

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POST SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS

Factors contributing to post school employment for students  
with special needs:

A Meta-Synthesis

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### **Abstract**

As the number of students qualifying for special education services continues to grow and the demands on districts to serve these students continues to change, it is important to investigate what is working. To help these students transition out of high school and into the working world, the transition plan that includes employability (the quality of being suitable for paid work) is an area that should be investigated. The work-based learning programs that have success are the ones we should emulate as it pertains to our growing population of students we serve with special needs. Additionally, it would be helpful to know what other factors contribute to a students' success in being employed after high school. This meta-synthesis of the literature on success factors and successful school-to-work curriculum models will help guide those of us in this field to start to engage in and begin to implement or support these different components

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## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1. Background*

It has long been known that students with special needs will require a transition plan and will need some kind of vocational training in high school in order for them to get and keep a job after they graduate. How we get there, however has changed over the past several decades starting in the 1960s before PL 94-142 when students who were not able to graduate were in school part of the day and the rest of the day was spend doing ‘work study.’ This public law, also known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act required schools that got federal funds give students with disabilities access to free and appropriate education. After this public law passed in 1975, the Carl Perkins Act passed in 1984 and other federal programs funded what is now called career education, career technical education or work-based learning. Career education or CTE (career technical education) and WBL (work-based learning) was academic in nature and provided students with classroom instruction. Alfed, et al (2013) explained that the strategy was to help students apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills.

Then in the 1990s, transition became the focus. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 both focus on transition. According to the IDEA (2004), transition services are a coordinated set of plans that focus on and facilitate movement from high school to postschool activities and those activities include vocational training, adult services, independent living and/or community participation.

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In 2001, the *No Child Left Behind Act* required states to administer yearly tests in reading and math to demonstrate adequate progress by students. This requirement then forced school districts to return the focus back to academics. ‘The federal investment in school-to-work fizzled during the era of *No Child Left Behind*, but interest in better aligning education and employment has resurfaced in light of a stubbornly high unemployment rate from 2008-2012.’ (Alfeld, Charner, Johnson, & Watts, 2013, p. 3)

Sabbatino and Macrine, (2007) explain that transition plans do not necessarily translate into successful employment. They said that simply developing a transition plan does not automatically give that student experience and training that leads to long-term employment.

The term ‘work study’ or ‘school-to-work’ has popped back up in the educational system and is now being used to describe a number of different types of curriculum and school programming. The work study this author will be referring to includes classes taught at the secondary level that include teaching employability skills inside and outside the classroom.

### *1.2 Author's Beliefs and Experiences*

Not having taught in a formal classroom until the age of 43, this author has truly found her calling. After having received a master’s degree in outdoor recreation, I went on to work in a variety of children’s camps, outdoor residential facilities and environmental education programs. It wasn’t after having children of my own and waiting until they were in school did I feel prepared to teach in a formal setting. Additionally, I enjoyed the hands-on education I was able to administer to youth in a variety of settings and wasn’t ready for 4 walls.

Two years ago, I took a position as a special education teacher for students in intensive resource at a high school. My department head tried to explain that students in this program

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were placed here because they were very low academically but had very high executive functioning. It was explained that this group needed social, emotional and employability skills even though the classes I had assigned to me were in science, civics and math. The students just described were on my caseload and all on IEPs. They were considered intensive resource and not college bound; they did not need to remember the parts of a cell or know how to solve an algebraic problem. After floundering for a year trying to meld these together, I worked with the district, my administrators and the school counselors and have created a work study program that includes students getting out into the community, practicing vocational proficiencies and working on adult living skills.

Now at the beginning of my third year in this position, I feel I am truly making a difference. My students have improved their work ethic so dramatically. They understand what it means to be 'work ready' and being 'on the clock' and working as a team. I am confident that most of them could get a keep a job that doesn't require much skill or thought, but that is routine in nature and pays a living wage.

It seems as if our newly created workforce, and the workforce we are currently preparing lack a good work ethic and their employability skills are extremely lacking. It's these millennials, as we are calling them, who are turning the tables and telling their employers how they are going to do things rather than the other way around. I have many friends who are business owners who only hire people in their upper 30s and beyond because of work ethic.

As the work study coordinator, I am thrilled to be able to do this kind of work; getting out into the community, cooking, cleaning and creating! The program I have built is structured in a way that emulates a real working environment, complete with time cards, uniforms and crew

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leaders. Additionally, students participate in job shadowing, mock interviewing and job fairs. Students also practice filling out applications and keep an updated resume in their file. I now have a full-time aide and am working with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and my school district to get my students paid for the work they do, whereby giving this program credence and credibility and the benefits these students deserve.

Last year I attended a transition conference in Anchorage. As an exercise, one of the presenters asked us to count how many jobs we have had. There were about 50 participants and no one had come close to my 28 different jobs I have held at 28 different places of employment (from fast food to construction; to a camp director to a real estate agent). It was then I realized why I was the work study coordinator; what better person to help students become employable than someone who has searched up, applied to, interviewed for and kept 28 jobs (and counting)!

The topic I chose will help to create a better, more robust program for my students and help answer some questions I have formulated through my research:

1. What models of work-based learning are being implemented?
2. Which school-to-work models are actual hands-on learning?
3. Which components of these curriculum models are being used most?
4. What instructional models are the most successful in promoting employability skills for students who will be seeking jobs after high school?

