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Educators' knowledge about strategies and supports for autistic students in the transition from school to adulthood

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ABSTRACT

High school educators play an integral bridge role in facilitating successful transition services for autistic teenagers moving into adulthood. To better understand everyday educator perspectives, we surveyed 54 general and special education educators about their knowledge and attitudes regarding transition services for autistic students, with additional open-ended questions on perceived barriers to success. Overall knowledge was at a basic level but on average educators would not feel comfortable coaching or teaching others about transition implementation. Educators emphasized the need for student input at all phases of transition planning but acknowledged this happens too rarely. They reported significant challenges because of difficulty connecting with other school staff and with community providers, of too little time and resources, and the struggles students face to advocate for themselves effectively. Educators called for increased family involvement and better communication amongst school staff. Recommendations for transition best practices for autistic students include providing adequate resources for educators to have time for training, transition planning and implementation, and family and student engagement. In some circumstances, it may make sense for students to take more than four years of high school to complete their transition goals.

Introduction

The time of transition into adulthood is a critical period for autistic adolescents as they face marked changes across multiple settings including education, employment, health and mental health care, and relationships (Bennett et al., 2018; King et al., 2020; Płatos & Pisula, 2019; van Schalkwyk & Volkmar, 2017; Wisner-Carlson et al., 2020). In the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IDEA. n.d, 2024) requires that schools provide transition support services to all students receiving special education services. Effective transition services may include individualized goals identified by the student's education plan; activities to foster self-determination and independence across multiple domains (e.g., academics, life skills, social and emotional skills, employment skills); and meaningful student involvement throughout the process (e.g., Alverson et al.,

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2019, 2019; LaPoint et al., 2024; NTACT:C, 2024.). However, implementation of effective services is inadequate for many students (Alverson et al., 2019; Anderson et al., 2017; Pillay et al., 2022; Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

Because most transition planning takes place within education settings, educators create an integral bridge between familiarity with the needs of individual students and legal mandates for transition services. Training and support of teachers, including general education as well as special education teachers, is thus an important area for intervention to improve the transition process (Bolourian et al., 2022; Karal & Wolfe, 2020; Kellems et al., 2016; Ricci et al., 2017). Nonetheless, little is known about teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge of autism during the transition age and their ability to meet individualized student needs (Bolourian et al., 2022; LaPoint et al., 2024; Segall & Campbell, 2012; Van Mieghem et al., 2020).

Teacher training and attitudes

Across all ages and grades, the experience of autistic students is strongly affected by teacher training and attitudes (Russell et al., 2023). Larcombe et al. (2019) surveyed families and early intervention providers of autistic children entering school in Australia who reported that the child's experience was dependent in large measure on the attitudes of teachers and teaching assistants. Australian high school students likewise focused on relationships with teachers as a critical contributor to success (Saggers, 2015). Within the wider body of global research, Losh et al. (2022) found that positive student-teacher relationships improve engagement for young autistic students, contributing to positive learning and school success. Losh and Blacher (2023) further found that teachers who use positive response strategies such as praise, positive comments, and incentives reported closer student-teacher relationships. Autism-specific training and perceived usefulness of the positive response framework predicted the use of those positive strategies, suggesting ways to facilitate better relationships and thus better student engagement in the future (see also Esqueda Villegas et al., 2025). Positive relationships with other staff paraeducators are also important (Hamsho et al., 2024).

Better teacher training can improve attitudes and effective practice alike (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Maddox & Marvin, 2013; Russell et al., 2023). General education teachers and assistants report little knowledge and self-efficacy about teaching autistic students and often feel overwhelmed when responsible for providing transition services to autistic students (Bertuccio et al., 2019). General education teachers who lack special education training are less likely to report using inclusive practices (Segall & Campbell, 2012). Not surprisingly, quality ratings for transition programs reviewed by outside, expert raters are significantly higher for modified programs in self-contained classrooms than standard diploma programs in inclusive settings (Kraemer et al., 2020). But even special education professionals self-report a deficit-based framework for their autistic students that is at odds with a recommended, strengths- and solutions-oriented model for meeting student needs (Ashby, 2012; LaPoint et al., 2024). A few studies of teacher training for autism have reported positive post-training changes in knowledge about autism and intentions to change classroom practices to better support autistic students but these changes may not persist over time (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Maddox & Marvin, 2013). Researchers in this area consistently call for more autism-specific training to improve teacher comfort and attitudes towards autistic students (Anderson et al., 2017; LaPoint et al., 2024; Larcombe et al., 2019; Li et al., 2009; Morin et al., 2022). It is essential that teacher training and professional development programs move away from deficit-based models towards strengths-based approaches that provide meaningful, individualized support for every autistic student (Ashby, 2012; LaPoint et al., 2024).

