

- ○ Someone else assigned me to perform this task.
- ○ I chose to perform this task after collaborating with colleagues.
- ○ I chose to perform this task on my own.
- ○ I am unsure of how I came to perform this task.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

As part of this research study, we are also conducting focus group interviews with a small group of survey
participants to hear about views in more depth. Interviews would last 1.5 hours and occur at a time and place (may be virtual) that works for you and your schedule! If you are selected to complete an interview, you will receive a $25 gift card. Please note below whether or not you would like to be contacted to participate in an interview.

Are you interested in participating in a focus group interview with your colleagues to talk about your views in more depth?

○ Yes, I am interested in being in a focus group with my colleagues to share more information
○ I would like to share more information but will only do so in an individual interview without my colleagues present. (NOTE: This may not be presented as an option.)
○ No, I am not interested in being in an interview.

GIFT CARD INFORMATION

Thank you for completing the survey!

Please provide your contact information below to receive your gift card. This information will not be shared publicly. All of your responses will be kept confidential. If you do not wish to provide contact info, select "I do not want a gift card."

Would you like your gift card?

○ Yes, I would like my gift card.
○ No, I do not want my gift card.

First Name

_____

Middle Name

_____

Last Name

_____

Email Address

_____

Phone Number

_____

Street and Address Number

_____

City/Town

_____

Zipcode

_____

Please select ALL of the following weekday dates/times for which you are typically available to participate in an interview.

	Afternoon (4:00-5:30)	Evening (5:00-6:30)	Late (6:00-7:30)
Mondays	☐	☐	☐
Tuesdays	☐	☐	☐
Wednesdays	☐	☐	☐
Thursdays	☐	☐	☐
Fridays	☐	☐	☐

Please select ALL of the following weekend dates/times for which you are typically available to participate in an interview.

	Early morning (9:00-10:30)	Late morning (11:00-12:30)	Early afternoon (1:00-2:30)	Late afternoon (3:00-4:30)	Evening (5:00-6:30)	Later than 6:30
Saturdays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sundays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Protocol

Welcome and Overview

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. My name is Michele Schutz, and I am a doctoral candidate in special education at Vanderbilt University. The goal of this project is to understand the roles that different school staff members play in preparing high school students with disabilities for employment. We have heard from many people in your district on our online survey—including all of you— about the different roles you play with respect to supporting students with disabilities in career development. Today, we would like to hear some more detail about the specific roles you play in your position to support students, your views of the staffing models in your district, and your recommendations for making improvement in programming that will lead to stronger employment outcomes for students with disabilities. What you share will help researchers and practitioners in transition understand how transition services are being provided and what can be done to improve these at the systems level. Additionally, we will use what you share to develop specific ideas and recommendations for your district on how to improve transition programming. However, rest assured that responses will not be linked back to individual staff members.

This focus group will last up to 1.5 hours. I am going to ask a variety of questions about your views and experiences. You can skip any question you want. You'll receive the $25 gift card no matter how much you choose to share. I will also audio-record the focus group and take some notes. I want to assure you that your name will not be used when we talk or write about this study. The recording will be transcribed and de-identified so that any reference to people or places will be removed. I'm joined by ___, who is taking notes for me.

First, we will go over a few ground rules for the good of the group:
- We want to hear from everyone. It is important to share the floor and provide time for everyone to talk.
- Please be respectful of the opinions of others in the group, whether you agree or not. We are not trying to reach a consensus of opinion in the group. Instead, we are trying to hear the range of perspectives. It is okay—and encouraged—to share a different perspective.
- We ask that you respect the confidentiality of the focus group and not discuss what was shared or who participated outside of this group.
- [*If virtual*]: If you need to step away from Zoom, turn off your camera so that we know you are taking a break, keep your mic muted unless you're speaking, and use the chat to problem solve any technical difficulties.
- Lastly, if you have something important to share in response to a question but do not feel comfortable sharing it in front of the group or do not have time to do so, we have created a short questionnaire for you to complete at the end of the focus group on which you may share any additional information privately.

