



University of Kentucky  
UKnowledge

---

Theses and Dissertations--Educational  
Leadership Studies

Educational Leadership Studies

---

2017

## BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES SEEKING INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Jason L. Wheatley

University of Kentucky, [jason.wheatley@jefferson.kyschools.us](mailto:jason.wheatley@jefferson.kyschools.us)

Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2017.089>

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wheatley, Jason L., "BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES SEEKING INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION" (2017). *Theses and Dissertations--Educational Leadership Studies*. 19.

[https://uknowledge.uky.edu/edl\\_etds/19](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/edl_etds/19)

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Leadership Studies at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--Educational Leadership Studies by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact [UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu](mailto:UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu).

## **STUDENT AGREEMENT:**

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

## **REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE**

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Jason L. Wheatley, Student

Dr. Wayne Lewis, Major Professor

Dr. John Nash, Director of Graduate Studies

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE  
FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES  
SEEKING INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

---

DISSERTATION

---

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Jason Lance Wheatley

Louisville, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Wayne Lewis, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

Copyright © Jason L. Wheatley 2017

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES SEEKING INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) is an urban school district in Louisville, Kentucky. While serving more than 100,000 students, JCPS is the 27<sup>th</sup> largest school system in the United States. JCPS serves students with moderate to severe disabilities (MSD) seeking to attain an alternative diploma upon exiting secondary school. Students with MSD enrolled in JCPS age 16 and older receive transition services to support post-secondary transition. Community stakeholders and JCPS central office staff are concerned about post school outcomes and transition for students with MSD. Based on a report by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), a majority of students with MSD in JCPS are not engaged in employment or higher education one year after exiting secondary schools (KYPSO “2013 Annual Report”, 2013). While a national report shows this population accessing two-year and four-year colleges at a rate of 28% (U.S Department of Education IES, 2011), students with MSD in JCPS access two-year and four-year colleges at a diminished rate of 11% (KYPSO “2013 Annual Report”, 2013).

Based on my professional perception as transition administrator for JCPS’ Exceptional Child Education (ECE) Department and local data identifying post school outcomes for students with MSD, MSD teachers in JCPS lack capacity to facilitate the transition of their students into two-year and four-year colleges. The purpose of this action research was to build capacity in special education teachers and JCPS, through a Community of Practice (CoPs) for professional learning, to support a successful transition into two-year and four-year colleges for students with MSD.

Using an action research design, this study utilized mixed methodologies to determine progress towards achievement targets. Applying the concurrent nested strategy model and triangulation of findings, the following three research questions will be informed: (a) what did the CoP actually do? (b) what changes occurred regarding the behaviors of special education teachers on identified achievement targets? (c) What were the teachers’ perceptions of the relationship, if any, between the actions of the CoP and noted changes in their professional behaviors? Action research participants included MSD teachers, central office staff, and external stakeholders. I served as both participant researcher and participant leader throughout the action research process.

During a three-month period, four events were conducted in alignment with CoP framework (Wenger, McDermott, Snyder 2002). Data sources included documents (e.g., notes and agendas), participant exit interviews, survey questions, and observations of special education teachers’ professional learning. A comparative and ongoing analysis of data was used to support research questions. Special education teacher behaviors, aligned

to achievement targets, were monitored using a Likert scale survey, every 30 days throughout the action. Categories and codes supported the development of themes for an analysis of MSD teacher exit interviews. Insights garnered were used to support future action and add to the body of research for educational leadership.

The findings of this action research identified themes and data to support capacity building and leading within a central office support department of a large urban school district. The study revealed that special education teachers, when supported in professional learning, perceived an increase in their capacity to support MSD students and families seeking a transition to two-year or four-year colleges.

**KEYWORDS:** Community of Practice, Educational Leadership, Moderate to Severe Disabilities, Transition to Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disability, Post-secondary Outcomes, Special Education

Jason L. Wheatley

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE  
FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES  
SEEKING INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Jason Lance Wheatley

Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr.

Director of Dissertation

Dr. John Nash

Director of Graduate Studies

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

I dedicate this work and give eternal thanks to my mother and father whose unwavering support and high expectations are forever in my forecast. Their encouragement and love have championed me through this journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not have been realized without the involvement and support of many. To the mirror on my wall, for showing me that perseverance is the only option. Without you, this would not be a reality. To my fiancé, Sara, who has reminded me that dreams do come true, if you work for them and get a little lucky. To my mother, who instilled in me a passion for education and a heart for all people, especially those with moderate to severe disabilities. To my father, who has worked so hard to provide opportunities for the betterment of his family and reminded us that education is a valuable opportunity worth serious attention. To my mother and father, who have provided me with encouragement and support throughout all my educational endeavors, they're the MVPs.

Special appreciation is given to Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, my committee chair. His guidance and feedback were essential to this dissertation. I appreciate his critical eye and straight-to-the-point nature which pushed me to meet high expectations for this important work. I thank him for his commitment to me throughout this experience, as he has accomplished great things for the children of Kentucky. I will forever trust his judgement. Appreciation goes to my committee members Dr. Lars Bjork, Dr. Beth Rous, and Dr. Sally Shepley for their guidance. Lastly, appreciation goes to my cohort and JCPS colleagues, who listened to me vent, provided encouragement in discouraging times, and reminded me that I was not in this alone.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter One: Leadership Context, Supporting Literature, & Challenge of Leadership Practice	
Introduction.....	1
Research Setting and Situation	
JCPS’ Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities.....	2
Challenge of Leadership Practice	
JCPS’ Exceptional Child Education Transition Programs.....	5
Transition Needs for Students with MSD.....	7
Post School Outcomes for Students with Disabilities.....	8
Leadership Roles and Responsibilities.....	11
Position as Insider in Context of Research.....	13
Review of Supporting Literature.....	15
Inclusion for Persons with MSD in Higher Education.....	16
Parental Role and Perception in Transition for Students with MSD.....	19
Role of the Special Education Teacher in Transition.....	22
Educational Leadership and Professional Learning for Transition.....	24
Concluding Statement: A Community of Practice for Capacity Building.....	29
Chapter Two: Action & Research Design	
Introduction.....	30
Organizational Context.....	30
Serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities in Jefferson County Public Schools.....	30
Serving Students Age 18-21 in JCPS.....	31
Vision 2020.....	32
Plan for Action.....	33
Overview.....	33
The Early Stages of Development.....	34
Stage 1: Planning.....	34
Stage 2: Coalescing.....	36
Stage 3: Maturing.....	40
Participants.....	46
Central Office ECE Department.....	46
Community of Practice External Membership.....	47
Community Coordinators.....	48
Role of Researcher.....	50
Research Plan.....	51
Research Questions.....	52
Data Sources.....	53

Data Analysis Strategies.....	57
Quality Assurances.....	58
Conclusion.....	58
 Chapter Three: Community of Practice Findings	
Introduction.....	59
Results.....	60
Excellence with Equity through a CoP.....	60
JCPS Data Management and IRB.....	61
Recruitment.....	61
MSD Teacher Participants.....	62
A Community of Practice Realized.....	63
A Mechanism for Change.....	66
Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing.....	67
A CoP for Coordination.....	69
A CoP for Communicating with Parents.....	71
A CoP for Capacity Building in IEP Development.....	72
Recommendations.....	75
Continuing a Community of Practice.....	75
Future Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing.....	77
Supporting Post-School Outcomes through Organizational Leadership...79	
Special Education for Higher Education.....	81
Reflection.....	82
Leading-Participating in a CoP for JCPS.....	82
A Practitioner’s Perspective on Action Research Efforts.....	84
 Appendices	
Appendix A: (Structured) Participant Community of Practice Interview	
Questions.....	85
Appendix B: Web-based Survey.....	87
Appendix C: Transition IEP Development Support Document.....	89
Appendix D: Community Observation Instrument.....	93
Appendix E: Case Study Analysis Tool.....	94
Appendix F: Community of Practice Handout.....	95
Appendix G: IRB Consent to Participate.....	96
Appendix H: IRB Approval Form.....	100
References.....	101
Vita.....	105

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1, Comparison of a Professional Learning Community and a Community of Practice.....	27
Table 2.2, Community of Practice Summary of Events.....	44
Table 2.3, CoP Triangulation Matrix.....	54
Table 3.4, Community Coordinator Presentation Event Summary.....	65
Table 3.5, Participant-Leader/Researcher Email Frequency.....	66
Table 3.6 Communication with Parents/Guardians .....	72

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing.....	68
Figure 3.2 JCPS and OVR Coordination.....	70
Figure 3.3 Individualized Education Program Development.....	7

## **Chapter 1**

# **LEADERSHIP CONTEXT, SUPPORTING LITERATURE, & CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE**

### **Introduction**

“Culture change starts with personal change. We become change agents by first altering our own maps. Ultimately, the process returns us to the ‘power of one’ and the requirement of aligning and empowering oneself before successfully changing the organization” (Quinn, 1996, p. 103). Embracing the assertion that deep change comes from both within the person as well as within the organization, this action research seeks to build capacity in special education teachers to facilitate the successful transition of students with moderate to severe disabilities (MSD) into two-year or four-year colleges. The action research, conducted in the largest school district of Kentucky, involves the design and implementation of a community of practice for special education teachers and community stakeholders to promote professional learning and capacity building. Data sources will include documents (e.g., notes and agendas), MSD teacher exit interviews, longitudinal responses to survey questions, and observations of MSD teachers’ professional learning.

In chapter one I provide a detailed description of Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), where the community of practice (CoP) will be enacted due to my role within the district, along with programmatic and structural mechanisms related to how the district

currently supports students with MSD. In describing the CoP's context, I project my leadership roles and responsibilities as they relate to the challenge of leadership for this action. To clearly identify my position and the presence of bias I describe my role as an insider within this study. I describe phenomena to support the importance of this action research as well as literature supporting a need for improvement. Additionally, the targeted review of literature provides insights as to the usability of a CoP as a mechanism for professional learning and capacity building.

In chapter two, I further develop the specific context and setting for implementation. I provide a plan for implementing the CoP including a detailed description of participants and their roles related to the action. Further, in chapter two, I provide a plan for research with guiding questions and a description of data sources.

## **Research Setting and Situation**

### **Jefferson County Public Schools' Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities**

The JCPS district is the largest of 173 school districts in the state of Kentucky (KY) (KDE "Open House", 2015). JCPS serves approximately 101,000 students throughout Jefferson County. The district has 172 schools including 89 elementary, 23 middle, 19 secondary, 2 combined, and 39 special. JCPS employs over 6,400 teachers to provide relevant, comprehensive, quality instruction in order to educate, prepare, and inspire students to learn. Recently, JCPS has moved from the 51<sup>st</sup> percentile to 35<sup>th</sup> in accountability performance (KDE "Open House", 2015).

Exceptional Child Education (ECE) is the district department responsible for supporting students with disabilities having an educational impact and supported through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In the 2008-09 school year, there were 24,708 secondary students in JCPS. The percentage of secondary ECE students was 9.7% at 2,398 (2009-10 High School Data Books, JCPS, 2015). Students with MSD or students with low incidence disabilities, represent approximately 1% of school age populations as identified by the definition of that group in P.L. 105-17. Also commonly referred to as intellectual disability, students with MSD often display significant learning, cognitive, and other conditions (e.g., mental disability), where disability affects their ability to access grade-level course content. These are not students who would access the postsecondary education system in a typical manner; rather, they require significant planning and collaboration to provide them with access. This population of students typically (though not always) includes students who (a) take the alternate state assessment for accountability; (b) exit secondary education with an alternative diploma instead of a typical high school diploma; and (c) qualify to receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) until they are 21 years old.

JCPS' central office ECE department supports students with disabilities and is comprised of the following role groups: special education director, coordinators, specialists in a variety of domains (autism, placement, transition, related services, etc.), consulting teachers, and resource teachers allocated to multiple schools. Additionally, special education teachers, related service personnel, and paraprofessionals provide direct

instruction for students with MSD at school-based levels (Exceptional Child Education JCPS, 2015).

The KDE School Report Card shows that there are 510 grade 12, or transition age, students with MSD in KY (KDE “School Report Card”, 2015). An internal report generated in September 2015 through Infinite Campus shows that JCPS serves 135 grade 12 students with MSD. Additionally, 147 students with MSD are enrolled in the district and identified as grade 14. JCPS has 62 high school classrooms serving students with MSD grades 9 through 14. Grade 14 identification signifies that a student with MSD has completed all assessment and alternate diploma graduation requirements, yet is attending secondary school to develop skills leading to a successful transition. Students with disabilities can attend secondary school until the age of 21.

According to the KDE School Report Card (2015), a majority of students with MSD across KY participated in the Kentucky Alternate Assessment Program (KAAP), a standards-based alternate assessment. The result of inclusive practices, students with MSD are frequently included in secondary schools alongside typical peers while participating in standards-based alternate assessment programs. These alternate assessment standards are a modified version of grade level standards in which typical students are assessed annually; with the expectation that benchmark attainment of these skills by students with MSD, indicates a student to be prepared for a transition to college. In Kentucky, students participating in the KAAP are on track to receive an alternative diploma in place of the regular high school diploma. This diploma signifies the student has completed 12th grade state accountability assessments and has attained

the academic knowledge to support success in postsecondary environments (KDE Alternate K-PREP, 2012).

### **Challenge of Leadership Practice**

In this section, I describe the challenge of a leadership practice supporting capacity building in JCPS' special education MSD teachers. Specifically, the challenge of practice to support the post-secondary transition of students with MSD into two-year and four-year colleges. Furthermore, the transition needs of students with MSD and the role of JCPS' special education teachers to support transition is described to explain the importance of capacity in the area, along with need for development and coordination with district specialists. Additionally, data related to post school outcomes is included and discussed to depict significance to JCPS and need for improvement or change.

### **JCPS' Exceptional Child Education Transition Programs**

Historically, dominant philosophies of education and perceptions of individuals with MSD led to their exclusion from programs based solely on academic achievement (Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, & Hodapp, 2012). Furthermore, in alignment with this notion, functional and vocational programs became the most prevalent programs to support transition for students with MSD (Bouck, 2012). Due to these phenomena much of the effort of JCPS' ECE transition programs focus solely on students' transition to vocational experiences, rather than transition to programs and experiences within higher education environments (JCPS ECE Transition Programs, 2015).

JCPS offers a variety of transition programs to support students with MSD. Based on enrollment numbers, the largest of these programs is Ahrens Work Transition Program. The program serves 40 students annually and is supported by four special education teachers, multiple job coaches, and a vocational teacher. Ahrens is a 3-yr program for full-time community-based work education. In addition to Ahrens are three part-time vocational programs that serve a combined student population of approximately 75 students with MSD. Eight job coaches and an ECE resource teacher support these programs. JCPS offers transition programs in both education and employment. However, it is my professional opinion as both a former secondary special education MSD teacher and currently in my role as transition specialist, transition programs in the area of higher education are not close to meeting the need of our MSD population.

In fact, the only JCPS ECE transition program focused on supporting students with intellectual disability in postsecondary environments is a collaboration between JCPS and the University of Louisville. Providing Access to Community Transition Program (PACT) is a three-year program for individuals with MSD who are receiving services through JCPS prior to aging out at 21 years old (JCPS ECE Transition Programs, 2015). This program, which is highly sought after by students, parents, and advocates in the district, serves at a maximum of 10 students annually. It has been my experience, through communicating with parents of students with MSD, that this program was their first choice for transition programming. Unfortunately, the limited capacity and lottery for admittance make the only higher education transition program in JCPS an unobtainable reality for most students.

## **Transition Needs for Students with MSD**

Applicable to the transition-age (grade 12-14) MSD population, transition services were updated in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004). Included in this reauthorization is the mandate for secondary transition components in each students' IEP by age 14 or 8<sup>th</sup> grade (whichever comes first). More relevant to the present study is the requirement that postsecondary goals be included in the IEP as appropriately identified in transition assessments. Furthermore, IDEA, according to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP, 2007), places emphasis on transition programming for students with disabilities stating, "States may use funds reserved under §300.704(b) (1) for the development and implementation of transition programs, including coordination of services with agencies involved in supporting the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary activities" (IDEA Regulations, 2007, p. 2).

Individuals with MSD often complete state accountability assessments in Grade 12 and remain in high school classrooms or training centers to further develop transition skills, while the majority of peers pursue life in the world of higher education (KDE School Report Card, 2015). Through my professional experience and perception, students with MSD feel abandoned with an unsatisfied desire to continue their education in postsecondary settings and, more specifically, two-year and four-year colleges after experiencing inclusion in k-12 environments (Kleinert, Jones, Sheppard-Jones, Harp, & Harrison, 2012). The historical exclusion of persons with MSD from higher education

has equated to low expectations and less than desirable adulthood experiences for persons with MSD (Kleinert et al., 2012).