### *1.3. Purpose of this meta-synthesis*

This meta-synthesis, which focused on curriculum models for school-to-work programs for students with special needs, had multiple purposes. One purpose was to review articles

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about work study programs for students with disabilities throughout the world, to find common components and compare the different models. Another purpose was to find research studies detailing successes with different curriculum models as it pertained to teachers being hopeful, students reporting growth or students actually being employed after high school. These purposes together gave me purpose in conducting this meta-synthesis, which is to use this information to formulate my own model to use with students in my work study program. My students deserve a program that is research-based and will have the most success in helping them be contributing members of society. By helping to create a new workforce, one with special needs that is employable and with an amazing work ethic, is of greatest purpose!

### **2. Methods**

#### *1.2. Selection criteria*

The 40 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria.

1. The articles explored school-to-work program models.
2. The articles explored school-to-work program models for students

with special needs.

3. The articles explored transition plan components for students in high school.

4. The articles were published in peer reviewed journals related to the field of education.

5. The articles were published between 1989 and 2018.

#### *1.3. Search procedures*

Database searches and ancestral searches were conducted to locate articles for this

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meta- synthesis.

### *1.3.1. Database searches*

I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using these specific search terms:

1. (“school-to-work”) AND (“special needs”).
2. (“work-based learning”) AND (“disabilities”).
3. (“work-based learning”) AND (“disabilities”) AND (“curriculum models”).
4. (“school-to-work”) AND (“special needs”) AND (“curriculum models”).
5. (“work-based learning”) AND (“disabilities”) AND (“high school”).
6. (“work-based learning”) AND (“special needs”) AND (“secondary education”).
7. (“school-to-work”) AND (“special needs”) AND (“program”).
8. (“curriculum model”) AND (“school-to-work”) AND (“special needs”).
9. (“vocational training”) AND (“high school”) AND (“disabilities”).
10. (“secondary education”) AND (“transition plan”).

These database searches yielded a total of 22 articles (Alfeld, Charner, Johnson, & Watts, 2013; Alias, 2014; Black & Lawson, 2016; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Beyer & Robinson, 2009; Cheong, Zainiyah, & Yahya, 2013; Fish & Smith-Augustine, 2015; Freedman, & Baker, 1995; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015; Moon, Simonsen, & Neubert, 2011; O’Connor, 2009; Pan, 2011; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Levinson & Palmer, 2005; Patton, Cronin, & Jairrels, 1997; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006; Walker, Uphold, Richter,

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& Test, 2010; Wong, 2016; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004).

### 2.2.2 *Ancestral searches*

An ancestral search involves reviewing the reference lists of articles relevant to the research topic. I conducted ancestral searches using the reference lists of the previously retrieved articles. These ancestral searches yielded 18 additional articles that met the selection criteria (Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Case, 1989; Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015; Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, & Schulte, 2013; Dubberly, 2011; Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001; Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013; Goldberger, Kazis, & O'Flanagan, 1994; Kash, 2009; Kohler, Johnson, Chadsey-Rusch, 1993; Kohler & Chapman, 1999; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Orr, 1995; Lipscomb, Laco, Liu, & Haimson, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson, 2015; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Scholl & Mooney, 2004).

### 2.3. *Coding procedures*

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 40 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

#### 2.3.1. *Publication types*

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive work, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* use a formal

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research design to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* use existing literature to analyze, expand, or further define a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption. *Descriptive works* describe phenomena and experiences, but do not disclose particular methods for attaining data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain, justify, or recommend a particular course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. *Guides* give instructions or advice explaining how practitioners might implement a particular agenda. An *annotated bibliography* is a list of cited works on a particular topic, followed by a descriptive paragraph describing, evaluating, or critiquing the source. *Reviews of the literature* critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison. A *case study* is a research method involving an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study. An *evidence review* is a scientific investigation that focuses on a specific question and uses explicit, pre-specified scientific methods to identify, select, assess, and summarize the findings of similar but separate studies. A *journal article/newspaper article/report* is a periodical dealing especially with matters of current interest or similar interests. A program evaluation evaluates a particular program. An *editorial* is an article in a newspaper or other periodical or on a website presenting the opinion of the publisher or writer.

### 2.3.2. Research design

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* research utilizes numbers to convey information. Instead of numbers, *qualitative* research uses

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language to explore issues and phenomenon. *Mixed methods* research involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to present information within a single study.

### *2.3.3. Participants, data sources, and findings*

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., students with special needs, teachers of students with special needs, parents of students with special needs, employers of students with special needs, mentors of students with special needs). I also identified the data sources used in each study (e.g., observations, surveys, interviews). Lastly, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

### *2.4 Data analysis*

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 40 articles included in this meta-synthesis. Significant statements were first identified within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, significant statements were identified as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) suggestions for teachers in a school-to-work program; (b) students in a school-to-work program with special needs; (c) factors that influence success; (d) employer attitudes; (e) need for collaboration; (f) transition difficulties and system shortcomings; and/or (g) ideas for improved program models. I then generated a list of non-repetitive, verbatim significant statements with paraphrased formulated meanings. These paraphrased formulated meanings represented my interpretation of each significant statement. Lastly, the formulated meanings from all 40 articles were grouped into theme clusters, represented as emergent themes. These emergent themes represented the

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fundamental elements of the entire body of literature.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Publication type

I located 41 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each article is located in Table 1. Sixteen of the 40 articles (39%) included in this meta-synthesis were research studies (Alias, 2014; Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Case, 1989; Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013; Lipscomb, Laco, Liu, & Haimson, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Moon, Simonsen, & Neubert, 2011; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Scholl & Mooney, 2004; Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006; Walker, Uphold, Richter, & Test, 2010).