For our discussion today, we will start by getting to know each of you a bit. Then, we will talk

about three areas in our discussion. I will ask you to describe, in detail, some of the ways in which you support students with disabilities in preparing for the future and how you came to assume these roles. Then, I will ask you about the staffing models in your district and how you work with one another to support these students. Finally, I will ask you about the programs in your school to support students with disabilities and your recommendations for making them even stronger.

Any Questions? We will now begin recording.

Section 1: Background Questions (5-10 minutes)
1. Please introduce yourself by telling us your pseudonym, your job position in schools, and the types of disabilities of students who you most often support in your job. Please be very brief, only taking about 30 seconds.
2. How would you describe, in just a few words, your primary role (or roles) for supporting these students in career development?

Section 2: Staff Roles in Career Development for Students with Disabilities (30-35 min)
3. Tell us a bit about how roles are decided in your school when it comes to planning and implementing career development for students with disabilities.
    a. Are roles and responsibilities typically delineated by an administrator or do you tend to determine your own roles?
        i. Are these different for different schools in your district or departments/programs in your school?
    b. How do you know about the roles that others in your district are supposed to play and how to coordinate with one another? Do you ever feel like there are overlap in roles across multiple professionals?
    c. Do you ever negotiate your roles with an administrator or colleague? How do you do that?
    d. How confident do you feel in your own understanding of your roles? Are you ever unsure of what is your role versus that of a colleague?
    e. To what extent do you feel that your role reflects what you expected it would be when you began your position?

For this section, I will individualize questions for each district or staff group (e.g., special education staff or general education staff) based upon the survey responses of that district or group. I will ask participants to expand upon items for which the district or staff in similar positions tended to respond were not part of their job role, but they perform anyway or those they identified to be part of their job role, but they do not regularly perform. I will ask them to describe reasons (e.g., I noticed that some special education staff reported that it is their job to _____ but they rarely do so. Why do you think that is? or provide examples (e.g., I noticed that many staff reported that they _____. Can you provide some examples of how you may do this or how you came to assume this role?).
4. Based on responses to the survey *[screenshare visual representation of survey data from specific district]*:
    a. *For the tasks that you said were part of your job role, but you perform rarely or never, why is this?*

    b. For the tasks that you said were not part of your job role, but you still perform them, why do you do this?

    c. For the tasks that you said were not part of your job role, why do you believe that?

    d. Tell me more about the tasks that you were unsure of.

Section 3: Staffing Models and Role Allocation (20-25 min)

For this section, I will individualize questions for each district or staff group (e.g., special education staff or general education staff) based upon the survey responses of that district or group. I will ask participants to expand upon tendencies in district views on staffing models and roles (e.g., Why do you think that most staff feel that there are insufficient staff for supporting SWD? Explain how roles are unclear.)

5. *Based on responses to the survey . . .*

    a. Why may have staff in your district reported that there are insufficient staff for preparing all students for work?

    b. Why may have staff in your district reported that there are insufficient staff for preparing students with disabilities for work?

    c. Where is more staff attention needed? To perform what tasks?

    d. Why may have staff in your school reported that roles are unclear for preparing students with disabilities for work?

    e. For the tasks that were reported to be performed rarely or never across staff in your school, why are these tasks not being performed?

6. Describe what you see as the biggest gaps in your district with respect to transition for students with disabilities. Why do you think these gaps exist?

Section 4: Recommendations for District Improvements (20-25 min)

7. How could roles for supporting students with disabilities in career development be made clearer in your district?

8. Who else in your district should be utilized for supporting students in this area?

9. How could staff roles be reconfigured a bit differently to address the biggest gap areas in your district's programing?

10. What else could be done to address the biggest gap areas in your district's programming?

APPENDIX F

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Protocol

Welcome and Overview

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. My name is Michele Schutz, and I am a doctoral candidate in special education at Vanderbilt University. The goal of this project is to understand the roles that different school staff members play in preparing high school students with disabilities for employment. We have heard from many people in your district on our online survey—including you— about the different roles you play with respect to supporting students with disabilities in career development. Today, we would like to hear some more detail about the specific roles you play in your position to support students, your views of the staffing models in your district, and your recommendations for making improvement in programming that will lead to stronger employment outcomes for students with disabilities. What you share will help researchers and practitioners in transition understand how transition services are being provided and what can be done to improve these at the systems level. Additionally, we will use what you share to develop specific ideas and recommendations for your district on how to improve transition programming. However, rest assured that responses will not be linked back to individual staff members.