Systemic barriers to effective transition support

In addition to inadequate training, research regarding barriers to transition services has highlighted related issues regarding educators' lack of time in the context of an already overwhelming workload, limited communication across stakeholders, and lack of resources and support from school administration (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020; Hedges et al., 2014; LaPoint et al., 2024; Li et al., 2009; Saggers, 2015; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Often, a single special educator may be responsible for all transition services including assessment, goal planning, implementation, communication with families, and follow-up. As one special educator noted in a focus group interview (reported in Hedges et al., 2014, p. 75):

We're already so overwhelmed by paperwork and overwhelmed by expectations and what we need to do…once we get back to the classroom, forget it. I'm already working on his IEP, his re-eval., and I'm doing this and that…. Who is going to help us to do it?

General education teachers may not be aware of transition goals and activities, may be unsure of how to implement them, and/or may be frustrated at having to provide accommodations for individual students in a classroom that is already too large and difficult to manage (Hedges et al., 2014; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Family involvement is essential to effective transition programming, but bi-directional communication between schools and families is an almost universal concern: families often find themselves unaware of the transition process, while educators do not feel connected to families(Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020; Snell-Rood et al., 2020) and s students themselves often have limited involvement (LaPoint et al., 2024; Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

Ongoing consultation and training

Data for this paper was collected as part of planning and program evaluation research conducted by the Individualized Transition to Adulthood Plan (ITAP) program at Emory Autism Center in the Emory University School of Medicine. ITAP provides consultation to high schools at the student, school and system level, with a strong emphasis on starting the planning process early and focusing on creating opportunities to develop functional skills that will result in meaningful experiences after high school graduation with the goal to develop a best practice, person-centered transition planning model. Data were collected from staff at two area high schools described below, including general education and special education staff.

Study aims

The purpose of this study was to ascertain perceived knowledge about autism-related transition best practices and supports for autism-specific skill development from educators who are directly involved in everyday service with autistic teens in two high schools in the Atlanta, Georgia USA region. We first analyzed and report data from the quantitative questionnaires to ascertain educators knowledge regarding autism and regarding transition best practices. Secondly, we present the open responses with three specific aims:

1. To measure educators' perceived knowledge of autism and transition
2. Determine the challenges and barriers that teachers face when working with their students
3. Investigate the supports (who and what) teachers need to help their students succeed

Methods

This study was conducted under approval from the Emory University Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. There was no involvement from autistic voices in the design and implementation of the project.

Participants

All participants actively worked in one of two schools in the greater Atlanta area. The two schools (High School A and High School B) have collaborated with our ITAP program which provides educators with professional development and conducts transition program evaluation. Participants were general education and special education teachers who had received training or were in the process of receiving training in autism transition from ITAP program staff. All participants were contacted via school email to participate in the survey. There was no external recruitment of educators. All individuals spoke English and were able to consent to the study.

To maintain anonymity, we did not collect information about which responses came from general educators or special educators. Fifty-four educators completed an online survey via the Qualtrics online platform (Qualtrics Inc, Provo, Utah). Thirty-eight of these responses came from High School A and sixteen came from High School B.

High School A is a Title 1 (low-income) public school with a current enrollment of 2266 students and 200 educators. Of the 200 educators, there are currently 22 special education teachers employed. Of the total student population, there are currently 253 identified as students with disabilities and 20 of those students have a primary eligibility category of Autism. *High School B* is a suburban public charter school with a special education emphasis that uses an inclusive, individualized learning model to serve both non-autistic and autistic students. High School B enrolls about 300 students of whom about 60 have a primary diagnosis of autism. ITAP collaboration began in 2018 at High School B, and in 2019 at High School A.