**Table 1**

<b>Author(s) &amp; Year of Publication</b>	<b>Publication Type</b>
Alfeld, Charner, Johnson, & Watts, 2013	Report
Alias, 2014	Research Study
Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015	Research Study
Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000	Research Study
Black & Lawson, 2016	Journal Article
Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017	Research Study
Beyer & Robinson, 2009	Literature Review
Case, 1989	Research Study
Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015	Journal Article

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Cheong, Zainiyah, & Yahya, 2013	Case Study
Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, & Schulte, 2013	Evidence Review
Dubberly, 2011	Report
Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001	Research Study
Fish & Smith-Augustine, 2015	Journal Article
Freedman, & Baker, 1995	Report
Gallagher & Bennett, 2013	Research Study
Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012	Research Study
Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013	Research Study
Goldberger, Kazis, & O'Flanagan, 1994	Guide
Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015	Journal Article
Kash, 2009	Journal Article
Kohler, Johnson, Chadsey-Rusch, & Rusch, 1993	Guide
Kohler & Chapman, 1999	Literature Review
Levinson & Palmer, 2005	Journal Article
Lipscomb, Laco, Liu, & Haimson, 2018	Research Study
Luecking & Luecking, 2015	Research Study
Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015	Editorial
Moon, Simonsen, & Neubert, 2011	Research Study
O'Connor, 2009	Journal Article
Orr, 1995	Report
Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017	Research Study
Pan, 2001	Program Evaluation
Patton, Cronin, & Jairrels, 1997	Journal Article

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Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997	Research Article
Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson, 2015	Journal Article
Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007	Research Article
Scholl & Mooney, 2004	Research Study
Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006	Research Study
Walker, Uphold, Richter, & Test, 2010	Research Study
Wong, 2016	Descriptive Newspaper Article

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### *3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies*

As I stated previously, I located 16 research studies that met my selection criteria (Alias, 2014; Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Case, 1989; Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013; Moon, Simonsen & Neubert, 2011; Lipscomb, Lacoce, Liu, & Haimson, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Scholl & Mooney, 2004; Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004).

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Table 2

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Alias, 2014	Qualitative	2 students with learning disabilities	Interviews and observations	Success for students with special needs to overcome the challenges of acquiring work-related skills on the job and adjusting to their work environment depends on training in schools and assistance from special education teachers, supervisors and co-workers
Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015	Mixed Methods	1,318 students with low scores on a college placement test	Placement Tests	Found the effectiveness of the 52-hour <i>developmental summer bridge program</i> (academic instruction in one area of need, guidance about academic expectations, academic support services, career assessment and guidance and knowledge needed to navigate college) was not statistically successful in increasing students' academic achievement, credit accumulation or postsecondary enrollment
Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000	Qualitative	709 students with disabilities ages 15-21 and 45 young adults with disabilities ages 17-26	Surveys	Graduation and employment outcomes of students with disabilities are associated with career-related work experience and student-identified transition goals; factors were paid work experience, participation in transition planning, vocational education classes and a

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				good relationship with at least one trusted adult.
Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017	Qualitative	6 junior high students with special educational needs	Questionnaire	Workshop for high school students' transition made a positive difference in students' lives by working through the booklet and having group discussions about feelings regarding transition, support systems at home and school. Students felt more confident in finding resources and realizing their capability to grow.
Case, 1989	Qualitative	233 students with disabilities at 4 schools	Interviews and surveys	Transition to Work Program suggestions by participants (students, parents, service providers, teachers) reported the need for parent training, but all groups surveyed saw activities as positively impacting students.
Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001	Mixed Methods	2,258 high school students with special needs over a 5-year period	Referral data form, intervention log, questionnaire	Completion of a highly structured, community-based paid vocational internship program at local businesses is associated with positive/successful post-school outcomes.
Gallagher & Bennett, 2013	Mixed Methods	20 employers, 7 job coaches, a principal, 21 students with disabilities	Survey and interviews	Well-informed principals and educators, supportive networks, community involvement foster sustainable employment for students with disabilities.
Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012	Quantitative	2,282 people with visual impairments aged 22 or younger	RSA <i>competitive employment indicator</i>	Education is important for competitive employment for youths with visual impairments and early work experience for transition-age youth was also important.

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<p>Gold, Fabian, &amp; Leucking, 2013</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>6,028 students with disabilities</p>	<p>Interviews and demographic data</p>	<p>Need for school systems to increase their efforts and use available resources to support paid employment for youth with disabilities and an intensive program prior to school exit greatly increases the likelihood of employment after high school. Outcome indicators: career counseling, job placement, paid work experience, support for student and employer for job training and workplace accommodations all contributed to positive outcomes</p>
<p>Moon, Simonsen &amp; Neubert, 2011</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>12 community rehabilitation providers</p>	<p>Phone surveys</p>	<p>Participants reported that authentic work experiences, teaching self-advocacy skills, obtaining paid employment and learning transportation modes all contributed to successful transition after high school.</p>
<p>Luecking &amp; Luecking, 2015</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>349 secondary education students with disabilities</p>	<p>Program Database (applications, exit forms...)</p>	<p>Components contributing to successful post-school outcomes (ultimately careers for students with disabilities) include: family involvement, work-based experiences, leadership development, community employment services linkage...</p>