The role of secondary special education teachers is broadening with the emergence of new opportunities and environments to support the transition to adulthood for persons with MSD. Unfortunately, coordination between the JCPS transition specialist and secondary special education MSD teachers is a deficit area, as there is no coordinating mechanism. This often results in inadequate support and knowledge for transition planning. In my experience as a MSD teacher and transition specialist in the district, coordination only happens as a reactive strategy to address student needs and advocacy from the parent/guardian. The realm of higher education programming for students with MSD is relatively new and opportunities are growing rapidly. For students with MSD in JCPS to be successful in accessing newly established and highly sought after postsecondary programs, communication within the school district will need improvement.

### **Post School Outcomes for Students with Disabilities**

Mandated by IDEA, students with disabilities age 16 and older are required to have post-secondary goals on the IEP in the areas of education/training, employment, and, if appropriate, independent living. Additionally, IDEA requires states to monitor post school outcomes for students, in the aforementioned areas, one year after leaving school.

In 2010 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly 88% of higher education organizations enrolled students with disabilities (e.g. hearing

impairment, visual impairment, speech and language impairment, mobility or orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, specific learning disability, ADD or ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, health impairment, and/or mental illness; (U.S Department of Education, Institute of Education Services, 2011). However, students with MSD enrolled with less prevalence at a rate of 41% of higher education organizations (Grigal, 2012).

In 2011, the National Center for Special Education Research provided that 55% of young adults with disabilities continued to postsecondary schools. The study identified students with MSD as enrolling in 2-year or community colleges at a rate of 21.5% and 4-year colleges just 6.3% (U.S Department of Education, IES, 2011). In comparison, students with learning disabilities accessed 2-year or community colleges at a rate almost double to those with MSD at 41% and 4-year colleges at 15.5% (U.S Department of Education, Institute of Education Services [IES], 2011).

In alignment with these findings, Indicator 14 and the Kentucky Youth One Year Out (KYOYO) 2016 survey showed great disparities in transition beyond secondary schools for students with disabilities. Furthermore, students with MSD had far less success in this realm. A comparative analysis of JCPS and other KY school districts showed that students with MSD are not enrolling in community colleges or four-year colleges and universities at the rate of their typical peers, nor peers with MSD nationally. As stated previously, 72% of JCPS graduates enroll in higher education compared to 0% of students with MSD (KDE “School Report Card”, 2015). Although this phenomenon was not unique to JCPS, as throughout KY only 1% of students with MSD are being included in higher education, a district enrolling students in higher education at a rate that

is 17% greater than the statewide average could be equitable in this area for students with MSD (KYPSO “2016 Annual Report”, 2016). Additionally, a national average of 28% of students with MSD are accessing two-year and four-year colleges, compared to just 1% of those in KY (U.S Department of Education IES, 2011).

It has been my professional experience, as a former MSD high school teacher, that a majority of students with MSD transition out of high school and find an inadequate amount of opportunities in the domains of employment and education. In KY, an alarming 67% of individuals with MSD are neither employed nor pursuing postsecondary educational experiences during the year after graduating/exiting high school (KYPSO “2016 Annual Report”, 2016). JCPS has greater success as 46% of students with MSD continue to live without a job nor educational opportunities in postsecondary environments just one year out of high school (KYPSO “2016 Annual Report”, 2016). Data in this area depict a very real situation where the perception can be that the adult lives of individuals with MSD lack meaning and fulfillment.

Data based on employment and postsecondary education showed that many individuals with MSD lack engagement (KYPSO “2016 Annual Report”, 2016). As a result, many of these individuals continue to rely on the support of their families and, more specifically, parents. While 77% of persons with disabilities in KY reside with their families one year after leaving high school, in JCPS this rate is higher at 86% (KYPSO “2016 Annual Report”, 2016). It has been my experience that parents of students with MSD, while advocating for their students throughout K-12 experiences, increased their efforts in this role as students reached transition-age. I assert that parents

realized their student will no longer be supported by the local education agency (LEA) and seek meaningful and appropriate transition experiences. Data from KYOYO (2016) data further supports this notion by illustrating the significant role parents provide, as residence providers, for individuals with disabilities during adulthood.

### **Leadership Roles and Responsibilities**

Specialists in JCPS's ECE department serve as district-level administrators for areas of expertise. My role as Extended School Year (ESY) and Transition Specialist is to coordinate district wide initiatives, related to those areas, with schools serving students in grades k-12 (and grade 14). More specifically, my transition responsibilities include coordinating services to ensure a successful transition for students with disabilities after high school. Each ECE student in JCPS, starting at age 16, has postsecondary goals in the area of education or training, employment and, if appropriate, independent living. My responsibility is to build capacity in schools to implement transition services needed for the student to be successful in meeting those goals. Central to this role is my focus on sharing of information packaged in a way to be utilized in schools throughout the district. Currently I do this through the development of a SharePoint web page containing a resource library and calendar of transition related events. I also provide districtwide trainings and present in ECE Department Chair meetings each month. I provide consultative support to schools and attend Admission and Release Committee (ARC) meetings throughout the district. In these meetings, I provide input to ensure our district is compliance to IDEA guidelines related to transition. I also make recommendations to the ARCs regarding students' participation in JCPS' Transition Programs. ARCs are

responsible for making all decisions about the identification, evaluation, placement, and provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for a child or youth.

Ensuring JCPS compliance with federal special education regulations, as identified in IDEA 2004, is another one of my main responsibilities. To ensure compliance, transition checklists are completed by school-based professionals to document that each component of Indicator 13, the federal OSEP indicator monitoring state compliance with transition components of the IEP, has been met for students receiving special education services. The transition checklist is a tool for monitoring the successful development of IEPs to include transition components. It is my responsibility to ensure that checklists throughout the district are accurate, completed correctly, and data is turned into KDE during the district's annual record review. I provide technical assistance to the district for IEP development and coordinate, design, and lead professional development for IEP transition components.

Supporting JCPS in completing the KYOYO survey is central to my work on assessing the effectiveness of JCPS transition efforts. A product of KY Post School Outcomes (KYPSO) organization, each school implements the YOYO survey. It is my responsibility to train an educator or counselor from each of JCPS' secondary schools to conduct the survey and report data to KYPSO.

Kentucky uses a cooperative structure to provide better collaboration and communication throughout the state for programming and educational services. Additionally, Kentucky cooperatives are a means of maximizing buying power for fiscal conservation (KDE "Kentucky Educational Cooperatives", 2015). All 173 Kentucky school districts and the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) and Kentucky School for

the Deaf participate in the cooperative system consisting of eleven cooperatives across the state. Jefferson County, because of the size of its district, is made-up of only JCPS and KSB. I serve as the Transition Specialist and communicate information garnered from statewide transition consultant meetings. Additionally, organized around the Special Education Cooperative structure, Kentucky has eleven Regional Interagency Transition Teams (RITTs) that provide a forum for information sharing and problem solving at the regional and/or local levels. It is my responsibility to lead the RITT for Jefferson County Education Cooperative.

### **Position as Insider in Context of Research**

At an early age my interactions and experiences with persons with MSD began through visits to my mother's public middle school self-contained classroom. Through those experiences I developed relationships with persons with disabilities and realized the importance of inclusion; as my peers at a different parochial school, the same school I attended, never experienced. As my passion and awareness were nourished through conversations with my mom about her students, I pursued and graduated from Western Kentucky University with a Bachelor Degree to teach students k-12 with learning and behavior disorders and MSD.

After successfully beginning my career in JCPS for teaching students with MSD I decided to develop my professional knowledge base around educating special populations. I pursued a master's degree in teaching students with MSD. I went on to teach in JCPS for six years in a MSD classroom. My former position, as a teacher of

students with MSD at Eastern High school, required that I develop and implement a student's IEP in collaboration with the multidisciplinary team.

While creating, implementing, and assessing student progress on the IEP best practice indicates that parents/guardians play an active role and communication be maintained with them by the teacher. It has been my experience that parents of students with MSD are often very engaged in their student's education. For that reason, I spent much of my time before, during, and after school communicating with parents about their child's progress. It was rare for one of my students' parents to not attend parent-teacher conference days. Parents of students with MSD are often the first and primary advocate for their student as the population often has barriers in the area of communication and advocacy.

In August of 2015, I began a role, which I presently maintain, within JCPS that is central to transition planning for students with MSD and all other disabilities. Serving as a special education administrator in the area of transition for the past few years has given me valuable perspective, power, and momentum to influence the transition experience of students with disabilities, and the families that support them, throughout JCPS. While operating with referent power as a special education teacher and transition case manager of students with disabilities served in my classroom, I now additionally possess legitimate and expert power to support teachers and students as they navigate through transition years of education.

## **Review of Supporting Literature**

A review of literature describes the scholarly and professional literature on students with MSD pursuing postsecondary education opportunities. Additionally, illustrated are the transition needs of students with MSD (and their families) and the role of a special education teacher to support transition. Discussed in this review is the perception of parents with children having MSD. Parents perceive their role in planning, communication, and implementation of transition services to be inadequate, yet studies show that parents are often the greatest support and advocacy role for this population. To identify the value and importance of building a capacity in parents, as advocates, their perception and knowledge of children with MSD is shown. Another important role group, special education teachers in secondary schools, is described in relevance to involvement within transition. The impact and role of special education teachers is discussed to provide evidence that building capacity in that professional group will result in desired improvement for students with MSD and the organizations that serve them.

Leadership studies are examined to provide a framework and competencies for which action was garnered. Using a variety of leadership lenses, attributes are identified to support a need for organizational improvement, as it relates to coordination between the LEA and higher education environments. Additionally, leadership competencies are illustrated to support the claim that leadership is demonstrated through individuals of varying roles and positions. Discussed in this review is the importance of collaboration between educators and families. As a mechanism for capacity building and

organizational improvement professional learning in the form of communities of practice (CoPs) are described.

### **Inclusion for Persons with Moderate to Severe Disabilities in Higher Education**

Prior to inclusive efforts in educational environments, students with MSD often left school to obtain roles in non-competitive employment, independent living services, or adult day programs (Neubert, Moon, & Grigal, 2002). However, inclusive practices have led to a greater quality of life for individuals with MSD. Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Browder, and Spooner (2005) illustrates the expansive impact of inclusive practices, conveying a phenomenon of higher expectations for students with MSD coupled with increased awareness of effective instructional strategies (Flowers et al. , 2005).

Since 1995, the Council for Exceptional Children has advocated for students with MSD to graduate from secondary schools, alongside typical peers, to seek further opportunities in colleges and/or technical schools (Neubert et al., 2002). The Council for Exceptional Children supported the idea that, persons with disabilities have greater post-school outcomes in the area of employment and independent living when included in secondary and post-secondary learning environments (Bouck, 2012). In describing participation in college Grigal (2012) states, “college provides opportunities to learn skills such as problem solving, communication, discipline, and persistence that are critical to future employment and being a valued member of one’s community” (p.223). As Jones and Goble (2012) asserts, opportunities within the realm of higher education can positively influence the lives of included populations.

The Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA) of 2008 provided new hope and resources for students with MSD seeking enrollment in higher education programs. Section 709 of Title VII Part D provides students with intellectual disability increasing opportunities for quality higher education. More specifically, legislation describes the population of students to benefit from this enactment as, “ a student (1) with mental retardation or a cognitive impairment, characterized by significant limitations in intellectual and cognitive functioning, and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills; and (2) who is currently, or was formerly, eligible for a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (HEOA, 2015, p. 164).

HEOA sought to identify effective transition practices, design and implement a modified curriculum; while building capacity in faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education to support students with MSD seeking inclusion. Important to this study, deficits in the areas of retention, transition, recruitment, and completion processes were to be addressed through technical assistance afforded by HEOA legislation. (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2015). Furthermore, ThinkCollege (2014), an organization devoted to improving access for persons with intellectual disability or MSD, describes the Transition Postsecondary Education Program for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) model. This model, funded by HOEA, provided institutes of higher education (IHEs) with grants for five years. The purpose of the five-year grant was to promote positive outcomes for persons with MSD through the development of programming for

students with MSD in higher education (Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, Sulewski, Weir, 2015).

The result of advocacy on behalf of students with MSD, HEOA successfully diminished systemic obstacles preventing access to higher education. These obstacles were described by VanBergeijk and Cavanagh (2012) as, “a lack of college-based supports for students with intellectual disability, limited funding for ‘non-traditional college participation (part-time, audit, continuing education)’ and limits in Federal funding” (VanBergeiki, 2012, p. 2471).

Along with inclusion, equality and accessibility were sought for persons with MSD utilizing a diverse set of programming options, strategies, and supports (Jones & Goble, 2012). Unfortunately, stereotypes and negative perceptions limited access for students with disabilities to postsecondary environments (Naugle, Campbell, & Gray, 2010). The Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 sought to prevent discrimination of persons with MSD in postsecondary settings (Naugle et al., 2010).

Postsecondary education can provide persons with MSD better outcomes in adulthood. Migliore, Butterworth, and Hart (2009) examined the relationship of participation in higher education to employment for students with MSD. Individuals who participated in higher education and entered employment with the support of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) were nearly two times more likely to obtain paid employment than their counterparts who did not receive postsecondary education before entering employment. Similarly, the average weekly earnings of persons with MSD who

did not receive postsecondary education were \$195, where those who had participated in higher education earned \$316 weekly (Migliore, Butterworth, Hart 2009). Overall, students with MSD having participated in four years of higher education obtained employment at a rate of 75%. While 20% of students obtained a degree or certificate, 59% earned some sort of credential supporting the obtainment of employment (TPSID Annual Reports, 2014).

### **Parental Role and Perception in Transition for Students with MSD**

Parents of students with MSD play a critical role in student transition from secondary schools to adulthood, especially in uncharted territory such as higher education. Jones et al. (2012) provided explicit examples of ways in which parental capacity is used for supporting students in higher education. For example, when identifying the need for communication with professors', parents advocated for students with MSD to provide the instructor with a summary page describing their learning preferences, personality, and even disability. Parents played an important role, as they utilized their unique perspective to advocate for practices to increase accountability and independence for the student (Jones & Goble, 2012). Insights garnered from parents have been essential to successful outcomes in higher education.

Parents of students with MSD often have holistic knowledge of their child garnered through life experiences in the area of health, social/emotional, communication, and academic areas. Jones and Goble (2012) asserted, due to a holistic perspective, parents sought activities and inclusion in social events with as much effort as they did for academics. Jones et al. states, "socializing is an integral part of the college experience

and an important feature of the mentoring relationship” (p.163). Additionally, spontaneity was identified as an indicator for parents seeking natural social integration for their children. Parents were supportive of unplanned social opportunities embedded in higher education environments, when facilitated by trusted mentors, as they saw great enjoyment from their children. (Jones & Goble, 2012)

Parents of students with MSD are becoming increasingly aware of the inclusive impact of k-12 education. Students with MSD increasingly seek inclusive opportunities similar to those provided in k-12 LEAs. Causton-Theoharis (2009) described this phenomenon stating, “Fueled by students who have goals to attend college, there is an increased expectation on the part of families to help these young adults continue to develop skills in inclusive postsecondary settings with same-age peers” (p.2). Unfortunately, the notion of parents as primary advocates and valued stakeholders in the adult lives of people with MSD is not being transferred to practice in the realm of transition to higher education (Davies & Beamish, 2009). Davies and Beamish described the lack of capacity stating:

Parents have consistently reported low levels of family participation in the transition process and poorly coordinated transition planning. Parents... have identified concerns related to high levels of unemployment, restricted levels of participation in community activities, and a prevalence of continued living with and dependence upon families. (p.249)

Outcomes for persons with MSD, across domains of transition, were better when parental involvement was elevated (Dyke, 2013). Unfortunately, nearly one third of parents

involved in transition reported being unsatisfied with their level of participation (Cameto et al., 2004).

In the United States, parents of students with MSD often have jurisdictional authority and decision making power related to their child's' education. This jurisdictional authority would include guardianship, power of attorney, or supported decision-making. Therefore, educational objectives often reflect both the parent and student values for both present and future programming. However, parents often rely upon professionals within the LEA to advise them on appropriate possibilities and opportunities that are available for their child. Therefore, special education teachers and LEA professionals have a significant impact on opportunities made available through transition services. Educators informed about inclusive higher education (IHE) have a positive impact on students obtaining inclusion in those settings. Furthermore, Grigal et al. implores future research to be representative of the increasingly high expectations for students with MSD; as current resources and practices are failing to navigate through the lack of interagency coordination, perceptions related to limitations of students with MSD, and institutional barriers in both LEAs and higher education organizations (Grigal & Hart, 2012).