Procedure

Participants completed a 16-item survey, with 13 Likert questions measuring perceived knowledge of autism and transition, and three open-ended questions assessing barriers and supports needed for autistic students to achieve postsecondary success. While the full survey provided to educators contained additional items beyond the 16 items mentioned, these items were outside the scope of the current study and are not discussed. Within the context of working with transition-age autistic students, we asked educators to rate their knowledge related to both transition and autism. Specific questions asked about knowledge of transition best practices for autistic students and supports for autism-specific skill development. The instrument used a 4-point Likert scale adapted from Maddox and Marvin (2013): 1 = *I have little knowledge of this*, 2 = *I have basic knowledge of this*, 3 = *I have a full understanding of this*, and 4 = *I could teach this to others*. We interpreted scores in the 1–2 range to reflect less preparedness than desired for full-time transition education staff while the 3–4 range reflected adequate to excellent confidence and preparation. The Likert items were not separated by category in the Qualtrics survey. We categorized them conceptually into Autism Knowledge and Transition Knowledge domains. The first four questions of the survey were organized into the Autism Knowledge domain, while the remaining 9 questions were organized into the Transition Knowledge domain. In addition to the items reported here, survey participants completed 15 items regarding their intentions to implement transition practices that are beyond the scope of this study and not reported here.

To assess barriers and supports needed, literature on educators working with transition-age autistic students was reviewed. This review showed a distinct lack of studies collecting qualitative data. One study by Elias et al. (2019) collected qualitative data from educators on postsecondary transition difficulties of autistic students. We adapted two of their focus group questions for our survey and added a third question on how educators define postsecondary success for their autistic students. The full set of survey items analyzed in this study can be found in the supplemental data S1.

Data Collection

Fifty-four participants completed an online survey in the Fall of 2022. The three sections took about 20 total minutes to complete, and the survey involved minimal risk. Qualtrics stored all responses from teachers in a confidential database only accessible by study members. No identifying information was collected from survey participants, and all data collection and analysis were anonymous.

Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data was thematically analyzed using the qualitative analysis software NVIVO. In the first round of analysis, one rater used an inductive approach to identify common themes in the responses, which were then inputted into NVIVO. In a second round of analysis, each response was individually coded by one of the previous raters and a new, second rater. These two raters coded independently and met weekly in debriefing sessions to reach consensus.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data from the Likert-scale knowledge questions were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for each domain (Autism Knowledge and Transition Knowledge). A paired-samples *t*-test was

Fig. 1. Qualitative Themes and Examples.

conducted to compare educators' perceived knowledge ratings across the two domains. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were also calculated for individual question items; this data can be found in a supplemental table S1.

Results

Quantitative results

Educators respond with an average rating just above 2 for both domains (Autism Knowledge $M = 2.28$, $SD = .61$; Transition Knowledge $M = 2.18$; $SD = .62$). Mean ratings for the domains were not significantly different [$t(106) = .845$, $p = .400$].

Qualitative results

Definition of post-secondary success

Not surprisingly, educators' goals for transitioning students were geared towards independence and work situations that match their skills and interests. Importantly, educators stressed the importance of student involvement in transition goals and IEP planning including conversations about their "strengths, weaknesses, their hobbies, likes and dislikes" to shape the best opportunities for growth. Educators emphasized how student involvement in their own post-graduate plan fosters independence and self-confidence as students practice advocating for themselves.

Challenges and barriers for educators

Comments from survey respondents fell into two major categories when describing the challenges they face for facilitating successful transitions, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The first group of comments relates to systemic challenges including limited collaborations with other school personnel and with families; a lack of resources including time and training; and too little awareness about autism with potential employers in the community. The second group of comments, which was the most frequent, acknowledged that students would benefit from better executive and social skills and from being more involved in their transition planning. A larger table of sample quotes is included in supplemental data S2.

Barriers to collaboration. Educators are tasked with working with their students in the classroom, but they reported needing support from collaborators to effectively address transition needs. This included other school staff including teachers, school psychologists, and administrators, as well as student families. Classroom educators depend on these collaborators to assist students in finding opportunities to learn real-world skills and to coordinate participation in preparatory activities. Educators also indicated that they need "help implementing transition goals into the working school day on a school wide basis." Outside of the classroom, families play a tremendous role in monitoring student progress and holding students accountable for meeting goals. Teachers express the desire for more engagement, time and partnership with families regarding the transition process.