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<p>Lipscomb, Laco, Liu, &amp; Haimson, 2018</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>13,000 parents of students with special needs and students with special needs ages 13-21</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education Database</p>	<p>Youth with an IEP are less likely to participate in key transition activities like paid work experience, having parents involved at school and parents participating in post-high school transition planning-one predictor was socioeconomic status. Over the past decade there has been greater engagement and use of supports in school among students with disabilities but less likely than in the past to participate in important transition activities, like supports to help make progress in school, equal opportunities to participate in school activities and strategies to encourage successful transition after high school.</p>
<p>Ozbek, Girli, &amp; Ozturk, 2017</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>59 teachers employed at vocational or special education schools</p>	<p>Interviews</p>	<p>Teachers in this sample had significant lack of knowledge and experienced significant problems regarding both the curriculum and the means at the school about existing opportunities for students with special needs as it pertains to teaching employability skills.</p>
<p>Scholl &amp; Mooney, 2004</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>31 program participants (high school apprentices with disabilities)</p>	<p>Interviews, exit and follow-up surveys and a database</p>	<p>Factors identified as enhancing success of youth included: high levels of program organization and coordination, quality worksite placement, rigorous instruction that integrated technical and academic competencies.</p>

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Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006	Qualitative	803 random adults	Phone interviews	Consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities was overall positive.
Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004	Quantitative	367 teachers	Survey	Survey measured attitudes towards the School-to-Work program in their school. Results indicated teachers had very positive attitudes, however teachers reported doing work-based activities like job shadowing, co-op work and internships infrequently.

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### *3.2.1 Research and Design*

Seven of the 16 studies (43.7%) used a qualitative research design (Alias, 2014; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Case, 1989; Moon, Simonsen & Neubert, 2011; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006). Six of the studies (37.5%) utilized mixed methods research design (Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Scholl & Mooney, 2004). Three of the studies (18.7%) used a quantitative research design (Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Lipscomb, Lacoce, Liu, & Haimson, 2018; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004).

### *3.2.2 Participants and data sources*

A majority of the research studies included in this meta-synthesis analyzed data from students or school aged-youth with special needs. Twelve of the studies (75%) analyzed data collected from students or school-aged youth with special needs (Alias, 2014; Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Case, 1989; Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Scholl & Mooney, 2004; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004). Three of the sixteen studies (18.7%) analyzed data collected from teachers, parents, community rehabilitation providers, employers, and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities (Moon, Simonsen & Neubert, 2011; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004). One study utilized (.6%) adults by random digit telephone dialing (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006).

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Ten of the studies (62.5%) used surveys, tests, questionnaires, interviews and phone/survey interviews; these provided the main sources of data used in the research studies (Barnett, Bork, Mayer, Pretlow, Wathingon, & Weiss, 2015; Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Bunn, Davis, & Speed, 2017; Case, 1989; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Moon, Simonsen & Neubert, 2011; Ozbek, Girli, & Ozturk, 2017; Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006; Yan, Goubeaud, & Fry, 2004). Two of the studies (12.5%) used some form of demographic data from a database (Lipscomb, Lacoé, Liu, & Haimson, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015). One study (6.2%) used interviews, exit surveys and a database (Scholl & Mooney, 2004), one study (6.2%) used observation with follow-up interviews (Alias, 2014), one study (6.2%) used interviews and demographic data (Gold, Fabian, & Leucking, 2013), and one research study (6.2%) used a combination of referral data, intervention log and questionnaire (Fabian, Lent, & Willis, 2001) as the sources of data.

### *3.2.3 Findings of the studies*

The findings of the 16 research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows.

1. High school students with special needs who had actual work experience in a highly structured work-based program were more likely to have meaningful employment after high school and positive post-secondary school outcomes.
2. Paid work experiences during a high school as a part of a school-to-work program was a success factor in these students with disabilities continuing employment after high school.
3. Students with outside support networks like parent and family involvement significantly increased the likelihood of employment after high school. Additionally, students with

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disabilities that had community involvement outside of school showed more success working after high school.

### *3.3. Emergent Themes*

Seven themes emerged from my analysis of the 40 articles included in this meta-synthesis. These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) need for staff and parent training; (b) employer awareness and support; (c) program organization and coordination; (d) family involvement; (e) paid work experiences; (f) well-informed and supportive school districts and administrators (g) supported employment and job coaching. These seven theme clusters and their formulated meanings are represented in Table 3.