When postsecondary environments were considered, Jones (2012) identifies a need for collaboration and capacity building in stakeholders including parents and professors. More specifically, in Jones study parents of students with MSD were valued in their partnership with mentor support. Mentors are typical peers supporting students with disabilities in the postsecondary classroom, much like peer tutors in secondary schools.

Postsecondary mentors are a strategy used by supported higher education programs to promote inclusion. (Jones & Goble, 2012).

Initially, for students with MSD, LEAs have been identified as the main source of referrals for postsecondary education. This is mainly plausible because of dual enrollment programs, that is, programs in which students continue to receive special education services via LEA while also enrolling in college and attending postsecondary courses. However, referrals from parents are beginning to rise as students with MSD are seeking enrollment in postsecondary education outside of programs based within their LEA (Grigal, Dwyre, Emmett, & Emmett, 2012). Students with MSD are at great disparity as an increasing percentage of this population seeks enrollment in LEA supported higher education programs with limited capacities (ThinkCollege, 2015).

### **Role of the Special Education Teacher in Transition**

Improvement in the area of transition services for persons with disabilities is identified at both state and federal levels. Central to the transition role of special education teachers is the implementation of assessments, services, and programming identified by federal and state indicators. More specifically, Grigal and Hart (2012) describe federally mandated data collection as identified in IDEA 1997 Indicator 13. Indicator 13, a state performance plan indicator, holds states accountable for in-school transition services upon a student turning 16 years old. Additionally, IDEA 1997 has included Indicator 14 to ensure state accountability for persons one year since exiting secondary school (Grigal & Hart, 2012). Special education teachers, as part of each

student's multidisciplinary team, play an essential role for student transition into postsecondary settings.

The result of IDEA 1997, transition is a key component to IEPs implemented in k-12 settings. Cameto (2004) describes the prevalence of transition services stating, "Almost 90% of secondary school students receiving special education services have transition planning under way on their behalf, with about two-thirds having begun the process by age 14 as required by IDEA '97. Furthermore, about three-fourths of students, regardless of age, have a course of study identified that is intended to help them achieve their transition goals" (p. 2). Special education teachers report participation in transition planning at rate of 97%. Best practice supports the participation of parents, students, special education teachers and, when appropriate, outside agencies in transition planning. (Cameto et al., 2004)

The role of special education teachers has traditionally been to provide the student with direct services as outlined in the IEP. Transition specialists/coordinators have been left with the task of facilitating the coordinated set of transition activities as mandated in IDEA 2004 (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). However, larger LEAs may entrust more coordination responsibilities on special education teachers to better support the transition needs of the student. Brought about by IDEA 1990 mandate for transition planning to be included in IEPs, the role of special education teachers has broadened to facilitate the services identified in the area of transition (Li et al., 2009). Furthermore, the knowledge base for special education teachers is inadequate for the needed extension of involvement in transition services (Li et al., 2009). Significant demands and a need for capacity in

interagency coordination have resulted in negative attitudes towards transition planning by special education teachers (Li et al., 2009).

The broadening of special educator's' role in transition has created a professional climate that places further emphasis on collaboration and coordination. Additionally, in alignment with IDEA 2004, Li (2009) encourages special education teachers to increase involvement related to implementation and analysis of transition assessments (Li et al., 2009). Interagency collaboration is yet another area identified as deficit in both practice and knowledge of special education teachers. Competencies to promote development in this area for educators is desired. Li (2009) describes the situation stating, "Although interagency collaboration has been identified as one of the important factors leading to positive post-school results, special education teachers were found to be less involved in such collaboration activities" (Li et al., 2009).

### **Educational Leadership and Professional Learning for Transition**

The transition from secondary to postsecondary schools can be difficult for students with disabilities. Postsecondary schools have a different set of laws governing participation of students with disabilities (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). More specifically, instructional practices and environments at the k-12 organization are often much different for students in postsecondary environments (Eckes and Ochoa, 2005). Practices in leadership can provide educational leaders solutions to changing environments. Understanding the nature of leadership allows leaders to apply a post-industrial view with a critical lens for examining the influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend meaningful change in alignment with shared purpose (Rost & Burns, 1993).

Furthermore, this notion supported future leadership action that garnered participation from a variety of stakeholders to engage in meaningful collaboration. Additionally, Rost and Burns (1993) assert that leadership must be multidirectional and engagement must include vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and circular relationships.

Developing meaningful relationships, building knowledge, and creating coherence between the LEA and postsecondary organizations are leadership competencies that can be enjoyed by both special education teachers, central office staff, and parents of students with MSD. In seeking capacity within the secondary school environment, Fullan (2001) encouraged development in teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as well as professional community, program coherence, technical resources, and principal leadership. Organizational obstacles within the LEAs and postsecondary schools exist to the detriment of transition services. Fullan encouraged leadership action as an obligation to, "remove barriers to sharing, create mechanisms for sharing, and reward those who do share. Leadership creates the conditions for individual and organizational development to merge" (2001, p.132).

In citing the limited collaboration between JCPS' central office transition specialist and special education teachers of students with MSD throughout the district, it is important to target ways to promote professional learning and capacity building in the future. Prior to beginning an examination of popular mechanisms for professional learning it can be valuable to view how organizations use information as related to change and growth. Choo (2006) described the phenomenon of a knowing organization and, more specifically, knowledge transfer. Choo's model describes how people or

groups used information. In this utilization of information, we learned of the following functions to develop identity and context, develop new knowledge, and make allocations for implementing action (Choo, 2016).

Understanding the varying perspectives of knowledge transfer, as described by Choo, it is important to observe the growing shift in supporting capacity building and organizational growth through communities. In this realm of professional learning two dominant mechanisms exist: (1) professional learning communities (PLCs) and (2) communities of practice (CoP). Voulalas and Sharpe (2005) describe the need for professionals to understand both frameworks and the similarities or differences between them. Dufour and Eaker (1998) posited the following that could be applied to both the PLC and CoP, “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as a ...community” (p.xi). Table 1.1 provides a summary of both frameworks.

Table 1.1

*Comparison of Professional Learning Community and Community of Practice*

Model	Membership	Leadership	Organizational Culture	Knowledge Sharing
Dufour & Eaker (PLCs)	Membership automatically applied through faculty status; educators divided into teams to work on school issues	Principal; distributive decision making; top-down information sharing; vision and values support decisions; focused on results	Shared mission, vision and values drive the work; collaboration is key; innovation, experimentation and a focus on results are vital aspects	Discussion is limited; team members collaborate, but how teams create new knowledge and share it with the whole organization is not discussed at length
Hord (PLCs)	Membership automatically applied through faculty status; flexible in size or enrollment	Principal; understood to provide conditions conducive to growth	Shared vision and values drive the work; collaboration is achieved through shared practice; cultural shift is paramount to becoming a PLC	Teachers participate in reflective dialogue; peer coaching and feedback are also ways knowledge is shared
Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (CoPs)	Volunteer to participate; membership through self-selection or identified through organization; based on knowledge or interest for a topic	Shared; leadership comes from both formal and informal leaders, both internal and external to the organization; community	Organization values innovation and knowledge sharing;	Occurs mainly within the community; however, exchange across and at community boundaries occurs when appropriate

*Note.* Adapted from *Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice: A Comparison of Models, Literature Review*, p. 4, by Blankenship & Ruona, 2007, University of Georgia

Importantly noted in Table 1.1 is that membership in CoPs encompasses a wider variety of professionals and is not exclusive to those situated within the school district. CoPs' voluntary and comprehensive structure is most conducive, when compared to the PLC, for promoting research and evidenced based transition practices. More specifically, CoPs will support interagency collaboration, an important component of transition planning (NTACT, 2016). The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition urged LEAs to promote interagency collaboration, provide instruction and training in natural environments, include individualized transition services in student learning plans, and provide training and resources to families to support involvement in transition planning; including linkages to adult agencies and informative support networks (NTACT, 2016).

Citing examples of leadership actions that support knowledge and program coherence, Eckes (2005) provided recommendations in the realm of interagency collaboration. Facilitating opportunities for college representatives to engage in conversation related to transition can have a positive impact on students and, thus, stakeholders. Developing a mechanism, such as a CoP, for transition services to be discussed with agencies external to the LEA would provide an opportunity for parents, special education teachers, and students with disabilities to establish meaningful relationships with advocates for inclusion in postsecondary settings (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). A CoP for promoting the inclusion of students with MSD in two-year and four-year colleges will increase the capacity of JCPS' stakeholders.

## **A Community of Practice to Support Capacity Building**

The purpose of implementing a community of practice in this study is to support special education teachers serving students of MSD and their families. More specifically, this community of practice will build capacity in special education teachers to facilitate transition of students with MSD to two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. In alignment with research-based practices on transition and the framework of communities of practice, the action in this study will seek to provide professionals and stakeholders, both internal and external to JCPS, with a mechanism to support and lead in an area of self-identified passion, interest, and need. In the next chapter, I will provide a description of the setting for this community of practice as it relates to the context of JCPS.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **ACTION & RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I describe students with MSD and how they are served in JCPS with an emphasis on the 18-21 age range. I describe the specific organizational context for this action research through a discussion of ECE department structure. Additionally, organizational context is described in relation to the JCPS vision, Vision 2020, as that context supports the implementation of a CoP to promote capacity building and professional learning. Furthermore, the plan for action is described in alignment with Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) framework for cultivating a CoP to include; planning, launching, growing, and sustaining the community. Action research participants and their roles in project development, implementation, data collection, and data analysis are described; including my role as participant-leader and researcher. Research questions are stated and described along with a description of the proposed research design, methods, and data sources to be utilized.

#### **Organizational Context**

##### **Students with MSD in JCPS**

Mentioned in the previous chapter, students with MSD are a population identified through the disability categories of Functional Mental Disability, where their IQ is 55 or below, or the presence of comorbid Multiple Disabilities that have a significant impact on academic performance and/or adaptive skills. Students in this population are also categorized as having low incidence or intellectual disability. According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2016), an intellectual

disability is one that negatively impacts both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, where adaptive behavior can include day-to-day skills in the domains of concept, social skills, and practical skills (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2016).

Intellectual disability is described as students with significant learning, cognitive, and other conditions (e.g., mental disability), whose disability impacts their ability to access course content without a strong system of educational supports and services. These are not students who would access the postsecondary education system in a typical manner; rather, they require significant planning and collaboration to provide them with access. This population typically (though not always) includes students who (a) take the alternative state assessment; (b) exit secondary education with an alternative diploma, such as IEP diploma or a certificate of attendance, instead of a typical high school diploma; and (c) qualify to receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) until they are 21.

JCPS typically serves students with MSD in separate classes with varying opportunities for inclusion. Additionally, a variety of supports are included in MSD classes but maintain a ratio of 10:1 student to teacher and a minimum of two paraprofessionals per classroom of 10 students.

### **Serving Students Ages 18-21 with MSD in JCPS**

Students with MSD between the ages of 18-21 are served in JCPS' 22 high schools and 7 special schools. In accordance with their IEPs, students with MSD are supported in the area of transition to promote positive post-school outcomes. JCPS serves 135 12th grade and 147 grade 14 (transition) students in the alternative diploma

program. There are 62 classrooms in JCPS serving 18-21-year-old students with MSD. These classrooms are identified as self-contained special classes. Students with MSD in JCPS spend less than 40% of their day in general education classes where they will earn an alternative diploma upon exiting the district.

The IEP, and postsecondary goals described within it, drive the education of students in the area of transition. Stated in the Kentucky Department of Education IEP Guidance Document, each students' IEP, for it to be in effect upon the student's' 16th birthday, describes post-secondary goals in the area of education/training, employment, and, if appropriate, independent living (KDE IEP Guidance Document, 2015). To support the attainment of post-secondary goals in education/training LEAs must provide students with transition assessment, coursework, specially designed instruction, and transition services to promote the likelihood of successfully meeting goal(s). For students with MSD identifying college or higher education as a post-secondary goal on their IEP, transition services could include: visits to college campus, information about the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), information and/or support on applying for college, and other services to be individually identified as appropriate (NTACT Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix, 2016).

### **Vision 2020**

The district's Vision 2020 is described in this section to reinforce the notion that a CoP is in alignment with JCPS' overarching strategic plan. Vision 2020 highlights three broad strategies to move the district forward towards the vision, "All Jefferson County Public Schools students graduate prepared, empowered, and inspired to reach their full potential and contribute as thoughtful, responsible citizens of our diverse, shared world"

(JCPS Vision 2020, 2016). The design and implementation of a CoP aligns in the following strategic areas:

1. Learning, Growth, and Development
2. Increasing Capacity and Improving Culture

Furthermore, the focus on increasing capacity identifies the need for cultivation of a growth mindset to support implementation of professional learning practices for building capacity of teachers, staff, and school leaders. Increasing family involvement is a leading indicator in this area. (JCPS Focus Areas, 2016). Additionally, a district goal within capacity building is professional learning. The need for professional learning and collaboration is illustrated in the goal's description, "Develop a culture of high-performing teams throughout the district that fosters collaboration, innovation, creativity, and continuous improvement. Such teams include Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as well as teams across all sectors of the district and school operations" (p.9).

## **A Plan for Action**

### **Overview**

A Transition CoP was designed and implemented to build capacity in special education teachers for facilitating the transition of students with MSD into two-year and four-year colleges. For special education teachers in JCPS to experience an increased capacity in this area of transition for students with MSD, I needed to provide them with a CoP as a professional learning mechanism to improve coordination with the central office specialist, as well as external stakeholders. To better realize the potential achievement of the CoP mission, I needed to bring awareness to the CoP of available supported higher

education opportunities and existing resources for students with MSD pursuing two-year and four-year colleges. So that a student-centered lens is maintained, feedback and communication with MSD students (and their families) seeking enrollment in a two-year and four-year college needed to occur; to better represent the population's preferences, interests, and concerns. Lastly, special education teachers needed the opportunity to learn best practices for transition, to include IEP development.

### **The Early Stages of Development**

#### **Stage 1: Planning**

Prior to implementing the CoP, approval was given by the JCPS Director of Special Education and the ECE Coordinator of Programs. While their role in this action is not direct, they serve as my supervisors and provide feedback or directives, as necessary, related to the CoP. Additionally, the Coordinator of Programs approved each session in PD Central allowing special education teachers attending a CoP event to receive two hours of professional development credit per event. Updates were shared with the assistant superintendent of programs throughout planning and implementation.

Emphasis on potential dates for events was placed on the community coordinators, as their attendance takes priority. The four events for this action research CoP were held from January through March. The following plan for action structure utilizes the Wenger et al (2002) framework. While the CoP framework identifies five stages, only three of those stages are represented due to the length of the study. The third and fourth stages of the maturation phase are not expected to occur until the following academic year 17-18 or later, outside of the life of this action research. This study focuses on the development stages of Planning, Coalescing, and the first maturation

stage: “Stage 3: Maturing” (Wenger et al 2002, p. 97). The overarching target for implementing the CoP was to build capacity in JCPS special education teachers, district resource teachers, parents of students with MSD, and community stakeholders; to support coordination throughout the transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with MSD.

The CoP framework was utilized to identify structural components for implementation as well as best practices. Wenger et al. (2002) provided a model for structure including domain, community, and practice. In developing a plan for the community, it was important to define the focus or target of the community. For the Transition CoP, the focus was to build capacity in special education teachers, families, and external stakeholders to facilitate transition of JCPS’ students with MSD in two-year and four-year colleges. Secondly, the CoP framework sought to define the domain and identify engaging issues. The JCPS Transition CoP focused on coordination, both within and external to JCPS, and the engaging issue was to provide a seamless transition to two-year and four-year colleges for the targeted population. The aforementioned ideas and messages were communicated at the first community event.

The CoP utilized community coordinators to support the mechanism throughout implementation. Community coordinators for the Transition CoP included myself, as Transition Program Specialist, an OVR counselor, and a ThinkCollege representative. Additionally, I served as the primary community coordinator as well as researcher. An advertisement email was sent to each special education teacher serving students with MSD in JCPS secondary schools. This process will identified approximately 62 teachers throughout 18 schools and programs, aside from exclusions described in the following

chapter. All recipients of the invitation were eligible to participate. A statement with instructions to confirm intent to participate were included within the email.

Community coordinators assume a critical role and it was important that they were both knowledgeable and passionate about the topic. The CoP framework identifies the following key functions of community coordinators: identified important functions specific to their domain, facilitate community engagement, connect community members, promote development in member knowledge base, and assess the health of the group. As the primary community coordinator, I met with each coordinator individually to informally assess and provide feedback related to their functioning in this role.