Not enough resources. Survey responses consistently mentioned the lack of time available for educators to work meaningfully on transition-related activities. They reported expectations to both teach the school curriculum and fulfill transition-based needs, which lead to limited time for educators to work with students one-on-one to create a student-centered a post-high school plan. Educators requested more face-to-face interactions with their transition-age students. They also highlighted the need for more and ongoing training for writing student transition plans with appropriate goals.

Connecting to community providers. Educators reported that they rely on community organizations to provide real-world opportunities that could include volunteer positions, internships, and jobs. Educators hoped that students working in the community learn to advocate for themselves and their needs while employers also do their part to support the student by obtaining knowledge and understanding of autism.

Student challenges. Educators, family members, and community providers are guides to help the students discover their own version of post-secondary success. Survey respondents noted that students themselves must learn how to navigate different social situations such as jobs and opportunities in real-world scenarios that are different than the practiced methods learned by students in school and in therapeutic services. But challenges with planning, organization, flexibility, and execution (executive functions) can affect student opportunities for transition-based activities. Differences in social styles that are common in autism may also impact success in community work settings. Educators noted that too few students are adequately involved in the transition process.

Discussion

Effective transition services contribute to better post-secondary outcomes for students in special education programs (Wehman et al., 2014; White et al., 2024). We surveyed 54 general and special educators who are actively involved in providing transition services for high-school aged autistic adolescents. On a four-point scale asking about educator knowledge about autism and about transition services generally, these educators reported levels of knowledge with an average of 2.2 which equates to a "Basic" level. In other words, they feel comfortable with fundamentals, but they would not feel comfortable coaching or teaching others about transition implementation. Underprepared and overworked teachers leave students in special education programs at a disadvantage for making a successful journey to adulthood (Antoniou et al., 2024; Fore et al., 2002; Hester et al., 2020).

Respondents to this survey highlighted a number of essential areas for improvement within transition planning and implementation including 1) need for more collaboration; 2) need for more resources including time and training for transition planning; 3) better connections to community providers; and 4) challenges with including students in their own transition planning process. Here we

consider each of these themes individually and then their broader relationships to inadequate resources to maximize transition success.

Collaboration. Collaboration with families, other members the school team, and community partner agencies is recognized as a critical best practice (Frazier et al., 2020; Kellems et al., 2016; Sanderson & Stout, 2025). Yet such collaboration is the most vulnerable practice to high caseloads and staff shortages: as student-to-teacher ratios increase, collaborative practices are the often first element to disappear (Hendricker et al., 2022, 2023; Magee & Plotner, 2022). Ideally, school teams could encourage and *protect* time for practices that foster bi-directional communication and partnership with families, such as positive calls home and mental health support. School psychologists are uniquely positioned for this role but tend to be less involved (Hendricker et al., 2023) and a shortage of school psychologists and school psychology training faculty is a growing concern (Bocanegra et al., 2022; Morrison et al., 2022; Renzi & Daly, 2024). One variable that is likely to improve effective collaboration is to ensure individual collaborative team member responsibility; this may provide a fruitful focus for technical assistance teams (Magee & Plotner, 2022).

Time and Training. A second consistent theme from our qualitative responses was a lack of resources to implement effective plans. Respondents consistently mentioned ideas such as "not enough time" or "training closer to when I will need to create a transition plan." Another theme that our respondents did not mention but has come up in other studies is lack of *student time* in their busy day-to-day schedules (Cease-Cook et al., 2015; Szidon et al., 2015). At the intersection of these is the pressure for schools to focus on academic skills which may leave little time for additional adaptive and life skills development that is crucial for students enrolled special education programs (Bartholomew et al., 2015). While IDEA legislation in the US has mandated the provision of a transition plan for students receiving special education services, these everyday barriers frequently decrease effective implementation. Schools do their best to meet legal compliance, but this does not necessarily equal quality transition planning and implementation, although more compliance is associated with better quality (Landmark & Zhang, 2013). Technical assistance partners can help schools navigate limited resources to maximize outcomes. Programs like our ITAP program provide training to educators regarding transition planning best practices and can assist in building comprehensive transition assessments early in the high school years and evaluating student-specific functional skills for adulthood (e.g., social interaction skills, self-awareness, executive functioning skills, and daily living skills). In the US, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C, 2024.) has a host of resources available with state-by-state guidance and shared best practices. Among recommended practices are starting the transition planning early to afford students, educators, and families time to make the most of those high school years. On an individual basis, it can be beneficial to extend time in high school beyond the traditional 4 years to allow more time for development, maturation, skill building and "real life" (e.g., work experience) opportunities. These recommendations do not solve the resource problem but give more time and availability to implement needed skill building.