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**Table 3**

<b>Theme Clusters</b>	<b>Formulated Meanings</b>
<p><b>Staff/Parent Training</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide professional development for teachers and staff to develop instructional strategies and problem-solving skills.</li> <li>● Offer resources and information about high-quality work study curriculum and programs.</li> <li>● Know the service and employment agencies that are available to students with disabilities.</li> <li>● Determine the roles of the different agencies in the school to work transition process.</li> <li>● Parent training topics to help students and their families with transitioning to adult life and in the area of transition to work.</li> <li>● Topics to include: effects of wages on social security benefits, service and employment agencies available to students with disabilities after they leave high school and roles of different agencies in the school to work transition process.</li> <li>● Patience and dedication of staff benefit students.</li> <li>● There is a need to educate parents on different types of employment opportunities since many of the students are not able to communicate properly the information they receive at school from staff.</li> <li>● In-service training is needed for educational assistants to understand their roles and to explain the importance of specific activities as it pertains to the transition process.</li> <li>● There is a need for people who are trained to train persons with learning disabilities and a need to have trained transition personnel to support the transition.</li> <li>● Training the educators is important and needed to provide adequate vocational training for students with special needs.</li> <li>● Schools can help parents support their children’s career and vocational explorations by offering presentations and workshops, which will help increase their child’s occupational awareness by talking with them about various career options.</li> <li>● Family focused training increases parents’ knowledge and skills related to advocacy, planning, support and legal issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Employer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hold meetings with employer associations to support the creation of</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Awareness and Support</b></p>	<p>more meaningful work-based learning programs connected to the school curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Need for new institutional structures at the regional labor market level to provide coordination, quality assurance and sustainability.</li> <li>● Employers must be shared the learning goals of students and the work study program coordinators must have strong links to the labor market to meet employer needs.</li> <li>● Employers have the tendency not to employ people who have special needs.</li> <li>● An employer’s needs must be understood so they can be good employers of disabled people.</li> <li>● Person-centered employment planning or discovery is an approach to assessment undertaken in partnership to understand a person’s aspirations, skills, needs and abilities and can benefit the job seeker as well as the employer.</li> <li>● Persons with learning disabilities need support from employers to have a successful transition into the workplace.</li> <li>● There should be more awareness created for employers and others to understand persons with learning disabilities and understanding from the employers to help them stay employed.</li> <li>● There is a challenge faced by employers to train the worker with a learning disability which requires additional costs.</li> <li>● Employers report that positive attitude, dependability and consistency are the three most often desired work characteristics.</li> <li>● Linking schools and employers is very important; recruiting and maintaining employer involvement can be challenging.</li> <li>● Businesses often do not participate in school-to-work programs because of the cost to partake in the programs, but if the benefits are identified to the employers, there is greater participation.</li> <li>● Support teachers to work closely with employer mentors and work site coordinators to construct detailed student training plans.</li> <li>● Employers should know that consumers respond positively towards companies who hire individuals with disabilities and prefer to give their business to those companies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Robust Program Organization and Coordination</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is a lack of investment in high-quality workplace learning for students in the United States; youth have very few of the applied skills or credentials that employers are seeking.</li> <li>● The United States has had a very broad but random approach to employability training in secondary schools.</li> <li>● Effective career counseling and guidance, including scaffolded exposure to employers and career pathways.</li> <li>● Programs that are well-structured and well-integrated with the school curriculum and culminate in products or services that demonstrate learning are effective.</li> <li>● Competence in functional academic, community living, personal-social,</li> </ul>

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	<p>vocational and self-determination contributes to better post-secondary employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Students must have the opportunity to engage in high-quality work-based learning experiences in order to be successful and effective.</li><li>● Without high structure, student ‘buy in’ and work attitude cannot be developed and lead to low performance.</li><li>● Some meaningful opportunities include career exploration (tours), job shadowing, work sampling, service learning, internships and apprenticeships.</li><li>● Transition planning for students with learning disabilities must begin early, as individuals with special needs often have unrealistic job expectations and inappropriate career goals or an awareness of how their strengths and weaknesses will affect their lives educationally, socially or vocationally.</li><li>● A program should provide relevant and effective training in a variety of job skills, work-related habits, work discipline, and work placement experiences taking into account the aptitudes of the individual with special needs.</li><li>● More intensive vocational training for students with disabilities is needed; components such as social skills, computer training, grooming skills and self-advocacy skills.</li><li>● Students need self-determination skills in order to have a successful transition from high school to employment and independent living, which includes decision making, problem solving, choice making, self-management, self-awareness, self-advocacy and goal setting (these are not easily taught as a part of a curriculum and need to be practiced in real-world experiences).</li><li>● Self-determination skills need to be present for students with disabilities to meet post-secondary goals, such as maintaining employment or maintaining a place to live; these skills must be taught in a structured and realistic way to ensure they become a reality.</li><li>● Studies show intensive vocational efforts at least a year or two prior to school exit substantially increases the likelihood of these youth acquiring jobs during school and improves the probability of employment after school.</li><li>● Vocational interventions have the potential to mitigate factors that ordinarily would impede student postschool employment success.</li><li>● The success of the students with special needs ability to overcome the challenges in gaining work experiences in the actual working environment not only depends on training in schools, but also the commitment of the individuals (employers, co-workers, mentors...) throughout the experience.</li><li>● Competence in areas for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce that includes banking, transportation, self-determination and persistence, in addition to conducting the proverbial assessment as a starting point for transition</li></ul>
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	<p>planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outcomes that were most important: using IEPs, educating students along their non-disabled peers and documenting progress in employment-related skills areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Family Involvement or Support Network</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students report that a good support network, particularly in relation to already having friends or siblings doing the same thing (employment, vocational training, or college), was beneficial.</li> <li>● Programs that involve parents or other community members engaged in transition planning was a predictor category in one study.</li> <li>● A student's 'sphere of influence' including parental involvement has been identified as a variable related to positive outcomes for students with disabilities as it pertains to school to work programming.</li> <li>● Students with disabilities and relevant family members that share in the responsibility for career planning is essential.</li> <li>● It is important that students with special needs and their families are all active in the process of goal attainment.</li> <li>● Consulting with parents is very important, as parents of children with disabilities have valid concerns regarding their children.</li> <li>● Parents of students with disabilities need encouragement by school personnel to help their children develop independence by not overprotecting them.</li> <li>● Transportation issues for students with special needs were found throughout the literature as a barrier to being employed after high school.</li> <li>● Parents need information for students who are Supplemental Security income (SSI) recipients; as many assume they cannot work.</li> <li>● Best practices in one study showed 90% of students with disabilities perceived family support as a personal resource for successful transition.</li> <li>● One study suggested that the lack of parent participation and involvement may be detrimental to the achievement of successful transition outcomes for students with special needs.</li> <li>● School administrators can help set the tone for parent involvement in their children's career planning, as parents are important members of the team and should be encouraged to provide input.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Paid Work Experiences</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create and provide paid internships to help sustain work-based learning designed to enrich and expand classroom learning; this shows students how their learning is applied in the world outside of school.</li> <li>● Offer apprenticeships to students to give them access to tools, equipment, facilities and expertise not available in a school setting.</li> <li>● Implement a school-based enterprise, like a coffee stand; this provides a direct link between students, their curriculum and the world of work.</li> <li>● Participation in paid work experiences in the community during the last 2 years of high school is a factor that contributes to better post-secondary employment and educational outcomes for students with</li> </ul>