It should be noted that the community could have adapted and changed along multiple dimensions as it was developed (e.g. membership). Inevitably, since participation in the CoP was voluntary, schools or programs could have potentially fallen from participation. To best prevent failed membership and participation, maintaining energy and value were a priority for community coordinators. Additionally, as knowledge changed and engaging issues shifted, it was important for the community to be flexible and responsible. Incorporating engaging issues were embedded in events throughout implementation by allowing for some extra time to address them.

## **Stage 2: Coalescing**

The coalescing stage occurred when one or more community members was able to merge an understanding of current practice and its outcome to a vision of what could potentially be achieved. Wenger et al. (2002) asserted that the most crucial element of the coalescing stage was the generation of energy. Energy was essential in facilitating community events, building relationships, comfort, and empathy of interests and needs.

**Event 1.** The community met, via Zoom online technology, for the first time in January on a date identified through a Doodle Poll amongst participants. In this 2-hour meeting I briefly led conversation around the purpose of the community and provided each member with a 1-page handout overview of CoPs. A dominant message in this first meeting and stage was the value of sharing knowledge about the interest in higher education for students with MSD. Members participated in a coordinator led activity in which they shared their experiences in the area of inclusive higher education and interest in growth in professional knowledge base.

To balance the intent of relationship building and networking while adding value in the first event, the message of support to community members was communicated. More specifically, the members were asked to voluntarily communicate any upcoming parent-teacher conferences, school-based events, or student ARC meetings in which they would appreciate support and attendance (coordination) from central office staff. By promoting this support, allocation of resources, availability and coordination to teachers and the schools that they served; immediate value in the community was hopefully perceived. This action was intended to support participation for active membership. A log of all requests for attendance and support related to the CoP mission was utilized for data collection.

While the first half hour of this event was spent establishing a community charter (norms, mission, vision, goals, and agreements), sharing introductions, building relationships, trust, and evidence of future support and coordination; the second hour was able to provide additional value as content from ThinkCollege was presented by Barry Whaley. This community coordinator was chosen to lead the second half of the first

event because it sought to provide a lens of appreciative inquiry for existing higher education programs available for students with MSD. Additionally, ThinkCollege involvement in the CoP aligned with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT, 2013) evidence-based predictor of interagency collaboration. NTACT provided correlational evidence suggesting increased positive post-school outcomes when interagency collaboration occurred.

During this event ThinkCollege identified supported higher education programs within Kentucky and the surrounding region. The programs were described related to finance or tuition, support model, and student outcomes. The intent was for this event to end with CoP members possessing energy and knowledge about potential opportunities for their students in the future. Minutes at event were kept by transition resource teacher and saved for data collection purposes. A sign-in sheet was maintained to document attendance and identify special education teachers seeking professional development credit.

**Event 2.** Now that the community was ready to launch the second event, it continued to seek relationship building amongst members and community coordinators. An agenda was shared with previously established community norms represented at the top of the document. The agenda and norms were reviewed and an opportunity to revise norms was offered. The agenda was saved in a logbook for data collection purposes. Attendance was taken at each event. To reward and reinforce attendance and participation, anyone who attended the event was entered into a drawing for a gift card. The drawing occurred at the conclusion of each event.

Since the main activities in this stage focused on ideas, perspectives, and practices the first half hour was spent reflecting on norms and sharing aloud celebrations that existed throughout the group. It was the function and intent of celebrations to spike energy and momentum for the remainder of the event. Celebrations could have included any achievement or progress related to students with MSD exploring two-year and four-year higher education involvement (i.e. a teacher shared the ThinkCollege website with parents of students considering higher education). The second event met in JCPS' central office where light refreshments were offered and funded by the participant-researcher.

The next half hour provided members and coordinators a time for case study. Through collaboration with the ThinkCollege community coordinator, a case study was identified. The case was related to the subject of supported higher education for students with MSD and was from post- 2008 to reflect practices that are more recent since the HEOA. The purpose of case studies in the CoP were to provide an opportunity to see what successful transitions to higher education for students with MSD may look like. An emphasis was placed on the student's' postsecondary goal(s), helpful resources, and outcomes through the Case Study Activity Documentation Form (see appendix D). This promoted opportunities for the community to discuss resources and coordination practices that would have been appropriate in the case(s). Although indirectly, the case study activity aligned with NTACTION (2013) evidence-based predictor of student support. As a predictor, student support demonstrated correlational evidence in the post-school areas of education, employment, and independent living (NTACTION, 2013).

For the second hour, potential services to be provided by The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) were discussed and led by a community coordinator, an OVR counselor. Previously noted, interagency collaboration is an evidence-based predictor for post-school outcomes in the area of education (NTACT, 2013). OVR, as stated on their website, “assists Kentuckians with disabilities to achieve suitable employment and independence” (kcc.ky.gov, 2016). Specifically, relevant to the CoP, OVR often provides financial assistance and numerous other services to persons with disabilities on higher education campuses when the persons’ goal is to obtain employment as the result of obtained education. The OVR counselor provided information about the OVR referral process, services provided as related to higher education, and first-hand experiences supporting students with disabilities in accessing higher education. Minutes from the event were recorded along with attendance for data collection purposes.

### **Stage 3: Maturing**

While in the maturing phase it was important to observe the phenomena of changing membership, focus, relationship of the group to JCPS, energy, and challenges (Wenger et al., 2002). In this stage, the transition CoP continued to work to clarify its role and share expectations with new members. It was my hope that membership would grow as word-of-mouth communication shared the value of community practice.

It is in the Maturing Stage that events transformed from simply a sharing of ideas and tips to creating a comprehensive pool of capacity in members. In order to do this the CoP created a mechanism for organizing knowledge and identifying gaps in that knowledge. A Dropbox was created to store and organize information. Additionally, an

ECE clerk was utilized as a Community Librarian to support the development and organization of the pool of knowledge. Community coordinators were vital in this stage as frustration arose or could have arisen with changes and developments. The community no longer sought to publicly address individual needs of its members but to refine and grow the domain in which the work was situated. It was in this stage that teams or work groups developed, as needed, to bridge gaps in knowledge on a specific occurrence within the domain.

If the community would have grown, although membership did not change, norms for membership would need to be refined and discussed. New members would have required sponsorship from a community coordinator. Sponsors would have been charged with communicating CoP norms and expectations as well as the focus of the group.

**Event 3.** Norms and expectations were reviewed for all members at the beginning of this two-hour event. An agenda was distributed. New members had the opportunity to provide a brief 2-minute synopsis explaining their interest in the domain and focus of the CoP, as they understood it. Returning members and community coordinators briefly stated their name and role in the community as well as their organization. Introductions and refreshments ended within 30-minutes of the start of the event.

The first hour of this event sought to provide an opportunity for members to hear from a parent of a student with MSD who attended a two-year and four-year college. However, a parent participant was not obtained. This component of the CoP sought to align with the evidence-based predictor of parent expectations/involvement. This predictor has correlational evidence for positive post-school outcomes for students with

disabilities in both education and employment (NTACT, 2013). During the event the parent would have provided members with information related to their child's inclusion in a higher education setting as well as a first-hand account of the supports, benefits, and outcomes (real or expected) of the child's experience in college.

In place of the parent of a student with MSD leading the conversation, a disability service coordinator was invited and participated in this event. The disability service coordinator described the role of that office on college and university campuses, while stating the supports to be expected on behalf of students with disabilities. Additionally, this community coordinator added to the body of conversation around the appropriateness of inclusive higher education for students with disabilities.

Although a parent was not obtained for speaking at the event, a student graduate from an inclusive higher education program did participate to share about his or her experiences. Prior to the day for speaking to the CoP the student was provided a set of questions generated by the CoP members, that (s)he was able to structure the session around. This document was developed through Google Docs and saved for data collection purposes.

The remaining 30 minutes were used for community members to get together in small groups to talk about current transition efforts and collaborate on ideas to support students transitioning to two-year and four-year college. I identified a note taker in each small group. Each group's conversation were summarized and reported to me. Summaries were shared aloud at the end of the event.

A gift card drawing was completed at the end with the intent to reinforce attendance. All members who attended were eligible. An attendance sheet was collected

and teachers provided a professional development form to sign, in order to receive two hours of credit.

**Event 4.** The event began with routine introductions of new members and refreshments for the first 30 minutes. This allowed all of those who attended to arrive and get settled. An agenda was distributed and reviewed. Attendance was taken with a sign-in sheet, and used for data collection purposes. Two hours of professional development were awarded to special education teachers. Upon the conclusion of introductions, participants were handed resources (see Appendix C) to support development of the IEP for a student(s) wishing to participate in supported higher education after high school. I used the next hour of the event to provide a training on transition components of the IEP. Supporting documents were uploaded onto the Transition CoP Dropbox and saved for data collection. The training sought to build capacity in all CoP members as they assume their role in future ARC meetings. An increased ability to prescribe, identify, and advocate for appropriate transition assessments, services, and postsecondary goals were to be garnered through this session.

The remaining 30 minutes of this event were spent in small groups with each group facilitated by a community coordinator. This time was used for CoP members to practice developing transition components of an IEP that support a student with MSD whose postsecondary goal included supported higher education. Table 2.2 below provides a summary of action items and a statement of achievement target alignments.

Table 2.2

*Community of Practice Summary of Events*

<u>Event</u>	<u>Agenda Action Items</u>	<u>Achievement Target Summary</u>	<u>Special Educator Behavior Indicators</u>		
Event 1	1. CoP Norms Discussion	<i>CoP members will have increased capacity in the following achievement targets:</i>	<i>CoP members will demonstrate capacity through performance on the following indicators:</i>		
	2. CoP Member Intro.			A.1.1 Attend CoP event(s).	
	3. CoP Overview-Handout			A. Participating in a CoP as a mechanism for professional learning.	B.1.2 Communicate information learned in CoP event with non-members (i.e. regular education teachers, parents of students, special education teachers, counselors.)
	4. CoP Member Sharing Activity			B. Utilizing available supported higher education opportunities.	C.1.1 Visit the ThinkCollege website/database.
	5. Community Coordinator Intro.				D.1.2 Share information/knowledge of ThinkCollege resource with non-CoP members (i.e. regular education teachers, parents of students, special education teachers, and counselors.).
	6. ThinkCollege Presentation				
	7. Attendance Collected				
	8. Minutes Recorded				
Event 2	1. CoP Norms Review	<i>CoP members will have increased capacity in the following:</i>	<i>CoP members will demonstrate capacity through performance on the following indicators:</i>		
	2. New Member Introductions	A. Coordinate with OVR to support student transition to 2-4 year college or university.	A.2.1 Contact an OVR Counselor or office with intent to coordinate for student transition to 2-4 year college.		

Table 2.2 (continued)

Event 2	<p>3. MSD Higher Ed. Case Study Activity</p> <p>4. OVR Support Presentation</p> <p>5. Attendance Collected</p> <p>6. Minutes Recorded</p>	<p>B.2.2 Provide a student or guardian with an OVR referral.</p> <p>C.2.3 Share information about OVR with non-CoP member (school counselor, reg. ed. teacher, etc.).</p>
------------	---	---

Event 3	<p>1. CoP Norms Review</p> <p>2. New Member Introductions</p> <p>3. Disability Services Presentation</p> <p>4. Student-Led Discussion to promote empathy in educators and CoP members.</p> <p>4. Small Group Brainstorming and collab. session</p>	<p><i>CoP members will have increased capacity in the following:</i></p> <p>A. Understanding preferences, interests, and concerns of family supports and students with MSD related to the transition to 2-4 year colleges.</p>	<p><i>CoP members will demonstrate capacity through performance on the following indicators:</i></p> <p>A.3.1 Identify, through communication with parents/guardians/students with MSD; preferences, interests, and concerns about post-secondary education opportunities.</p>
------------	--	--	--

Table 2.2 (continued)

	1. Review of CoP Norms	<i>CoP members will have increased capacity in the following:</i>	CoP members will demonstrate capacity through performance on the following indicators:
	2. Introduction of New Members	A. Developing IEPs to support transition to 2-4 year colleges.	A.4.1 Discuss the transition process to post-secondary education at a 2-4 year college during an ARC meeting.
Event 4	3. Review of CoP Overview (Brief)	B. Instituting Best Practices for Transition and the IEP.	B.4.2 Include Transition Services in an IEP to support transition to 2-4 year colleges, where appropriate.
	4. Transition IEP Training		C.4.1 Support a student in leading an IEP meeting (student-directed IEP).
	5. Transition IEP Small Group Practice Work Session		

## Participants

### Central Office ECE Department

The JCPS ECE Department supports students with disabilities districtwide through both school-based and central office based resources. The department is led by the Director of Special Education (DOSE) and ECE central office administrators (Specialists) are supervised by two coordinators. Specialists in the department directly supervise district resource teachers and other staff based in central office. As the Transition Specialist, I directly supervise two resource teachers, 4 job coaches, and a clerk while providing indirect support across the district to schools serving ECE

transition-age students. ECE central office staff involved in the planning and supervision of the CoP included the Director of Special Education, Program Team Coordinator, a Resource Teacher, and myself as Transition Specialist. School-based professionals with either direct or indirect involvement included high school administration, high school ECE Department Chairs, high school ECE MSD teachers, and high school paraprofessionals. Specific roles were described within the plan of action.

### **CoP External Membership**

A CoP allowed and encouraged membership both internal and external to the primary organization. Due to the CoP's mission and vision external organizations, agencies, and role groups were invited to participate. Participating organizations and agencies included OVR, KYPSO, ThinkCollege Inc., and the Human Development Institute's SHEP Program.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) participated in the CoP because the agency "assists Kentuckians with disabilities to achieve suitable employment and independence" (kcc.ky.gov, 2016). Specifically, relevant to this study, OVR often provides financial assistance and numerous other services to persons with disabilities on higher education campuses when the persons' goal is to obtain employment as the result of obtained education.

The Kentucky Post School Outcomes (KyPSO) Office was chosen to participate because they provide information about former student outcomes at the post-secondary level. They conduct this work for the Office of Special Education Programs and the

Federal Department of Education. KyPSO reports data disaggregated by district and schools in the state of Kentucky.

ThinkCollege was represented within the CoP based on their work on promoting inclusive higher education for people with MSD. ThinkCollege provides coordination nationally for 27 federally funded inclusive higher education programs along with training and technical assistance. Additionally, the organization conducts research to support the shared initiative of two-year and four-year college experiences for students with MSD. ThinkCollege provides a great search tool for prospective students as they seek programs and colleges to pursue their education. Additionally, the CoP sought membership from a student with MSD, and/or their parent, whom enrolled in a higher education environment upon leaving JCPS.

### **CoP Coordinators**

While their role will be described deeper in upcoming reading, Wenger et al (2002) identified the following key practices of community coordinators:

- Identify important issues in their domain;
- Plan and facilitate community events. This is the most visible aspect of the coordinator role.
- Informally link community members, crossing boundaries between organizational units and brokering knowledge assets.
- Foster the development of community members;
- Manage the boundary between the community and the formal organization, such as teams and other organizational units;

- Help build the practice--including the knowledge base, lessons learned, best practices, tools and methods, and learning events;
- Assess the health of the community and evaluate its contribution to members and the organization (Wenger et al, 2002, p.80).

CoP Coordinators were a representative from ThinkCollege/KyPSO, and a representative with OVR. I will served as the lead community coordinator.

Barry Whaley worked at the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (HDI) where he served as project director for SHEP and KyPSO. Prior to his role at HDI Barry served as the Executive Director of Community Employment, Inc as well as working with OVR. Currently, Barry works as the director of the Kentucky Interagency Transition Committee through KyPSO as well as working through a grant funded by ThinkCollege. In addition to providing the CoP with the bulleted practices described above as a community coordinator, Barry was able to share expert knowledge about inclusive higher education around the nation and build capacity in members to utilize ThinkCollege as a resource for considering higher education. In his role as KyPSO representative Barry led the group in exploration and analysis of the most recent YOYO survey for KY and JCPS.

Sara Johnson worked for OVR as a counselor serving both transition-age students and adults with disabilities in the Louisville, KY area. Sara Johnson served on JCPS' Regional Interagency Transition Team (RITT) and coordinated with JCPS on several students directed initiatives in the past. Sara is an advocate for persons with disabilities and has provided support and services to students accessing higher education at local

colleges and universities. While providing the community with functions detailed in the bulleted coordinator list above, Sara spoke expertly about the services and role of OVR for students with MSD seeking inclusion in two-year and four-year colleges.