This interview will last up to 1 hour. I am going to ask a variety of questions about your views and experiences. You can skip any question you want. You'll receive the $25 gift card no matter how much you choose to share. I will also audio-record the focus group and take some notes. I want to assure you that your name will not be used when we talk or write about this study. The recording will be transcribed and de-identified so that any reference to people or places will be removed.

We will talk about three areas in our discussion. I will ask you to describe, in detail, some of the ways in which you support students with disabilities in preparing for the future and how you came to assume these roles. Then, I will ask you about the staffing models in your district and how you work with one another to support these students. Finally, I will ask you about the programs in your school to support students with disabilities and your recommendations for making them even stronger.

Any Questions? We will now begin recording.

Section 1: Background Questions (5-10 minutes)
1. How would you describe, in just a few words, your primary role (or roles) for supporting these students in career development?

Section 2: Staff Roles in Career Development for Students with Disabilities (30-35 min)
2. Tell us a bit about how roles are decided in your school when it comes to planning and implementing career development for students with disabilities.
    a. Are roles and responsibilities typically delineated by an administrator or do you

tend to determine your own roles?
      i. Are these different for different schools in your district or departments/programs in your school?
    b. How do you know about the roles that others in your district are supposed to play and how to coordinate with one another? Do you ever feel like there are overlap in roles across multiple professionals?
    c. Do you ever negotiate your roles with an administrator or colleague? How do you do that?
    d. How confident do you feel in your own understanding of your roles? Are you ever unsure of what is your role versus that of a colleague?
    e. To what extent do you feel that your role reflects what you expected it would be when you began your position?

For this section, I will individualize questions for each district or staff group (e.g., special education staff or general education staff) based upon the survey responses of that district or group. I will ask participants to expand upon items for which the district or staff in similar positions tended to respond were not part of their job role, but they perform anyway or those they identified to be part of their job role, but they do not regularly perform. I will ask them to describe reasons (e.g., I noticed that some special education staff reported that it is their job to ____ but they rarely do so. Why do you think that is? or provide examples (e.g., I noticed that many staff reported that they ____. Can you provide some examples of how you may do this or how you came to assume this role?).

    3. Based on responses to the survey *[screenshare visual representation of survey data from specific district]:*
        f. *For the tasks that you said were part of your job role, but you perform rarely or never, why is this?*
        g. *For the tasks that you said were not part of your job role, but you still perform them, why do you do this?*
        h. *For the tasks that you said were not part of your job role, why do you believe that?*
        i. *Tell me more about the tasks that you were unsure of.*

Section 3: Staffing Models and Role Allocation (20-25 min)
For this section, I will individualize questions for each district or staff group (e.g., special education staff or general education staff) based upon the survey responses of that district or group. I will ask participants to expand upon tendencies in district views on staffing models and roles (e.g., Why do you think that most staff feel that there are insufficient staff for supporting SWD? Explain how roles are unclear.)

    4. *Based on responses to the survey . . .*
        j. *Why may have staff in your district reported that there are insufficient staff for preparing all students for work?*
        k. *Why may have staff in your district reported that there are insufficient staff for preparing students with disabilities for work?*
        l. *Where is more staff attention needed? To perform what tasks?*
        m. *Why may have staff in your school reported that roles are unclear for preparing students with disabilities for work?*

> *n. For the tasks that were reported to be performed rarely or never across staff in your school, why are these tasks not being performed?*

5. Describe what you see as the biggest gaps in your district with respect to transition for students with disabilities. Why do you think these gaps exist?

Section 4: Recommendations for District Improvements (20-25 min)
6. How could roles for supporting students with disabilities in career development be made clearer in your district?
7. Who else in your district should be utilized for supporting students in this area?
8. How could staff roles be reconfigured a bit differently to address the biggest gap areas in your district's programing? What else could be done to address the biggest gap areas in your district's programming?