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	<p>disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Program should include paid job training, help to secure employment and follow-up services.</li> <li>● Preparation for the world of work is a key aspect to paid employment aspirations for students with learning difficulties.</li> <li>● Paid work experiences with training and support from the employer is an important finding in the job placement transition process, as well as follow-along support and tracking of students to ensure that the student has a productive work experience.</li> <li>● Employment in at least one job before students with disabilities leave high school may be an integral part of transition support.</li> <li>● Highly standardized, community-based vocational experiences that involves paid, competitive employment was shown to be a predictor of success after high school.</li> <li>● Strong finding of the greater likelihood of competitive employment for those students with visual impairments who reported earnings before leaving high school.</li> <li>● Robust predictor of successful post high school employment for youth with disabilities is having held a paid job during school enrollment.</li> <li>● Literature points to enhanced outcomes for youth with disabilities who have participated in paid employment experiences.</li> <li>● Work experience and paid employment have been identified as being highly associated with positive postschool employment outcomes.</li> <li>● High school students who are involved in meaningful school-to-work programs and who have the opportunity to work while in school are more likely to be employed after graduation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Well-informed and Supportive State Leaders, School Districts and Administrators and Public Agencies</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide a clear and substantive purpose for teaching employability skills and state a value for the learning component in the work experience.</li> <li>● Fund work study projects with adequate support and resources.</li> <li>● Establishment of key positions funded jointly by schools and adult agencies to deliver direct services to students in transition.</li> <li>● Create an actual transition program within the school to improve participant’s postschool goals and to prepare them for meaningful employment.</li> <li>● Interagency collaboration plays a critical role in providing transition services to youth with disabilities.</li> <li>● Many school districts have dedicated special education teachers, counselors and social workers trying to respond to the needs of individuals with special needs and they have good vocational programs, but much remains to be accomplished- helping these students realize their potential to achieve a career that will benefit them and their community.</li> <li>● There is a need for support from the government to help create a collaborative support system and it’s important for government support</li> </ul>

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	<p>and funding for vocational training centers and facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is sometimes a lack of support from the schools to help search for services that can meet the transitional needs of the students with learning disabilities.</li> <li>● Helpful if policymakers are on board to give businesses incentives to provide employment to youth with disabilities.</li> <li>● State and federal legislation can alter the incentive structures for employers and schools and increase the likelihood of broad employer participation.</li> <li>● Action by state and federal agencies can facilitate the creation and diffusion of curriculum, assessment, staff-development and credentialing efforts that are far beyond the capacity of any individual program.</li> <li>● Even with all the federal mandates, laws and acts, unless there's administrative efficiency and/or evaluation, the problem is a lack of program fidelity.</li> <li>● Federal statutes and current initiatives in educational reform have reported high quality outcomes, especially the ones that emphasize improvement of career-related outcomes for all students and the inclusion of youth with disabilities in regular classes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supported Employment/Job Coaching</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Job mentors are sometimes needed to provide students with supports and training at their work site, then taper off as natural supports are developed.</li> <li>● Create transition specialist positions who work with the IEP team, have specific training and operate as a part of the district's special education services collaborating with building staff and community work sites.</li> <li>● Personalized approach to support people with disabilities into real jobs where they can fulfill their employment aspirations.</li> <li>● Individuals get to develop new skills and are included socially and economically.</li> <li>● People with disabilities have enhance self-esteem and increased consumer empowerment with supported employment.</li> <li>● Support should be built around choice, people choose and regulate their own employment support to promote career satisfaction.</li> <li>● People are supported to be full and active members of their workforce. and employment support is as unobtrusive as possible and fades over time (known as 'natural supports').</li> <li>● Support providers are: job coaches, employment advisors, job mentors or employment consultants.</li> <li>● There is a need for accommodation in the employment environment for persons with disabilities and a need for job coaching.</li> <li>● Job coaching is important for persons with learning disabilities to be successfully employed; this support helps with the transition to employment- to follow through from training to employment to job maintenance (keeping that job).</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Students shown to profit from the close monitoring and support of an adult supervisor in their workplace.</li><li>● Youth mentoring efforts in workplace settings are becoming increasingly prevalent for several reasons, including the perceived limitations of many current mentoring arrangements and active involvement of many corporations in mentoring outside of the workplace.</li><li>● Job coaches for students with special needs have proved to help with sustaining employment.</li><li>● Job coaches need professional preparation to understand and respond to the workplace context that their students will be immersed into.</li></ul>
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#### **4. Discussion**

In this section, I summarized the major themes that emerged from my analysis of the 40 articles included in this meta-synthesis. I then connected these emergent themes to my teaching practice and to my personal and professional experiences.