### **Role of Researcher**

While this action was studied and implemented in the fall and winter of JCPS' 2016-17 academic year, the CoP sought ongoing sustainability. My role as a participant was to (a) support professional learning through a CoP in both planning and implementation by communicating and coordinating with internal and external stakeholders, (b) provide leadership to the CoP in the role of lead community coordinator, and (c) conduct an analysis of data to assess the effectiveness of the CoP in promoting professional learning and capacity building to support special education teachers serving students with MSD in accessing two-year and four-year colleges.

The role of participant-leader was executed through my lead community coordinator responsibilities. Throughout stages of the CoP I reflected and lead as implications arose. I will provided necessary communication to central office ECE department and school-based professionals as needed. Additionally, as leader I worked to ensure that the CoP was implemented with fidelity as outlined in the plan for action through an application of the Wenger et al. (2002) framework.

While assuming the role of participant-researcher it was my responsibility to ensure that data collection occurred with assurances of reliability and validity. I was responsible for gathering documents and artifacts that were used for data collection. Furthermore, I was tasked with ensuring that protections and permissions be

obtained and maintained as identified by the institutional review board (IRB). As researcher, my role was to analyze data as related to the study.

### **Research Plan**

Action research, as described by Sagor (2011), is “a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the actor in improving or refining his or her actions” (p.1). In alignment with Sagor’s framework, in this action research study I sought to build capacity in special education teachers and stakeholders to facilitate transition to two-year and four- year colleges for students with MSD through a community of practice for professional learning. More specifically, the CoP sought to build capacity through knowledge sharing and the establishment of meaningful relationships to support the transition of students with MSD in two-year and four-year colleges. Upon implementation of recommended practices garnered through research on CoPs, I collected and analyzed a variety of data sources throughout the implementation stages of the action. Furthermore, the implementation of the CoP was evaluated and assessed to inform research question 1.

Instituting the Wenger et al. (2002) framework for professional learning, I sought to study the interactions, participation, and practices of a CoP comprised of a variety of stakeholders including JCPS special education teachers. Research literature promotes the use of CoPs for professional learning and practice to support cultivation including (a) designing the community for evolution, (b) opening a dialogue between inside and outside perspective, (c) inviting different levels of participation, (d) developing both public and private community spaces, (e) focusing on adding value, (f) combining

familiarity and excitement, and (g) creating a rhythm for the community (Wenger et. al, 2002).

### **Research Questions**

This study was characterized as mixed methods action research because both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. The strategy used throughout this action research was concurrent nested (Creswell, 2013). Priority was given to qualitative methods using a constructivist view but quantitative data was embedded to provide different levels of information informing research questions. To support the generation of information in this mixed methods study, Sagor's (2011) questions for action research were adapted. These questions included:

1. What did the community of practice actually do?
2. What changes occurred regarding the behaviors of special education teachers on identified achievement targets?
3. What were the teachers' perceptions of the relationship, if any, between the actions of the community of practice and noted changes in their professional behaviors? (Sagor, 2011, p. 88)

The research questions were identified and targeted to provide professional insight into the action within the realm of professional learning.

Research Question 1 focused on the CoP and data collected to support this question examined the planned implementation of the CoP and the manner to which it was actually implemented. This research question supported accurate conclusions and negated inappropriate or false assumptions, related to the CoP's impact on MSD teacher behaviors. To inform research question 1, I conducted an analysis of documents,

attendance data, event minutes, and observations. A triangulation of data informing question 1 supported support validity and reliability of the educational leaders conclusions.

Research Question 2 focused on change instituted by the CoP. Sagor (2011) encouraged the researcher to look for a variety of independent informational sources to support this question. Triangulation method was used to corroborate findings with validity and reliability. Research question 2 utilized survey data for 30-day intervals throughout implementation. Survey questions aligned to achievement targets. Additionally, CoP Participant Interviews occurred at the conclusion of implementation and data from interviews informed research question 2. A researcher's journal was used along with the aforementioned data sources to support validity and reliability.

Lastly, Research Question 3 sought to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables while identifying the presence of intervening and/or extraneous variables that might influence changes on performance variables (Sagor, 2011). To inform this research question survey data were compared and analyzed to identify the impact of the CoP. Attendance data were included in the triangulation to compare impact of attendance, or participation in the CoP, on achievement targets identified in survey data. Additionally, interview data identified extraneous variables that may have influenced change on performance variables.

### **Data Sources**

This action research study involved a triangulation of qualitative data and quantitative data through mixed methods. Research Question 1 was answered through data sources including documents (CoP agendas, emails, researcher's journal, solicitation

materials, instructional or resource materials), attendance data, and meeting minutes. Research Question 2 used survey data, CoP participant interviews, and researcher’s journal to support findings. Lastly, Research Question 3 was supported through data garnered from surveys, CoP attendance, and interviews.

Table 2.3  
*CoP Triangulation Matrix*

Research Question	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
What did the CoP actually do?	Documents: Agendas, emails, researcher’s journal, solicitation materials, instructional or resource materials	Attendance Data	Event Minutes  CoP Observation Instrument
What changes occurred regarding the behaviors of special education teachers on identified achievement targets?	Survey Data	CoP Participant interviews	Researcher’s journal
What were the teachers’ perceptions of the relationship, if any, between the actions of the community of practice and noted changes in their professional behaviors?	Survey Data	Attendance Data	CoP Participant interviews

Several data sources were utilized to inform multiple research questions and the triangulation process supported the validation of research findings (Craig, 2009; Patton, 1990; Sagor 2011). Qualitative data in this study included observations of CoP events,

transcriptions of participant interviews, CoP-generated artifacts (e.g., norms, meeting attendance and minutes, resource development, instructional materials), and a researcher's journal. Quantitative data were garnered through the implementation of a survey at baseline and again every 30 days throughout the life of the study.

**Document review.** Evidence of themes from observations, researcher's journal, and interviews were garnered from meeting agendas, norm statements, meeting minutes, surveys, and attendance records. It was communicated that the completion of surveys and participation in exit interviews was required as part of membership in the CoP. It was also communicated that those activities were used to assess, evaluate, and make adjustments to the CoP. Documents were utilized as evidence of CoP actions both within and outside of actual events and throughout stages of planning and implementation. The utilization of documents to support other data sources provided clarity, validity, and reliability to observations and interviews.

**Exit Interviews.** Interviews were used to identify movement or changes in achievement targets for CoP participants (see Appendix A). Semi-structured interview questions aligned with achievement targets and the CoP framework. Interview questions were open-ended and the dissertation committee, ECE Coordinator, and doctoral students from University of Kentucky had the opportunity to review questions. Upon review, future modifications were made to support clarification for researcher and/or participant.

Semi-structured participant (excluding community coordinators) interviews were conducted at the end of the study. Participants for these interviews were JCPS MSD teachers. The interviews were conducted between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. to not interfere with members during their non-working hours. Interviews sought to inform

research question(s) two and three. Interviews were transcribed on paper. The transcriptions were read back to the interviewee to ensure accuracy and garner approval. As a product of the structured interviews, an understanding of movement on priority achievement targets and the relationship, if any, of the CoP's action to performance on achievement targets sought to be gained.

**Surveys.** Surveys utilized a 7 point Likert scale. The benefit to this design was respondent familiarity to Likert format (Suskie, 1996). Surveys were distributed to all CoP MSD Teacher participants and used to measure growth on each achievement target. Survey questions aligned with Special Educator Behavior Indicators, and data from surveys were used to inform research questions 1 and 2. Surveys were not anonymous and identifiable by participant name and date of completion. Anonymity was not provided because survey data was analyzed and compared to attendance data and interviews to provide accurate information. Surveys were generated through Google Forms website and emailed to participants before their first event and monthly participation was a requirement for membership in the CoP. Surveys were distributed in the last week of each month throughout the study, except for March. The survey in March was distributed during the second week of the month due to an upcoming break in teacher work days. An examination of survey ratings was ongoing throughout implementation and during analysis. See Appendix B for CoP Survey.

**Observations.** Observations of CoP events supported the validity of surveys and interviews while directly informing research question 1. Observations were conducted by a community coordinator, and themes and patterns were coded. Observations were

recorded on the CoP Observation Instrument (see Appendix C) to ensure alignment with achievement targets and CoP framework.

**Researcher's Journal.** A researcher's journal was kept throughout the study and maintained through Google Docs. The researcher's journal served as a tool for compiling information throughout the implementation process. Sagor (2011) encouraged the researcher to be diligent in recording deviations from the theory-of-action, including a rationale for making those changes. If deviating from the plan-of-action, I recorded those actions with reasoning and shared with the dissertation committee. I also recorded any unexpected observations in the journal that may have impacted the study.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

An analysis of data was conducted and insights used to prepare a plan for future action related to the study. Sagor (2011) described the intent of analysis for action research stating:

1. Trace any and all changes in performance that occurred in the effort to reach your priority achievement targets.
2. Understand the pertinent factors or circumstances that contributed to those changes (p.127).

A data analysis was conducted to support the identification of themes and patterns to align with priority achievement targets. Datum garnered through surveys were examined for a distribution of frequency and sums. The analysis was comparative and ongoing. Categories and codes were used to organize data for the development of themes. Data results from interviews and documents were analyzed for evidence of CoP implementation. Data were compiled and organized by date, data collection method,

research question, and interview question. All documents and data collection artifacts were clearly labeled to support organization and identification.

### **Quality Assurances**

A variety of quality assurance measures were observed as part of this study. Checks were conducted by (a) dissertation committee members, (b) peer review, and (c) participant review. The dissertation committee and chair provided input related to data collection and analysis. I received support and feedback within JCPS from my direct supervisor, ECE Coordinator of Programs. Additional quality assurance was provided through the researcher's journal as it provided documentation of procedures and methods as well as a record of research. Sources of data collection were stored in a locked file cabinet at the JCPS' central office to maintain privacies and secure materials to prevent jeopardizing the study.

### **Conclusion**

It is with this study I sought to build capacity in JCPS' special education teachers to promote the inclusion of students with MSD in two-year and four-year colleges. Through the implementation of a community of practice, I hoped to enhance the perception of a CoP as a professional learning mechanism, provide special education teachers with a repertoire of supports and resources related to higher education for students with MSD, and support the establishment of meaningful relationships with stakeholders outside of JCPS.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Communities play an important role in learning. Developed through the field of psychology and situated within a social theory of learning, a CoP applies structure to the mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire of professionals (Barton & Trusting, 2005). This action research applied Wenger et al. (2002) framework to build capacity in special education teachers supporting MSD students seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

This chapter presents the results, recommendations, and reflections of the action research study. Results described seek to examine the CoP, any changes that occurred regarding special education teacher behaviors and the relationship between the CoP and changes in special education teacher performance related to knowledge sharing, professional learning, coordination with OVR, and practices in special education. Recommendations in this chapter inform future action related to a CoP in JCPS for special education teachers supporting students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges, as well as the challenge of leading a CoP in JCPS. More broadly, the implications of this CoP will be discussed related to organizational leadership and educational policy. In the concluding sections, I reflect on the CoP and action research process through the roles of participant-leader and participant-researcher.

## **Results**

### **Excellence with Equity through a CoP**

In alignment with JCPS' Vision 2020, the CoP to support teachers of students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges and universities promoted equity with excellence. By empowering MSD teachers to lead and learn, the CoP encouraged excellence. Targeting special education teachers serving students with MSD, the CoP promoted equity for a population that otherwise has limited success in transitioning to two-year and four-year colleges.

To support students with MSD in successfully transitioning to two-year and four-year colleges it was important to build capacity and influence the behaviors of MSD teachers. To envision this equity with excellence, the CoP sought to establish a mechanism for MSD teachers to engage in professional learning. Additionally, the CoP hoped to promote MSD teachers' use, through knowledge sharing, of available supported higher education opportunities for students through coordination with OVR, as appropriate. Furthermore, the CoP sought to improve the MSD teachers' understanding of student and family preferences, interests, and concerns related to the transition to two-year and four-year colleges and universities. Lastly, the CoP convened to improve MSD teachers' ability to develop IEPs supporting the student's transition to college, while promoting an awareness of best practices for transitioning students with MSD.

The CoP was examined through Sagor's (2011) action research questions and the results described what the CoP actually did, what changes occurred regarding the behaviors of special education teachers on aforementioned achievement targets, and CoP

participants' perceptions of the relationship between CoP participation and changes in their professional behaviors.

### **JCPS Data Management and IRB**

To conduct action research through the University of Kentucky (UKY), I applied for approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). UKY's IRB approved the expedited application for action research; however, that approval was contingent upon JCPS' consent. To obtain JCPS' consent to conduct action research in the district, I completed an online request through the JCPS Data Research Management System (DRMS). After receiving both IRB and DRMS approval, action research began in December, 2016.

### **Recruitment**

I shared the IRB approved recruitment letter and flyer within the ECE central office department prior to circulation districtwide to inform central office staff of the opportunity for a teachers professional learning. This internal communication was provided to support teacher inquiry and sharing of the professional learning opportunity. I advised central office staff to direct any inquiry received to me.

I submitted a request for, and obtained, the names of all sixty-two JCPS MSD high school teachers from an ECE clerk. Then, I collaborated with four central office resource teachers who provide direct support to MSD teachers throughout JCPS. We removed twelve teachers from the list who were retiring prior to the 2017-18 school year or taking a medical leave of absence. These teachers were removed due to the hope that

continued professional learning and CoP membership would continue into the following school year. Additionally, ten teachers were removed from the recruitment list due their known engagement in a career-ready accountability pilot project requiring a conflicting commitment. I emailed the recruitment letter to forty MSD teachers and received confirmation from ten who accepted the invitation to participate. Upon receiving acceptance, I mailed them an IRB consent form with return envelope and provided them with a Doodle Poll to identify CoP meeting dates that were most convenient. The poll was available for a 3-day timeline. Six teachers participated in the poll and identified four dates ranging from early January to mid-March of 2017. One participant dropped out, without returning a consent form, prior to participation with no further explanation upon inquiry. I received consent forms from nine of the ten previously confirmed participants. All nine MSD teachers fully participated in the action research CoP from start to finish.

### **MSD Teacher Participants**

The nine special education teacher participants were from different schools throughout JCPS. One of the teachers was from an optional school for students that, according to the school's website, "offers a creative, challenging, and diverse learning experience that considers students' specific social, emotional, and academic needs and stresses their active involvement in their own intellectual development" (JCPS Schools, 2016). Another special education teacher participant served students with MSD in a classroom at a residential treatment facility for girls. This residential and school environment, per the school website, "provides intensive treatment in residential settings

for girls with severe emotional trauma and destructive behaviors. Special education services are provided based on students' Individualized Education Plans." (JCPS Schools, 2016). The remaining seven teacher participants served students with MSD in comprehensive JCPS high schools.

### **A Community of Practice Realized**

An examination of what actually occurred versus the intended action is important for researchers to distinguish. Answering the question, "What did the CoP actually do?" allowed myself, as researcher, the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding future actions as well as provided a better understanding of the implications of the CoP. To answer this question a variety of data sources were analyzed using the triangulation strategy.

An analysis of data from attendance sheets and meeting minutes showed four CoP events were held from January through February. All nine MSD teachers attended each event, except for two that missed the first kick-off event due to inclement weather and the cancellation of school. The kick-off event was held online via Zoom technology and these two teachers did not communicate a rationale for missing the event, although it was assumed that cancellation of school and the change in the CoP's delivery format had an impact. The three subsequent events were held, as planned, at JCPS central office. At each event a gift card drawing was held and an MSD teacher awarded. One MSD teacher won the drawing for two separate events.

Through an analysis of meeting minutes, an approximate time allocation within the CoP events was identified. In total, an estimated 40% of the events were spent in

open-conversation style discussion. The majority of discussions related to supporting students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges and universities. Discussions not directly related to the aforementioned subject included the following topics: professional learning and development opportunities in JCPS, the presidential election, Special Olympics, and the potential vacating of MSD classrooms at one of JCPS' schools. Approximately 20% of the time of CoP events was spent discussing the CoP framework, community norms, and miscellaneous items (i.e. sign-in, gift card drawing). The remaining 40% of time allocation was spent in a presentation-style format.

Presentations were provided in separate events by various community coordinators. A document review and analysis of meeting minute data identified the community coordinator, or presenter, and topics discussed (see Table 3.4). Although not originally planned, a disability service coordinator (DSC) from a local college was invited to present at CoP Event 3. This action was the result of knowledge generated through the previous event, led by the OVR counselor. After learning of the important role in coordinating involvement between a DSC and the OVR counselor, membership changed to include the DSC at the request of the CoP. Additionally, Event 3 originally sought attendance from a student, and their parent(s), who graduated or was currently participating in SHEP. However, no individuals were available to attend after multiple attempts to contact via email and phone. Therefore, I reached out to ThinkCollege's national office via email and obtained a presenter. This young man was a graduate of Western Carolina's inclusive higher education program. He participated online through

Skype and shared information about his experiences, to including, strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and interests, as related to his experiences in a two-year college program.