Community Connections. Community providers are vital for offering real-world opportunities for autistic students. Students given the opportunity to volunteer or work a professional job will foster greater communication skills and collaborate with others improving their workplace skillset which can be an asset following high school (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2022; Roux et al., 2021). Employers can do their part in supporting students by providing helpful resources to guide students and showing them what their responsibilities are in the working environment (Fong et al., 2021). However, our survey respondents highlighted how few opportunities are available to autistic students due to the lack of awareness and understanding about common strengths that may benefit the company, and education about how to best work with both strengths and difficulties (see also Kim & Dymond, 2010; Li et al., 2009; Schutz & Carter, 2022). Respondents to our survey repeatedly mentioned the need for students to "learn by doing, not [just] being told" but noted the "lack of opportunity to engage in community activities" and challenges finding suitable community partners. Some countries report success in this endeavor, for example in Saudi Arabia (Almalky & Alqahtani, 2021). Schutz and Carter (2022) emphasize the benefit from having multiple stakeholders that can address diverse needs including varying levels of support needs in different types of employment settings; local and state employment agencies can play a key role here. While employers are often passive participants in transition (i.e., being contacted by schools/agencies looking for openings, and training provided by the schools/agencies), Project Search (e.g., Wehman et al., 2020) creates a much more active collaboration and randomized clinical trials have shown significant gains in competitive employment for autistic high school students. Solomon et al. (2025) has piloted an intensive training model for community employers with autistic adults that may translate well to transition programs. These programs point the way for researchers, educators, and policy advocates to focus on education throughout the community including for a variety of employment sectors to meet diverse interests and talents of autistic youth and young adults.

Building Student Skills. The most frequently referenced theme from survey results was a focus on functional student skills critical for success and independence in adulthood, including executive function skills, social skills, and self-advocacy skills, centered around being flexible to navigate unexpected or unscripted situations. One educator also mentioned the challenge of student engagement because "they cannot fully envision life beyond high school" but helpfully noted that "it is important to give multiple examples and let students try different tasks before deciding what their goals are following graduation." These challenges are known areas of difficulty for many autistic students (Chun et al., 2023; Demetriou et al., 2018; Zuber & Webber, 2019), but educators may feel frustrated when they provide the opportunities for skill building and/or employment but believe that students are not able to effectively access them without further support.

This hearkens back to an earlier point about the pressure for educators to focus on academic skills. However, the research literature is clear: for autistic youth, with and without intellectual disability, there is urgent need for training on "soft skills" and everyday living skills vital for succeeding in the real world once they have transitioned past high school. This does not mean demanding that students "mask" autism traits just to fit in, as this masking/faking camouflaging has been repeatedly shown to negatively affect mental health (Beck et al., 2020; Cook et al., 2021) including in school and work settings (South et al., 2025). Fortunately, there are now emerging school-based curricula to help students develop needed executive skills such as problem solving, planning, and self-advocacy – including *Unstuck and On Target: Ages 14–22* (Pugliese et al., 2024). Likewise, our ITAP educational consultants partner with schools

and the state Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program to support student development of social engagement skills, self-awareness, executive functioning, and daily living skills. Important attention is paid to the student's development of self-awareness in regard to their strengths and interests, how their diagnosis and disability impact them, and what tools, strategies and supports work best for them; addressing these developmental and critical intrapersonal insights are a foundational pathway for the development of self-determination and self-advocacy (Chou et al., 2017; Morán et al., 2021; Shogren et al., 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2010). Administrators should be encouraged to work with transition-related staff across disciplines to promote a shared vision that focuses on the child first. Of course there are many other pressures in a school, but if the child and family are left out, all other activities become inherently less meaningful. This may require a fundamental shift in priorities, attitudes, and funding to increase equity for all students in special education programs.

Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data. Analysis of trustworthiness is an important part of qualitative research, including consideration of the preparation of results, organization of findings, and how they are reported to ensure that findings are extracted from the data themselves and not researchers own biases or predispositions (Elo et al., 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Shenton, 2004). While trustworthiness may be difficult to wholly establish for any one project, we have examined our processes against the "Checklist for Researchers Attempting to Improve the Trustworthiness of a Content Analysis Study" proposed by Elo et al. (2014).

Preparation phase: We are comfortable with this phase as we chose to sample directly from those involved in day-to-day transition planning and implementation, and from schools with two different demographic settings. The survey was open to all related staff at each school and there were no constraints on participation. Thus, those who did complete the survey may have been different in meaningful ways than those who did not, but the voluntary data may be less prone to bias. While larger sample sizes are needed for more definitive statements, these data truly represent a ground-up approach to the problem.

Organization phase: raters approached the qualitative data without pre-set notions of categories. The three categories related to the need for more resources to complete quality transition plans were readily apparent, with the follow-up discussion about how much overlap they entail; in the end the organization of resources at school and to connect to homes and to community supports was a logical separation. The fourth category related to student preparation and input required more discussion about what message educators were trying to convey about their needs, without putting too much responsibility on students. This category may be the least reliable.

The Reporting phase including the Results and Discussion sections stay close to the data and are centered around the themes and quotes from the Organization phase. The Table shown in Fig. 1 highlight the themes in an easy-to-follow format for all readers, with additional supplemental data included for those wanting more in-depth follow-up. We believe the methods and interpretation are presented in a way that future research could follow.

Overall, confidence in the Preparation and Reporting phases is high; reliability of interpretation of the *student challenges* theme is complicated by our hesitation to assign too much responsibility for difficulties in transition to autism traits or to students who are depending on supportive adults to help them navigate complex systems.

Limitations and future directions

A strength of this study was focused recruiting for educators who are actively involved in day-to-day transition services and who have begun a program of training and support for providing improved education and service. However, the overall small sample size is small. In addition, the sample was drawn from only two schools, which may not capture the full spectrum of educator experiences across other settings. Nonetheless, these findings represent real-life constraints that provide useful insight into many educator perspectives. Our emphasis on anonymity means that we lack demographic information including the balance of general education versus special education teachers. As with all self-reported survey data, it is difficult to ascertain possible sources of response bias. Future research should be undertaken to link educator needs related to transition to professional characteristics, such as caseload size, specialization in special education or transition, and time in the field. Additional qualitative inquiry could be utilized to explore how educators develop expertise in transition programming for autistic students, or how educators adapt their transition-related professional practices over time based on the needs of the school populations they serve. This work is informed by the research that examines the relationship between knowledge to behavioral intentions and other relevant behavior change variables such as self-efficacy and subjective norms.

The schools themselves were quite different from each other (Title 1 versus suburban, public versus charter) and it is possible that school structure influenced responses. Within the context of small sample sizes and an emphasis on anonymity, we did not undertake school-by-school comparisons. This would be a helpful point for studies that involved more schools across multiple demographic factors.

We adapted survey questions from existing literature but did not develop psychometric validation for the set of questions we administered. There is an important opportunity to develop measures of educator perspectives to understand challenges and better solutions for effective transition programs.

Conclusion

The number of autistic high school students continues to increase and there is urgency to prepare these students for optimal post-high school outcomes. This study focused on a group of high school educators who are actively involved in transition planning and implementation for autistic students, as one group of stakeholders who have immense influence in the transition process. Their identification of multiple needs around communication and participation with school, family, and community stakeholders was insightful; respondents highlighted a key focus on involvement of autistic students themselves for creating meaningful and doable

transition plans reflects important intentions. Of note, all of these domains require time and adequate staffing ratios in order to implement, and research has shown that when school providers and educators are understaffed, collaborative partnerships with families, community members, and students themselves are one of the first areas impacted (Hendricker et al., 2022, 2023; Magee & Plotner, 2022). These reports from educators about how little time and preparation they are given to effectively manage these complex needs speaks to the urgency of changing mindsets and improving funding for autistic students at this critical time of life.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Snider Laurel A: Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Molly Berman:** Writing – original draft, Supervision, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Mikle South:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Matt Segall:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Divya Arora:** Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Statement of author positioning

This study was conducted by a team of advocates and allies who work in neurodivergent settings daily. One of the authors identifies as neurodivergent who also has neurodivergent family members.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.reia.2025.202648.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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