##### *4.1 Staff/parent training*

Throughout my readings of the literature, it was evident that the need for staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors...) to receive training in teaching vocational skills was not only extremely lacking in school programs, but very important. Special education teachers whose job it is to provide their students with employability skills must have some kind of staff development training in order to effectively transmit the information. If nothing else, teachers should be offered resources and curriculum (occupational knowledge, career readiness, vocational education). I am a great example; I was tasked by my district and my administrators to design and implement a work study program for my intensive resource classes. I was given no training or resources with which to do this.

Staff who teach vocational education should know the service and employment agencies available to students with disabilities. I have been teaching work study (vocational education)

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for three years now and I have just come from a week-long Transition Camp put on by SERRC (Southeast Regional Resource Center)- it's Alaska's educational resource center that serves students, teachers, families, schools and school districts to help meet our unique educational needs. At this camp, I was exposed to a plethora of programs and services that can serve my students through presentations, tours, brochures and workshops. I am still reeling from this experience, as there are so many terrific opportunities and support available for my students that I am just now aware of. Teachers, counselors and school administrators need to have direct linkages to these programs and do yearly networking as positions and people change. Especially for disadvantaged youth (low-income) and youth with disabilities, the programs out there for them after high school is vast and can only be accessed if there is knowledge of their existence.

In-service training for paraprofessionals and teacher aides is also lacking in the schools. Teacher aides often have more direct contact with students and could benefit from their roles in transition being explained and reviewed. For instance, I knew an aide that was not aware that there are certain classes and credits seniors must have a diploma as opposed to getting a certificate of completion and recommended the wrong classes almost preventing a senior from graduation. I feel this could have been prevented if they had proper transition training.

Parents could also use training regarding employment for their children according to the literature reviewed in this meta-synthesis. Parents of children with special needs could greatly benefit from training in career awareness and planning for their children before they exit high school. Kohler and Chapman (1999) found that family focused training increases parents' knowledge and skills related to advocacy, planning, support and legal issues. Specifically, a great piece of information to be included would be explaining the effect of students working and

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getting paid and how that affects Supplemental Security income (SSI) payments. As an example, I recently was able to get awarded a grant through DVR (Department of Vocational Rehabilitation) to get my work study students paid through this state agency. They receive minimum wage and work an average of 4 hours a week. I had three parents wanting to refuse this money because of how this might affect their SSI payments. Parent training would also be beneficial because unfortunately, students with special needs have a hard time communicating with their parents what they learned in school. And the students in my work study program are no exception. As an example, one of my students, after touring Job Corps during the Transition Camp understood she needed information from her mother for the application to prove income because she thought she had to go after high school. When her mother refused, my student ran away from home and the troopers were called (she walked 14 miles from her house to the school that night). It is reasons such as these that parents need more training and involvement once students are beginning to graduate and transition out of school.

### *4.2 Employer awareness*

My research on this topic was clear that actual work experiences were paramount in teaching employability skills. Additionally, involving employers in providing high quality learning experiences in the workplace for students with special needs was also an emergent theme. To start with employers' needs, then show the benefits of employing youth with disabilities was the progression most mentioned. Recruiting and maintaining meaningful employer involvement was shown to be a real challenge but starting with targeting employers who are most likely to participate seemed to make the most sense. The question of how to get and keep employer involved and how to ensure that their work-based learning provides the

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maximum value to students is the biggest hurdle.

Goldberger (1994) said:

A successful school-to-work transition program requires strong buy-in from two groups that have often kept their distance from each other: school personnel and employers.

This may seem obvious, but it goes to the heart of what makes these efforts different—and new. You can't link school and work without one or more active business partners willing to commit time and resources and willing to provide work opportunities for program participants. Without work, there is no work-based learning component (p.11).

It is because of this trend that our district has created a full-time position and is hiring someone next year to link up with employers to do this very thing.

Creating work-based staff development opportunities for teachers is an idea I read throughout my literature review, where employers can provide workplace experiences to teachers as well as to students. They can then develop lesson plans for teaching academic concepts in more applied contexts. For instance, Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana has a Tech Prep program; they visit local high-tech manufacturing plants and observe their approach to solving problems on the job.

### *4.3 Program organization and coordination*

Levinson & Palmer (2005) said according to the United States Department of Labor in 1991 about half of students leave high school without the knowledge or skills needed to find and maintain a job and according to the United States General Accounting Office in 1993 that one-third of students are not prepared for even entry-level work. I realize that was over 25 years

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ago, but it seems this trend persists with the millennial problem: our current generation of workers known for shying away from physical work. My review of the literature on this topic found the United States lacks the of investment in high-quality workplace learning; youth have very few of the skills employers seek. Additionally, it seems that across the United States, there are many different employability training models depending on what part of the country you're in or what a particular district is doing- it is very broad and random.

As we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our nation's youth are being challenged moving from school to work with any reasonable prospect for long-term productive employment. Our school-to-work transition system is lacking in comprehensiveness and is frustrating students. Additionally, this issue has substantial costs to business and to our economy as a whole. Orr, (1995) said, "A skill-deficient workforce hampers our nation's economic growth, productivity, and ability to compete in an international economy."