Table 3.4 Community Coordinator Presentation Event Summary

Event	Community Coordinator (Presenter)	Topic
1	ThinkCollege/SHEP Representative	Higher Education Programs in Kentucky, U.S.
2	OVR Counselor	OVR Role for students pursuing post-secondary education
3	Disability Service Coordinator-EKU Student Graduate from IHE	Role of Disability Services Office Preferences, Interests, Strengths, and Needs of students with MSD seeking transition to two-year and four-year colleges.
4	JCPS Transition Specialist	IEP Development Strategies supporting Transition

It was, in part, through my role as participant-leader and participant researcher that the CoP to support teachers serving students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges was realized. Through an analysis of documents, including the researcher’s journal and emails, an examination of my actions were depicted. Communication remained a theme throughout the findings of this action research CoP. My communication, on behalf of the CoP, could be categorized into the following groups: outside of CoP events, during CoP events, internal to JCPS, and external to JCPS. Most verbal communication occurred during CoP events and internally in JCPS. However, communication through email was most frequent. Table 3.5 depicts the frequency of my emails, on behalf of the CoP, throughout the action research study. In

total, ninety-seven emails were sent both internally and externally to support my role as participant leader and participant-researcher.

Table 3.5 Participant-Leader/Researcher Email Frequency

October	November	December	January	February	March
2	5	38	21	13	18

Time outside of communicating on behalf of the CoP was spent in a variety of ways, to include, purchasing gift cards and snacks for each event, writing in the researcher’s journal weekly, and reading about the CoP framework. Prior to each event I spent approximately eight hours organizing materials and preparing for the event. Additionally, each week I spent approximately four hours organizing data.

### **Mechanism for Change**

To focus on the change or growth of achievement targets identified in action research, Sagor (2011) identified a need for an analysis of the action’s impact. This action research examined the changes in MSD teacher behavior throughout the implementation of the CoP. To support the examination of research questions, I administered the CoP survey (appendix B) at baseline and every 30 days thereafter, throughout the course of the CoP action research. The survey had a participation rate of 100% with nine MSD teachers participating in all four surveys.

Additionally, it was important that leaders in education were able to understand the impact of actions within their organization to support next steps in moving towards a shared vision (Clampitt & DeKoch, 2011). Accurately identifying the relationship between the activities of the CoP and the capacity of special education teachers to

perform behaviors supporting MSD student transition to two-year and four-year colleges was essential to this leadership practice. Furthermore, through an examination of the relationship between the activities of the CoP and noted changes in teacher behavior, Sagor (2011) called for leaders to identify any factors, outside of the CoP, that may have influenced the performance indicators of MSD teachers in JCPS participating in the CoP. To support answering questions about the perceived relationship of the CoP to changes in MSD teacher capacity as measured through performance behaviors, an exit interview (see Appendix A) was conducted with each MSD CoP teacher following the last CoP event.

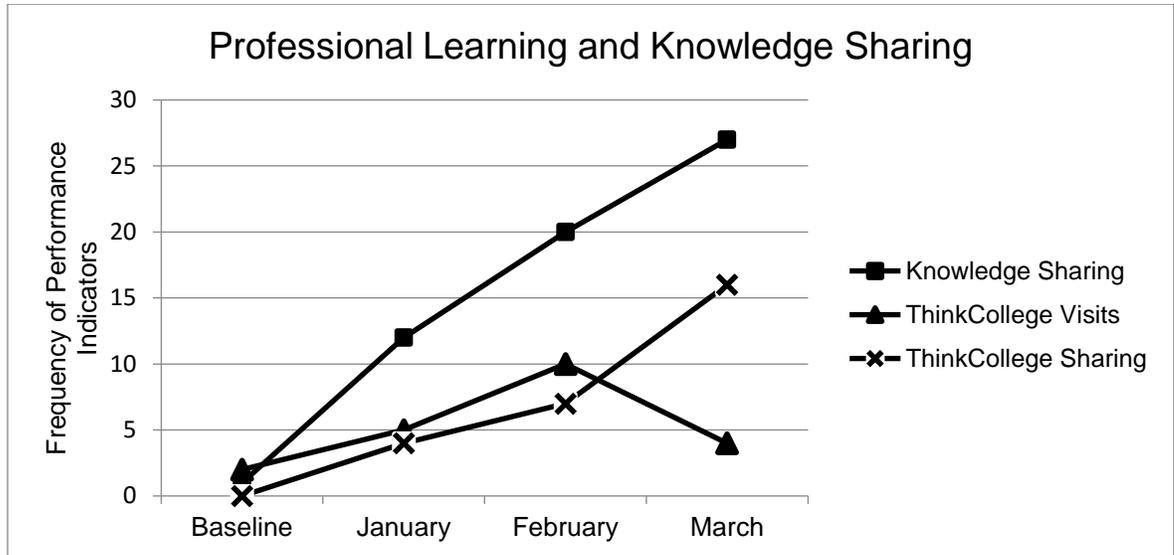
Through the triangulation and analysis of data, the following sections describe the changes that occurred regarding performance of special education teachers on behavior indicators (see appendix B) and teachers' perceptions of the relationship of the activities of the CoP to those changes in teacher behavior. Additionally, the triangulation of data garnered from the CoP Survey and MSD teacher exit interviews provides a lens for examining the presence of extraneous variables influencing changes in teacher behavior.

### **Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing**

Based on an analysis of data garnered through the CoP monthly survey, the behaviors of MSD teachers related to knowledge sharing and professional learning changed. MSD teachers self-reported an increase in knowledge sharing related to the transition to two-year and four-year colleges for students with MSD with JCPS special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, counselors, or other related service staff (see Figure 3.1, "Knowledge Sharing"). Additionally, teachers reported knowledge sharing specific to ThinkCollege increased throughout the CoP (see Figure

3.1 “ThinkCollege Sharing). Figure 3.1 identifies the frequency of visits to the ThinkCollege resource. MSD CoP teachers reported their direct use of this resource as spiking in February (see Figure 3.1, “ThinkCollege Visits”).

**Figure 3.1**



An analysis of exit interview data further supports the assertion that the CoP supported growth in professional learning and knowledge sharing. MSD teachers reported they valued participation in the CoP and appreciated the professionalism facilitated through the mechanism. More specifically, MSD teachers described their past professional learning in JCPS as having limited interaction/engagement with central office staff, outside of the CoP. However, teachers communicated that transportation and time outside of the school day were recurring barriers. Teachers also reported the desire for receiving stipend for CoP hours in the future once their credit requirement is satisfied.

MSD teachers described the knowledge sharing related to the transition of students with MSD to two-year and four-year colleges. Mainly citing communication

with fellow MSD teachers in the school building where they work, some described conversations with principals, building administrators, and related service professionals. One MSD CoP teacher reported communication occurring outside of JCPS stating,

I had the opportunity to talk to a parent and a teacher at Crittenden County High School about post -secondary opportunities for MSD students. One of my best friends from college is an English teacher there and had a friend with a daughter (IQ58) who was about to graduate and wanting to know what more was available for post-secondary opportunities. They were excited to learn about inclusive higher education opportunities!

Teachers reported this vertical and horizontal communication to be the result of the CoP. Additionally, two teachers reported sharing their knowledge of ThinkCollege with friends who have children with disabilities. Teachers identified ThinkCollege as a valuable resource for supporting MSD student's transition to two-year and four-year colleges and communicated the involvement of the student graduate in the CoP (event 4) as affecting this notion. Teachers described knowledge sharing with parents as having primarily occurred during the parent-teacher conference day and not directly as a result of the CoP.

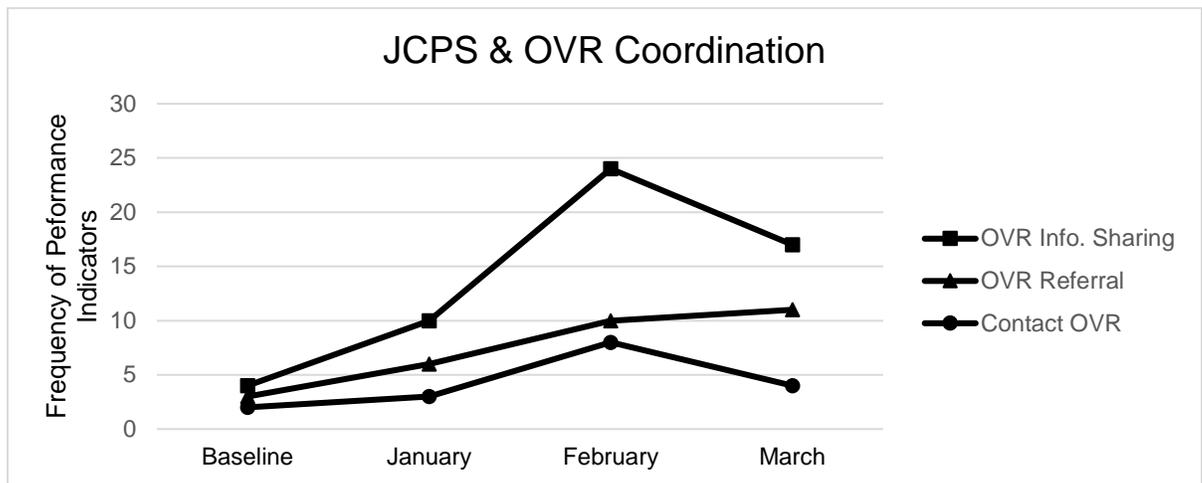
### **CoP for Coordination**

Interagency coordination and communication are important competencies for leaders and educators working to promote successful post-secondary transitions (NTACT, 2016). Fortunately, MSD teachers shared information about OVR with school counselors, regular education teachers, and related service providers to coordinate, on behalf of students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges, at a

positive trend over the course of the CoP (see Figure 3.2, “OVR Info. Sharing”). In fact, at baseline less than five instances of info sharing to support MSD students transitioning to college were exhibited. However, thirty-four OVR information sharing behaviors were exhibited from Event 1 through Event 4.

Additionally, MSD teachers participating in the CoP steadily increased in behavior frequency for providing a referral document to parents and/or guardians, in hope that it would support the likelihood of their MSD student transitioning to a two-year and four-year college (see Figure 3.2, “OVR Referral”). However, little change in behavior occurred for MSD CoP teachers directly contacting OVR counselors to support a student transition to two-year and four-year college occurred throughout the CoP (see Figure 3.2, “Contact OVR”).

**Figure 3.2**



An analysis of interview data further examined the degree of coordination with OVR, to promote MSD student transition to two-year and four-year colleges, supported through the CoP. While one teacher described a previous conversation with an OVR

counselor to support the transition to college, several teachers described their limited knowledge, prior to participation in the CoP, of OVR supports available. More specifically, most reported that they only recently learned, through discussion with the OVR counselor during the CoP event, that OVR could support persons with disabilities desiring a transition to higher education. Teachers identified tuition assistance and post-secondary counseling as important supports from OVR. The CoP and ARC meetings were solely identified as venues for communicating with OVR representatives. OVR's participation in the CoP attributed to better coordination with JCPS. During the CoP event, an updated list of OVR counselors serving JCPS was shared. This activity supported teachers' ability to coordinate on behalf of students seeking the transition. Teachers report that the CoP prompted communication with OVR.

### **CoP for Communicating with Parents**

Along with the aforementioned targets, the CoP sought to build capacity in MSD teachers to support an understanding of preferences, interests, and concerns of parents of students with MSD related to transitioning into a two-year and four-year college. This action research study identified communication with parents of students with MSD as a mechanism for capacity building in this area. An analysis of survey data aligned to monitor the frequency of communication with parents, or guardians, of students with MSD showed that the behavior of special education teachers changed and there was an increase in the frequency of which teachers communicated with parents/guardians related to a transition to two-year and four-year colleges (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.6** Communication with Parents/Guardians: Frequency of Behavior

	Baseline	January	February	March
Parent/Guardian Contact	1	4	11	4

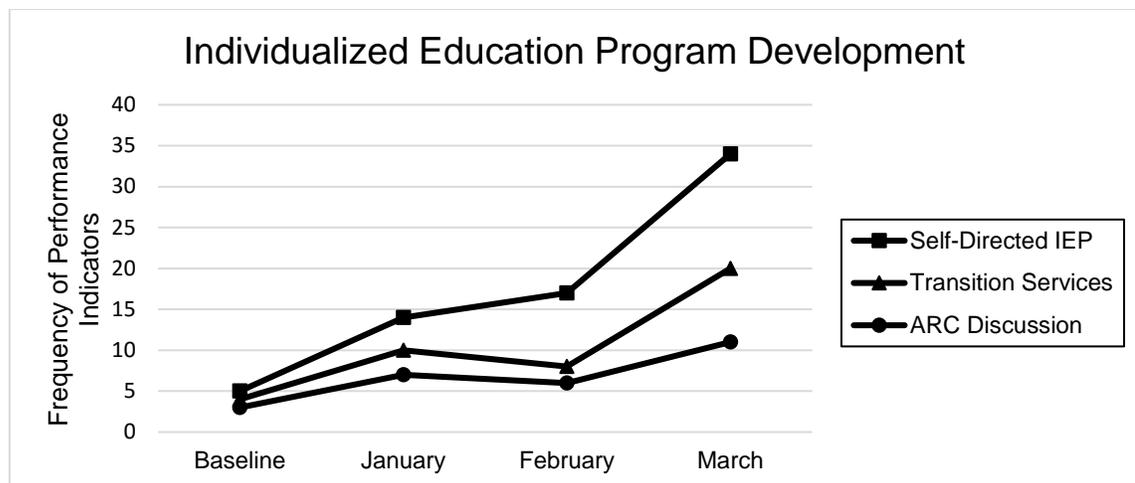
Communication with parents was identified as an indicator to promote empathy and understanding as a capacity of teachers supporting MSD students seeking a transition to college. An analysis of interview data identified communication with parents regarding transition goals and needs as limited. Themes identified day-to-day feedback with parents only reflective of more immediate needs and concerns. Additionally, most communication was identified as related to student behavior. Teachers reported that transition was primarily discussed on parent-teacher conference night, which occurred in February during this action research, and during ARC meetings where transition components were embedded in IEPs and individual learning plans (see Table 3.2). As one MSD CoP teacher stated, “We usually only communicate through notes in the students agenda. Most of our communication is about how the day went.” In relation to ARC meeting conversation, when transition goals were discussed explicitly, a focus on employment was the reoccurring theme.

### **CoP for Capacity in Individualized Education Program Development**

In alignment with this study’s theory-of-action, the CoP sought to build capacity in teachers to promote the development of IEPs supporting MSD student transition to two-year and four-year colleges. Based on an analysis of special education teacher behavior frequency, teacher behaviors related to IEP development increased. More specifically, CoP MSD teachers dramatically increased in the frequency of supporting

students in leading self-directed IEP meetings. At baseline, only five MSD teachers reported utilizing this strategy in the previous 30-day interval. However, in the 30 days prior to the last CoP event, MSD teachers reported an increase in behavior frequency, with 32 total occurrences, throughout the course of the CoP (see Figure 3.3, “Self-Directed IEP”). Furthermore, MSD CoP teachers reported a slight increase in the frequency of ARC discussions related to transition to two-year and four-year colleges (see Figure 3.3, “ARC Discussion”). Lastly, teachers reported developing IEPs to include transition services, supporting MSD student transition to two-year and four-year college, at an increased frequency throughout the duration of the CoP (see Figure 3.3, “Transition Services”).

**Figure 3.3**



*Note.* Transition Services frequency illustrates the frequency of which IEPs were developed including services supporting student transition to two-year and four-year college.

An analysis of exit interviews identified themes that supported the notion of utilizing a CoP as a mechanism for professional learning in special education practices related to the IEP and IEP development. Teachers reported and described ARC meetings

where transition to two-year and four-year colleges was discussed. More specifically, themes were identified related to students' individual graduation plans or learning plans. These plans often included goals related to the pursuit of higher education, yet few services or strategies were included in the plan to promote that outcome. However, teachers discussed the CoP as contributing to a greater discussion of objectives and services supporting post-secondary goals in the area of higher education. Social media is identified as a theme due to parent exposure and that exposure resulting in an ARC discussion on potential outcomes for their student(s). Stories of transition to higher education for students with MSD were observed on Twitter and Facebook. Murray State was mentioned as a local story depicting the transition of an individual with MSD into college.

Limited knowledge of transition services to support MSD student transition to college remained a theme, although the CoP was identified as supporting some knowledge in the area. Linkages to disability service offices and OVR emerged as services to be provided. The CoP supported teachers in leading self-directed IEP meetings. Mainly the CoP event on this strategy served as a reminder to teachers. The theme of college curriculum was present as teachers reported self-directed IEP as a strategy learned in education coursework. Furthermore, teachers identified a professional learning conference as a theme and extraneous variable, contributing to knowledge base on self-directed strategies.

## **Recommendations**

In the following section, recommendations are made, based on the results of the study, to promote continued leadership of a CoP supporting special education teachers in JCPS serving students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges. Additionally, based on the results of this action research CoP, implications of findings are discussed in relevance to practice, policy, and research. More specifically, recommendations are made to support future professional learning and knowledge sharing, the application of organizational leadership to promote positive post-school outcomes for students with MSD through coordination with external organizations, and practices related to leadership in special education.

### **Continuing a Community of Practice**

Communities of Practice are nourished through the desire, pledge, and connectedness of its members to the focus of the group (Wenger et al., 2002). Based on data garnered through exit interviews and the perceived change in MSD teacher behavior related to knowledge sharing, coordination, and professional learning garnered through JCPS' CoP, the CoP model should continue into the 2017-18 school year. More specifically, due to perceived results demonstrating that MSD teachers valued CoP participation, shared knowledge related to ThinkCollege and resources supporting students with MSD seeking transition to two-year and four-year colleges, and better coordinated with OVR; sustained leadership of the CoP is recommended. Wenger et al. (2002) stated that CoPs will evolve and end organically dependent upon the relevance of the topic and the community's commitment to shared learning. Based on results examined through the action research design and Wenger et al.'s (2002) CoP framework,

the JCPS' CoP in this study has progressed through the stages of planning, coalescing, and maturing. More specifically, the CoP has demonstrated value and focus as identified by MSD CoP teachers. In the future, stages of stewardship and transformation will likely be evident for the CoP (Wenger et al., 2002). In other words, ownership and openness of the CoP will likely become embraced by a greater number of stakeholders within JCPS. Then, upon the transformation stage, the CoP will either be extinguished or further embraced.

Based on the results of the CoP and Wenger et al.'s (2002) recommendations related to future actions for advancing CoPs through the stewardship stage, future recommendations are identified for continuing a CoP. It will be important for educational leaders seeking to provide future action to maintain relevance for the MSD teacher participants. Additionally, finding a voice for the CoP in JCPS as the organization and keeping the CoP engaging are essential to continued leadership practice. To engage present and future MSD teachers within a CoP, staying on the cutting edge of topics related to a transition for students with MSD to two-year and four-year colleges or universities is important (Wenger et al., 2002). When the CoP transitions into the stewardship stage, leaders should recruit new members. Based on results supporting the assertion that most knowledge sharing occurred within the immediate school community for each MSD teacher participant, an MSD teacher from each high school in JCPS would be ideal for districtwide influence. Furthermore, CoP membership from MSD middle school teachers in JCPS is imperative, as career and plans related to postsecondary education are often made long before high school graduation. In fact, many students

identify the career path they will pursue in postsecondary environments while in middle school with most decisions being made between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Gibbons & Border, 2010).

As Burke (2011) asserted, acting as a leader with the end or vision in mind is essential to achieving change. The final stage in Wenger's (2002) framework for CoP, the stage of transformation requires leadership to understand that the dissolve or transfer of focus for a community is just as important as its conception. For instance, the phenomenon that resulted in the creation of the CoP may become resolved or improved, thus the focus from a CoP is not required nor engaging. Another ideological example of a CoP's demise would be the expertise and practices of its members becomes commonplace within the organization, making the CoP unneeded. In JCPS, if MSD teachers develop a capacity to support students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges, through consistent demonstration of knowledge sharing, coordination, communication with parents of MSD, and best practices in special education, then the CoP would no longer be needed and could potentially transform.

### **Future Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing**

At the foundation of the CoP to support teachers serving students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges, is the ability of the CoP to build capacity through professional learning and knowledge sharing. Fullan (2008) asserts that groups prevailed when they continued to develop knowledge and skills through the engagement of professionals in purposeful interaction. However, although the results of the CoP demonstrated as a viable mechanism for knowledge sharing, these results were

stifled by the deficit in opportunities to share knowledge specific to resources, like ThinkCollege, outside of infrequent events (i.e. CoP events, parent-teacher conferences, ARC meetings). Therefore, it is recommended that additional opportunities to engage in knowledge sharing be provided in future leadership practice.

Lateral capacity building can be a powerful strategy for improving the practices of JCPS' MSD teachers seeking to support the transition of students with MSD to two-year and four-year colleges. To support lateral capacity building in this role group, Fullan and Quinn (2016) encouraged educational leaders to provide opportunities for peers and professionals to work together, while developing relationships, to share ideas, resources, and knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended that school-based or achievement area-based CoPs are developed and allowing of open membership to both internal and external stakeholders (e.g. OVR counselors, DSCs). It is additionally recommended that future venues and opportunities to engage in professional learning related to transition to two-year and four-year colleges for students with MSD take place through a professional learning network via social media (i.e. Twitter; Caron, 2011).

More broadly related to policy impacting knowledge sharing and professional learning, JCPS and LEAs must recognize the importance of participation in mechanisms like CoPs. To promote value in ongoing professional learning mechanisms, LEAs must allocate an appropriate amount of resources to not only developing CoPs, but also sustaining the participation and engagement of the members they seek to include (Wenger, 2008). Based on the results of this action research, MSD teachers sought additional incentives for time spent engaging in professional learning beyond the required

annual PD hours. JCPS website states, “JCPS is committed to providing professional learning opportunities that are on-going, relevant, and job embedded with the goal of strengthening and improving educator effectiveness and increasing student achievement (JCPS Overview of PdCentral, 2016). However, rarely does JCPS provide stipend or monetary payment to those engaging in professional development beyond the 24 credit hours required by KRS 158.070 annually.

The results of this action research described participation to be limited due to a scarcity of resources supporting participation and the burden on teachers to travel and allocate time. To further promote capacity building, Fullan (2008) demonstrates that leaders must use resources wisely if they are committed to installing energy and value to get things done collectively and continuously. In JCPS, to negate the scarcity of resources in supporting professional learning mechanisms, such as CoPs, battling teacher fatigue is imperative. As Clampitt and Dekoch (2011) described, “a goal is something that, once it’s accomplished, can be checked off the list. A mind-set, like a lifestyle, lasts forever” (p.62).

### **Supporting Post-School Outcomes through Organizational Leadership**

There is great value in reframing an organization’s practices both internally and externally (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In utilizing a multiple framed approach, this action research has identified strengths and needs that involved JCPS and the relationship of LEAs to external organizations (i.e. OVR). The human resource and structural lenses provided us with a mechanism to examine the needs of stakeholders essential to improving post-school outcomes for our students with MSD. Based on the results of this

action research, JCPS' CoP MSD teachers working to support students seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges would benefit from policies and procedures supporting a more convenient engagement with external organizations. While results identified an improved knowledge based on the role of agencies external to JCPS and bettered coordination with OVR, future policies and mechanisms to alleviate barriers to coordination are recommended.

Improving communication and transparency related to the roles and responsibilities of LEAs and external organizations with a shared mission to promote post-school outcomes for students with MSD, greater coordination can be realized. In alignment with this notion, the results of the action research identified the need for more frequent opportunities and venues to engage in active participation. Unfortunately, MSD CoP teachers had limited growth on behaviors supporting communication with OVR counselors outside of the CoP events. Therefore, it is recommended that more opportunities to forge meaningful relationships with OVR counselors, DSCs, and additional stakeholders be embedded in MSD teacher practice. To accomplish this goal, the organizational boundaries of JCPS must have a greater degree of permeability. Educational leaders supporting MSD teachers serving students seeking to transition to two-year and four-year colleges must strive to develop a more permeable boundary to the networks, agencies, groups, and alliances available to support them (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005).

## **Special Education for Inclusive Higher Education**

**Parental Involvement** As stated on the JCPS ECE website, “Exceptional Child Education (ECE) programs are designed to meet the needs of students who have educational disabilities... to address academic, social/emotional, and transition needs (e.g., changing to a different academic program, progressing from one level to another, or starting a career; Exceptional Child Education, 2017). In alignment, the CoP to support teachers serving students with MSD seeking a transition to two-year and four-year colleges sought to improve MSD teacher capacity for performing behaviors within the realm of special education. More specifically, the CoP sought to influence MSD teacher behaviors related to their engagement with parents/guardians to support this specific area of transition.

Results of the action research CoP have demonstrated the need for future recommendations and action to promote engagement, with the intention of establishing empathy related to a transition to two-year and four-year colleges between parents/guardians of students with MSD and their special education teachers. Furthermore, results support the recommendation for increased opportunities and tools for evoking dialogue about the potential transition of students with MSD to two-year and four-year colleges. Results have shown that outside of ARC meetings and parent-teacher conference day(s), little opportunities for communication of this type exist.

**ARC Discussion** Results showed that throughout the implementation of the CoP, positive professional behaviors in the area of IEP development increased. However, discussions within the context of an ARC meeting related to students with MSD

transitioning to two-year and four-year colleges have not increased much since baseline. Therefore, future recommendations for action are needed. To increase the prevalence of ARC discussions related to the transition to two-year and four-year colleges, policy requiring a more detailed structure to ARC meetings may be beneficial. Special education policy requiring a discussion about transition, specific to the environment of two-year and four-year colleges, may benefit the ARC team in making intentional decisions regarding post-secondary environments.

### **Reflection**

#### **Leading-Participating in a Community of Practice for JCPS**

Through my engagement as a participant-leader I experienced, first-hand, the complexities of leadership in education. Acknowledging and operating with an understanding of Quinn's (1996) challenges to educational leadership, identifying the need for special education teachers and myself to choose deep change over slow death was imperative. In working to disrupt the status quo, that is, students with MSD demonstrating poor post-school outcomes leadership competencies were required. The establishment of a CoP to support teachers serving students with MSD transitioning to 2-4 year colleges is strongly situated within the realm of leadership studies. Specifically, the action in JCPS supports the notion that leaders establish platforms to facilitate exploring new options and refining solutions for students that are most beneficial (Clampitt & DeKockh, 2011).

A progress maker in education and JCPS, I sought positive impact through involvement in the CoP as an initiative that would make a difference and be meaningful

to others. The action challenged me to step outside of past roles and initiatives as an administrator in the ECE department of JCPS' central office, and adopt the role of a change leader. Leading the CoP required me to adopt Fullan's (2011) framework for relational coordination. By establishing shared goals and knowledge with mutual respect amongst CoP teachers, we were able to nourish a collaborative culture supportive of coordination in alignment with JCPS' Vision 2020.

Through a reflection on the role of participant-researcher, it is important to describe the phenomenon of trust in seeking to establish the working relationship with special education teachers participating in the CoP. Algeo (2013) identifies honesty and respect as essential to the role of a participant-researcher. To support these characteristics, communication and transparency were central to all of my decision-making. Communicating internally within the ECE Department I provided my supervisor with the goal and outline of my action research prior to conception and proposal of the project. We generally followed-up on the action after each CoP event and utilized the after action review framework.

Communication within the CoP supported transparency as the IRB approved *Consent to Participate* was utilized and discussed during the CoP events periodically throughout the action. Additionally, special education teachers participating in the CoP were prompted to communicate questions and/or concerns at any time throughout the study. Proactive communication regarding action research parameters and the CoP's shared mission promoted transparency and honesty.

### **A Practitioner's Perspective on Action Research Efforts**

Conducting action research has been an exciting experience that, I believe, expands beyond my personal perspective. This action research study's efforts have led me into professional environments that I would not have likely encountered through my role as a practitioner and special education administrator in JCPS. Seeking to build capacity in special education teachers was an empowering experience with lasting implications on both my professional practices and the practices within JCPS on a variety of organizational levels. While the ECE department continues to seek and support mechanisms for professional learning that align with the district's vision, a CoP will be part of future discussions and storytelling. This action research effort has led others and myself in the JCPS' ECE department in developing a new understanding of our situational context that will inform future decisions and departmental actions. While I led the collaborative exploration of 2-4 year colleges as a potential environment for students with MSD, additional leaders emerged in the roles of parent, special education teachers, OVR counselors, and college disability service coordinators.

## Appendix A

### (Structured) Participant Community of Practice Interview Questions

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in the CoP event. I have a few questions for you that will help us in planning future CoP events. If you are unsure of how to answer the following questions, please do not worry and we will move onto the next question. I am not evaluating you; I am evaluating the effectiveness of our CoP. Any information you can provide will be helpful and utilized to support our CoP.

1. Tell me about your experiences in a CoP.
2. Did you share information learned in the CoP with special education teachers, general ed. teachers, parents, counselors, or other related service staff? If so, what prompted or supported this information sharing?
3. How do you feel about ThinkCollege as a resource to support student transition to 2-4 year college? (What prompted or supported this feeling?)
4. Did you share information about the ThinkCollege resource with special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, counselors, or other related service staff? (If so, what prompted or supported this communication?)
5. Have you contacted an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor regarding transition for MSD students to 2-4 year college? (If so, what prompted or supported this contact?)
6. Have you shared information about the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation with special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, or parents? (If so, what prompted or supported this communication?)
7. Describe your communication with parents regarding their child's transition goals and needs? (What has supported this communication?)
8. Describe conversations you have experienced, related to transition to 2-4 year colleges for students with MSD, within an ARC meeting. (What has prompted or supported those conversations?)

9. Describe your knowledge of IEP transition services intended to support students with MSD seeking a transition to 2-4 year colleges. (What has informed your knowledge base?)
10. Have you supported a student in developing a self-directed IEP? (If so, how did you learn about self-directed IEPs?)

## Appendix B

### CoP Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Please circle your answer for the below questions based on your activity in this month.

1. In the past 30 days, I attended a Community of Practice event.

Yes/No

2. In the past 30 days, I shared information or knowledge learned in a Community of Practice event with district special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, counselors, or other related service staff the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

3. In the past 30 days, I visited the ThinkCollege website or database the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

4. In the past 30 days, I shared information about ThinkCollege, as a resource, with district special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, counselors, or other related service staff the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

5. In the past 30 days, I contacted an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor regarding transition for MSD students to 2-4 year colleges the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

6. In the past 30 days, I provided a student or guardian with an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation referral to support transition to 2-4 year college for students with MSD the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

7. In the past 30 days, I shared information about Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to support student transition to 2-4 year college with non-CoP members (school counselor, regular ed. teacher, etc.) the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

8. In the past 30 days, I shared information with parents, guardians, and/or students with MSD about post-secondary education opportunities the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

9. In the past 30 days, I discussed post-secondary education at a 2-4 year college during an Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meeting the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

10. In the past 30 days, I developed an IEP that included Transition Services to support transition to 2-4 year colleges for students with MSD the following amount of times:

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

11. In the past 30 days, I supported a student in leading their IEP meeting (self-directed IEP).

0      1      2      3      4      5      More than 5

## Appendix C

### Transition IEP Development Support Document

Exceptional Child Education _____ Transition Documentation Checklist _____ Date of ARC _____ _____	Student Name:  DOB:  School:  ARC Chairperson:
Complete transition requirements #1-6 in preparation for and during the annual review meeting for students <u>age 14 or in the eighth grade (whichever occurs first)</u> . Complete transition requirements #1-11 in preparation for and during the annual review meeting for students <u>age 15 and older</u> . Complete transition requirement #12, Summary of Performance, during the final year for students <u>graduating with a diploma, alternative diploma, or exceeding the age eligibility requirements</u> .	
<b>Annual review of the IEP must be held within 365 days.</b> The ARC conducts a review of the IEP <b>annually</b> (i.e., within the calendar year). <b>Dates of last two IEPs:</b>	

- | Form  | Date Completed |  |
|---|----------------|--|
| ARC Notice  | _____          | 1. Student's name is listed on the notice to the meeting.  |
| ARC Notice  | _____          | 2. "To discuss post secondary transition needs and/or services" is checked on the notice as one of the reasons for the meeting.  |
| KY Conf. Summary. A statement is Conference Summary Form to describe how the student Summary Notes    | _____          | 3. <u>If in attendance</u> , the student signed the KY Conference Summary written on the KY Conference Summary Form to describe how the student participated in the meeting.<br><u>Example of Participation Statement in Summary Notes</u><br><u>Section:</u><br><i>Student was present and participated in discussion relative to transition planning.</i>  |
| KY Conf. interviews, ILP/IGP, etc. Summary- written on the the KY Conference Summary to Summary Notes | _____          | 4. <u>If not in attendance</u> , the student participated through surveys, (as applicable). A statement is describe how the student participated in the meeting.<br><u>Example of Participation Statement in Summary Notes</u><br><u>Section:</u><br><i>Student was not present; however, interests and preferences were discussed based on student survey and current Individual Learning Plan.</i> |
| IEP Levels statement including:   | _____          | 5. Transition needs are described on the IEP in the Present strengths, needs, and impact of disability. <u>At least one</u> category (instruction, related service, community experience, development of employment and other post school adult living   |

objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation) is addressed in the statement. Include transition assessment data in the Present Levels statement.