Through my literature review, there were many aspects to work study and the different work study curricula. The well-structured programs found the most success; the programs with scaffolded instruction starting with pre-teaching, demonstration and then hands-on learning reported more positive outcomes. Students with disabilities need competence in functional academics as well as soft skills like social and emotional learning, especially as it pertains to the workplace. In my practice, I teach the social and emotional piece throughout the day; as situations arise, we 'stop and talk' and learn from one another. Actual work experiences was another emergent theme and most of the articles referenced students in working real environments. The employability skills I teach and evaluate are: attitude and flexibility, accuracy and quality, rules and safety, communication, work ethic and hygiene- these I stole

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from another teacher in the district. These seem to be fairly congruent with the literature I reviewed.

Several other opportunities emerged from the literature to aid in career exploration for students with disabilities, they included job shadowing, work sampling, service learning, internships and apprenticeships. Additionally, creating a resume, practice filling out applications and mock interviewing were some other meaningful pieces to successful vocational programs. Students with disabilities often lack the exposure to these opportunities unless they were enrolled in some kind of vocational skills class. Other elements for structured work experiences include daily living skills (budgeting, buying and preparing meals), personal skills (responsible behavior, pursuing goals), occupational skills (seeking, securing and maintaining employment).

### *4.4 Family involvement or support network*

In my experience over the past 3 years as the work study coordinator at my school, I feel the number one predictor of success and employment after high school is extremely dependent on a student's support system at home. For instance, when I ask students what they will be doing after graduation as it pertains to work, many reply, "I don't know, I'll ask my mom." While reading through my articles I did not consider this a factor, as I had some personal bias and was looking for paid work experiences as a major factor of post school success. It has become abundantly clear, in my practice and in this research, that family plays a huge role in the lives of students with special needs.

In the world of special education, the parents are essential and are always included as a part of the IEP team and invited to all meetings. Parents are the legal guardians and have rights to information and must agree and sign all IEP documents. It was clear in my research of the

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literature, that programs that involve parents had more success and that students who had family support were more successful after high school. Only one study, however, mentioned that the lack of parental or guardian support may have adverse effects on successful transition outcomes for students with disabilities. This was interesting and I agree. Most of my students are being raised by people who also have disabilities.

Transportation issues were also an emergent theme in my readings as it pertains to family involvement and support network. Students with disabilities are less likely to drive because they are unable to pass the written or the driving test. The burden is then on the parents or guardians to get their children to work, and this can cause a logistical challenge that a family may not be able to overcome.

### *4.5 Paid work experiences*

In reviewing the literature on the success factors for students with special needs and employment after high school, having a paid work experience was an emergent theme throughout. Community-based work experiences that were highly standardized and involved competitive pay showed a greater likelihood of success for students with special needs. The research studies reported that having held a paid job during high school was a robust predictor of post school employment.

As stated in my background, my students are now getting paid for the work they do in my work study program. I have two classes of about 10, one is underclassmen and the other are the upperclassmen. Each week a new crew leader is assigned; this person oversees assigning tasks or teams, supervising the work and signing the timecards. Every week one group goes to a local church to clean their activity center, to a nearby school to help out and to the kitchen in the

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school to cook. Every week the other group goes to the Boys and Girls to clean, to the school kitchen to cook and to the city ice rink to clean. Students not only learn how to do dishes, mop the floor, take out the trash, wipe down surfaces and sweep floors, as this is just a vehicle to teach them employability skills. Each student is evaluated on: attitude and flexibility, communication, work ethic, rules and safety, personal care and hygiene and accuracy and quality. Students keep timecards and know when they are 'on the clock.' These timecards are now submitted to our district office and are processed just like a student worker, as we are now getting funds through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to pay these students minimum wage for this work. Unfortunately, I cannot speak on how this paid work experience will affect their post school outcomes.

### *4.6 Well-informed and supportive state leaders, school districts and public agencies*

Without support (money) from state and federal leaders for certain programs that help students with disabilities get and keep jobs, it would be extremely difficult to produce contributing members of society. Funding for work study projects is needed in order to give our youth with special needs the experience they deserve to succeed in the working world. Additionally, support from state and federal leaders to provide incentives to employers for hiring disabled youth was an important theme in the literature on employer perspectives.

Action by state and federal agencies to help facilitate the creation of curriculum and assessment based on best practices, as well as staff development can help give work study programs credence in the overall big picture of producing productive workers. If policymakers are on board to help create collaborative systems and services for these students, then the outcomes are more successful.

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I have always been a fiscal conservative and feel capitalism is king. However, I have changed my mind on social programming since starting my current position. Some of our federal tax dollars should go to programs that are needed to enhance our economy and prove they work. Governmental support in the form of establishing laws can help and can sometimes hinder efforts to teach our students with special needs employability skills, as evidenced by our educational reform history.

### *4.7 Supported employment/job coaching*

Job mentors, teachers' aides, job coaches and youth mentors were found in my literature review to increase self-esteem and longevity in the workplace for disabled youth. This accommodation, however, is extremely expensive as it requires hiring more people, which is the number one expense for any educational institution, agency or business. Supported employment has shown to enhance student empowerment, where they feel full and active members of the workforce.

## **6. Conclusion**

I found that there are many different programs and program models out there and many are doing great things for our students with special needs. The emergent themes were very telling in fleshing out the factors contributing to the success of our students in the special education system. What I found in the literature was that support systems (businesses, families, schools, legislatures) are necessary to make these work study programs work.

In my practice, I will continue the work I currently do. In picking this topic, I thought I would find a curriculum model that worked or was best practice. In conducting this review of the current literature on this topic, I've found there is no perfect program. What I did learn is

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that all I can do is provide a great program and teach my students with special needs

employability skills; it is up to the students and their families to make decisions about their lives

as it pertains to employment after school.

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