Examples of Transition Needs Statements (Present Levels):

*Amanda is 16 years old and is in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She plans to graduate in May 2016 with a diploma in the four years outlined by her Multi Year Course of Study. As a freshman, Amanda completed the required coursework and is on track for graduation with a diploma. Based on completed student and parent surveys, review of Career Matchmaker results and other Individual Learning Plan assessment measures, Amanda has the career goal of becoming a computer technician and has the following needs related to transition: Instruction and Daily Living Skills.*

Instruction:

*Amanda participates in a resource class for improving math skills as well as her annual goals for math. Amanda's deficit in reading (gaining information and drawing conclusions from a text) hinder her ability to complete in-class and/or homework assignments thus impacting her access to core content. Her deficits in problem solving will adversely affect her ability to budget for expenses, pay for purchases, balance a checkbook and pay bills in a timely manner. She requires accommodations in reading, math and oral directions if she is to benefit from instruction in these areas (see baseline data under Academic Performance). These deficits will adversely affect Amanda's ability to live independently, interact with peers within the community, follow job related instructions and be successful in a real-world job situation.*

Daily Living Skills:

*Amanda has difficulty managing time wisely, organizing household tasks, managing finances, making purchases and preparing food. Per progress data, Amanda takes more time than the task requires when completing daily living tasks. She finishes a task within the allotted time in 4 out of 10 trials. When presented with more than two options for making a purchase, she easily becomes frustrated. Daily living deficits will adversely affect the degree to which Amanda will be able to live and work independently.*

Revised 7/2016

- ILP/IGP/IEP \_\_\_\_\_ 6. A. Individual Learning Plan (ILP) or Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) (for Alternate Multi-Year Course of Study completed. Assessment students) including the multi-year course of study is completed.
- Editor All ECE students must have a completed ILP/IGP on file in blue ARC chairperson folder.
- KY Conf. Summary- B. A copy of the ILP/IGP/IEP which includes a multi-year course Summary Notes of study filed in the student's blue ARC Chairperson Folder for discussion at the annual review. A statement is written on the KY Conference Summary Form to document discussion of the ILP/IGP and the Multi-Year Course of Study.

Example of documentation in Basis of ARC Decision:  
Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and for Multi-Year Course of Study

Example of Statement in Summary Notes Section:  
*Committee reviewed and discussed the Individual Learning Plan/Individual Graduation Plan and the Multi-Year Course of Study. Student is on track for completion of coursework leading to a diploma (alternative diploma, if appropriate).*

IEP \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Postsecondary goals are written on the IEP that cover two areas:  
education/training and

employment and as appropriate, a goal for independent living. Postsecondary goals should be measureable (can the goal be counted?) and intended to occur after graduation.

Examples of Postsecondary Goals:

Postsecondary Goal---Education/Training and Employment  
*Upon completion of high school, John's goal is to enroll in courses at Jefferson Community & Technical College and take coursework leading to a major in the area of English and Communication to prepare to become a middle school english teacher.*

Postsecondary Goal---Independent Living  
*Upon completion of high school, Julia's goal is to independently prepare for work each day, including dressing, making her bed, making her lunch, and accessing transportation.*

IEP \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Activities/strategies for needed Transition Services are listed on the  
IEP.

Examples of Activities/Strategies:

*Completion of coursework leading to a diploma (alternative*

*diploma)*

*Referral to Office of Vocational Rehabilitation*

Consent \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Consent for Invitation/Release of Information was obtained prior to  
the notice to the ARC

Invitation/Release  
ARC meeting  
of Information  
KY Conf. Summary-  
Summary Notes

meeting if a representative of an outside agency was invited to the

*(Annually beginning at age 15)*

Example for Notice of Invitation

Agency attendees: Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

OR

Documentation was provided for cases where an outside agency was not appropriate or child's IEP did not include transition services that required another agency.

Example of Statement in Summary Notes Section:

*At this time, it is not appropriate to invite an agency representative for transition purposes.*

IEP \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Annual goals are written to support postsecondary goals.

IEP \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Formal and/or informal, age-appropriate transition assessments are used to determine Present Level Statement (interviews, etc.) postsecondary goals (Career Matchmaker, surveys, inventories, interviews, etc.)

*See Present Level examples provided for checklist item #5.*

SOP Form \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Summary of academic achievement and functional performance is completed

for students graduating with a diploma, alternative diploma or exceeding the age eligibility requirements. The district shall provide the student with a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting their postsecondary goals.

A copy remains in the blue ARC Chairperson Folder.

Complete this form for each annual review and return it to Jason Wheatley, ECE 4<sup>th</sup> Floor/VanHoose Education Center.

ARC Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Revised 7/2016

## Appendix D

### Community Observation Instrument

Coordinator Name \_\_\_\_\_

<i>Event Date</i>	<i>Achievement Target Addressed (check all that apply)</i>	<i>Anecdotal Notes:</i>	<i>Members Observed (if not entire community)</i>

## **Appendix E**

### Case Study Analysis Tool

Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitating Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Case Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe Supports and Resources evident in case study:

Describe Supports and Resources that may have been beneficial to student and/or family supports:

Describe Next Steps for successful Transition Planning for Student:

## Appendix F

### Community of Practice Handout

Why are Communities of Practice Important?

- ✓ “Connect people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either as frequently or at all.
- ✓ Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.
- ✓ Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities.
- ✓ Stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection.
- ✓ Capture and diffuse existing knowledge to help people improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices.
- ✓ Introduce collaborative processes to groups and organizations as well as between organizations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information.
- ✓ Help people organize around purposeful actions that deliver tangible results.
- ✓ Generate new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changes in needs and technologies.”

Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, & William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

How will our JCPS' Transition CoP function?

- A. Develop relationships, promote trust and respect, be committed.
- B. Understand and practice a shared meaning.
- C. Create and identify new knowledge.
- D. Take action!

## **Appendix G**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **TITLE OF STUDY**

Capacity Through a Community of Practice to support students with moderate to severe disabilities seeking transition to 2-4 year colleges.

#### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about professional learning to support students with disabilities transition to 2-4 year colleges. You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your role as a special education teacher of students with moderate to severe disabilities in JCPS. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about sixteen people to do so.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Jason Wheatley of University of Kentucky Department of Educational Leadership. Dr. Wayne Lewis is guiding him in this research. Jason is a doctoral candidate (student) in the Educational Leadership Ed.D program. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

By doing this study, we hope to learn the impact of a community of practice to support transition for students with moderate to severe disabilities into 2-4 year colleges.

#### **ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation in this study should not be volunteered if anticipating not finishing the school year in your current role as special education teacher of students with moderate to severe disabilities in a JCPS high school.

#### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research procedures will be conducted at Jefferson County Public Schools. You will need to come to Gheens Academy 4 times during the study for Community of Practice events. Each of those visits will take about an hour and a half. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 10 hours over the next 4 to 5 months. This includes the time spent completing monthly surveys and an interview at the conclusion of the study.

### WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

As part of this study you will be asked to take monthly surveys to self-report on professional behaviors. You will also be asked to attend four professional learning events and interact/engage with other members of the community. After attending the four events, you will be asked to participate in an interview with Jason Wheatley.

### WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

### WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced professional growth when participating in a community of practice. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

### DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you decide not to take part in this study, your decision will have no effect on your employment or your relationship to Jefferson County Public Schools.

### IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

### WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

### WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive a chance at 4 drawings for \$25 gift cards from Amazon.com for taking part in this study. You must be present at all events to be eligible to win. For each event you will have a one in sixteen chance at winning assuming all participants fully attend every event. Each time you attend an event, you will be entered into a drawing for \$25 with a maximum reward being \$100, if winning every time.

## WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. All data with identifiable information will be kept under lock and key except when supervised and in use by Jason Wheatley (principal investigator).

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. In addition, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online survey/data gathering company, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey/data gathering company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes may be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies.

## CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you or if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

## WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?

If the researcher learns of new information in regards to this study, and it might change your willingness to stay in this study, the information will be provided to you. You may



## Appendix H

Initial Review

Approval Ends  
November 21, 2017

IRB Number  
16-0889-P4S

TO: Jason  
Wheatley  
Education  
al  
Leadershi  
p  
PI phone #: (502)594-3726

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson  
Non-medical Institutional Review

Board (IRB) SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol

Number 16-0889-P4S DATE: November 28,  
2016

On November 22, 2016, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

*Building Capacity Through a Community of Practice for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities Seeking Inclusion in Higher Education*

PLEASE NOTE: Although the IRB approved the protocol design, you may not begin any research activities until documentation of the Jefferson County Public Schools approval has been submitted for review.

Approval is effective from November 22, 2016 until November 21, 2017 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. [Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.] Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

**N. Van Tubergen, PhD/ah**

Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

## References

- About JCPS. (February 25, 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/About/About.html>
- Algeo, C. (2013). The Researcher-Participant Relationship in Action Research: A Case Study Involving Australian Project Managers. Retrieved March 15, 2017, from <https://library.iated.org/view/ALGEO2013RES>
- Barton, D., & Tusting, K. (2005). *Beyond Communities of Practice Language Power and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Birkland, T. A. (2010). *An introduction to the policy process: theories, concepts, and models of public policy making*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Blankenship, S. S., & Ruona, W. E. (2007). Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice: A Comparison of Models, Literature Review. Retrieved April/May, 2016, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504776>
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). *Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Brand.
- Bouck, E. C. (2012). Secondary Students with Moderate/Severe Intellectual Disability: Considerations of Curriculum and Post-School Outcomes from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(12), 1175-1186.
- Brooke, V. A., Revell, G., & Wehman, P. (2009). Quality Indicators for Competitive Employment Outcomes: What Special Education Teachers Need to Know in Transition Planning. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 41(4), 58-66.
- Burke, W. W. (2017). *Organization Change: theory and practice*. Place of publication not identified: Sage Publications.
- Cameto, R., Levine, P., Wagner, M., Office of Special, E., Rehabilitative Services, W. D. C., & Sri International, M. P. C. A. (2004). *Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities: A Special Topic Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*: National Center for Special Education Research.
- Caron, S. W. (n.d.). Using Twitter for Professional Development. Retrieved February 3, 2017, from [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_tech/using-twitter-for-professional-development.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/using-twitter-for-professional-development.shtml)
- Choo, C. W. (2006). *The knowing organization: How organizations use information to construct meaning, create knowledge, and make decisions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, M. D., & Beamish, W. (2009). Transitions from school for young adults with intellectual disability: Neuberparental perspectives on "life as an adjustment". *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 34(3), 248-257. doi: 10.1080/13668250903103676
- Eckes, S. E., & Ochoa, T. A. (2005). STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO HIGHER EDUCATION. *American Secondary Education*, 33(3), 6.

- Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, & William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).
- Flowers, C., Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., Browder, D., & Spooner, F. (2005). Teachers' Perceptions of Alternate Assessments. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 30(2), 81-92.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: the right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Gibbons, M. M., & Borders, L. D. (2010). A Measure of College-Going Self-Efficacy for Middle School Students. *Professional School Counseling*, 13(4), 234-243.
- Griffin, M. M., Summer, A. H., McMillan, E. D., Day, T. L., & Hodapp, R. M. (2012). Attitudes toward Including Students with Intellectual Disabilities at College. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9(4), 234-239.
- Grigal, M., Dwyre, A., Emmett, J., & Emmett, R. (2012). A Program Evaluation Tool for Dual Enrollment Transition Programs. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 44(5), 36-45.
- Grigal, M., & Hart, D. (2012). The power of expectations. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9(4), 221-222. doi: 10.1111/jppi.12014
- Grigal, M., Hart, D., Smith, F. A., Domin, D., Sulewski, J., Weir, C. (2015). *Think College National Coordinating Center: Annual report on the transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities (2013–2014)*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.
- Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Weir, C. (2012). A survey of postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the United States. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9(4), 223-233. doi: 10.1111/jppi.12012
- Guidance Document for Individual Education Program (IEP) Development. (2015). Frankfort, KY: KDE.
- Higher Education Opportunity Act - 2008. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2015, from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>
- Hoyle, J. R., Bjork, L. G., Collier, V., & Glass, T. E. (2005). *The superintendent as CEO: standards-based performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Jones, M. M., & Goble, Z. (2012). Creating Effective Mentoring Partnerships for Students with Intellectual Disabilities on Campus. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9(4), 270-278.

- Kentucky Department of Education Open House. (2015). Retrieved from <http://openhouse.education.ky.gov/>
- Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card. (2015). Retrieved from <http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/ProfileByDistrict.aspx>
- Kleinert, H. L., Jones, M. M., Sheppard-Jones, K., Harp, B., & Harrison, E. M. (2012). Students with Intellectual Disabilities Going to College? Absolutely! *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 44(5), 26-35.
- Li, J.-Y., Bassett, D. S., & Hutchinson, S. R. (2009). Secondary Special Educators' Transition Involvement. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 34(2), 163-172.
- Migliore, A., Butterworth, J., & Hart, D. (2009). Postsecondary Education and Employment Outcomes for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities. *Think College!*, (1). Retrieved from [http://www.thinkcollege.net/administrator/components/com\\_resdb/files/214\\_pse\\_and\\_employ\\_outcomes\\_fast\\_facts.pdf](http://www.thinkcollege.net/administrator/components/com_resdb/files/214_pse_and_employ_outcomes_fast_facts.pdf)
- Naugle, K., Campbell, T. A., & Gray, N. D. (2010). Post-Secondary Transition Model for Students with Disabilities. *Journal of School Counseling*, 8(40).
- Neubert, D. A., & Moon, M. S. (2006). Postsecondary Settings and Transition Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Models and Research. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 39(4), 1-8.
- Neubert, D. A., Moon, M. S., & Grigal, M. (2002). Post-Secondary Education and Transition Services for Students Ages 18-21 With Significant Disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 34(8), 1.
- Quinn, R. E. (1996). *Deep change: Discovering the leader within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Reder, N., National Post-School Outcomes, C., & National Association of State Directors of Special, E. (2006). *Post-School Outcomes Data Collection and Use: Questions State Directors of Special Education Should Ask*: National Post-School Outcomes Center.
- Rost, J. C., & Burns, J. M. (1993). *Leadership for the twenty - first century*. Westport, CT: Praeger
- Rowe, D. A., Alverson, C. Y., Unruh, D. K., Fowler, C. H., Kellems, R., & Test, D. W. (2014). A Delphi study to operationalize evidence-based predictors in secondary transition. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38, 113-126.
- Secondary Transition. (2007). In *IDEA Regulations*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.
- Thornton, K., & Cherrington, S. (2014). Leadership in professional learning communities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39(3), 94-102.
- TPSID Annual Reports. (2014). Retrieved July 26, 2016, from <http://www.thinkcollege.net/publications/annual-reports>
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2011). *The post-high School outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 6 years after high school: key findings from the National Longitudinal Transition*

- Study-2 (NLTS2). Retrieved from  
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113004/pdf/20113004.pdf>
- VanBergeijk, E. P. (2012). Brief Report: New Legislation Supports Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Post-secondary Funding. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 42(11), 2471-2475. doi: 10.1007/s10803-012-1481-4
- Vitelli, E. M. (2013). A perspective on revising OSEP indicator 14. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 36(2), 124-134. doi: 10.1177/2165143412457984
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, 9(5), 2-3
- Wenger, E. (2008). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wilson, H., Bialk, P., Freeze, T. B., Freeze, R., & Lutfiyya, Z. M. (2012). Heidi's and Philip's stories: transitions to post-secondary education. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(2), 87-93. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-3156.2012.00746.x

## VITA

Jason L. Wheatley  
Louisville, Kentucky

---

### Professional Experience:

Special Education Administrator, JCPS (Specialist in Extended School Year and Transition) 2015-Present

Teacher of Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities, JCPS (Eastern High School) 2009-2015

Community Living Support Provider, Seven Counties Inc. 2013-2015

### Education:

Saint Xavier High School  
Class of 2004

Western Kentucky University, Bachelor of Science  
Graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor Degree in Teaching Students with Learning and Behavior Disorders/Moderate to Severe Disabilities (Dual Certification)

Western Kentucky University, Master of Arts in Education  
Graduated in 2012 with a Masters in Teaching Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities