2023

Transition Planning and the School to Prison Pipeline: a Phenomenological Study Investigating the Lived Experiences of Alternatively Placed High School Black Males with High Incidence Disabilities

Brandon Garrett Thornton
Illinois State University, bgthorn89@gmail.com

TRANSITION PLANNING AND THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALTERNATIVELY PLACED HIGH SCHOOL BLACK MALES WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

BRANDON GARRETT THORNTON

127 Pages

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better inform researchers and practitioners on best practices to ensure that their transition planning practices are person-centered and culturally responsive. Using a phenomenological approach, purposeful sampling was used to conduct semi-structured interviews regarding the shared educational lived experiences of two alternatively placed Black high school males with high-incidence disabilities with respect to their transition planning. Participants perceived their transition planning to be student-centered, and expected favorable employment outcomes. Additionally, the participants' choice to be alternatively placed played a role in their perception of transition outcomes. School personnel also played a pivotal role in shaping the student-centered transition planning experiences for the two included participants. Findings suggest key implications for continued research and practice for those involved with transition planning of youth with high-incidence disabilities.

KEYWORDS: black males, high-incidence disabilities, lived experiences, school-to-prison pipeline, transition planning

TRANSITION PLANNING AND THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALTERNATIVELY PLACED HIGH SCHOOL BLACK MALES WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

BRANDON GARRETT THORNTON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Special Education

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

TRANSITION PLANNING AND THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALTERNATIVELY PLACED HIGH SCHOOL BLACK MALES WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

BRANDON GARRETT THORNTON

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Kate Peeples, Chair

Sarah Ballard

Allison Kroesch

Mark Zablocki

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation committee who have continually enhanced the quality of my work. Without their support and assistance, this dissertation would not have been possible. Dr. Kate Peeples, I cannot thank you enough for staying on this journey with me as we both navigated difficult times and transitions. I may not text all of the time, but I have always felt supported since day one of meeting you, and that support was enough to empower me through many hurdles! Dr. Mark Zablocki, you sent me to the writing assistance lab after I phoned in a paper while pursuing my M.S. in Special Education. That was the first and last time I submitted anything less than excellent with my name on it. Thank you for that push, and thank you for your invaluable insight into the school-to-prison pipeline. Dr. Allison Kroesch, hearing you speak about how quickly you finished your dissertation while juggling a job, kids, and a social life inspired me to keep pushing through as well. I knew your insight would be invaluable in work-life balance, but also in making sure I was submitting my best work! Finally, and certainly not least, Dr. Sarah Ballard, thank you for helping me understand qualitative research better. Our meetups, emails, and the books you shared with me were integral in my writings (and revisions) of this study!

Since I am here because of my inability to say no, I think it is fitting to also acknowledge additional faculty members who were integral in getting me to say yes in pursuing this endeavor five years ago. In alphabetical order, those people are: Dr. Yun-Ching Chung, Dr. Carrie Anna Courtad, Dr. Yojanna Cuenca-Carlino, and Dr. Stacey Jones-Bock. I would also like to thank my additional support team whose work in and out of the classroom inspired me to keep pushing when I was eager to stop. In alphabetical order, those people are: Kim Albright, Kelli Appel, Jen Brooks, Lauren Butts, Crystal Curry, John Gaffney, Veronica Grundman, Jennifer Harris, Austin

Hendricks, Ramsey Hendricks, Matthew Henry, Dr. Lindsey Jensen, Dr. Tara Kaczorowski, Greg Keller, Bryan Kendall, Courtney Marks, Timothy Moore, Abigail Myers, Trisha Pearl, Alyssa Scott, Michelle Sleevar, Dr. Melinda Snodgrass, Cordale Thornton, Ashley Thurnau, Rachel Willyard, Ryan Wolber, and Dr. Diane Wolfe. Thank you for inspiring me for simply being excellent at your craft, while also keeping me in check when I take on too much.

I have relied on countless playlists ranging from anime soundtracks, classical music, ambient sounds, hip-hop, anything by Nobuo Uematsu, and of course, K-Pop. That said, I would be remiss to not shout out my favorite seven strangers, BTS, for helping me to love myself throughout this entire process. Thank you to Kim Namjoon for helping me center myself in my work, while also helping me to focus on the beautiful nature around me. Thank you to Kim Seokjin whose strength and confidence during hard times have helped me remain strong as well. Thank you to Jung Hoseok for literally being my "hope." Your lyricism and positivity in the face of change has helped me embrace change as well. Thank you to Min Yoongi for always being authentic, and for reminding me the importance of doing the same. Thank you to Kim Taehyung for being my consistent comfort through the most turbulent years of my life, and to Park Jimin as well. You both have helped me embrace parts of myself – both in and out of my writing – that I have hidden away for far too long. Finally, thank you to Jeon Jeongguk for always striving for excellence. You've given me a mark that I always intend to hit in everything that I do. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to my mom, dad, and brothers who center me every day, my students, my fellow speech coaches, former professors, former teachers, classmates, and colleagues, who provided unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey, and lastly, my dog, Rocky, who has been there for every milestone since my high school diploma.

B.G.T.

CONTENTS

TABLES

FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

More than 7 million students across the United States receive special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEIA (NCES, 2021). To better serve and understand these students, researchers, practitioners, and states classify and group them based off prevalence (i.e., low incidence, high incidence) with high incidence disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorders) accounting for nearly 80% of disability diagnoses in America. As the literature regarding high incidence disabilities continues to expand, our knowledge of the disparities these students face continues to expand as well (Green et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2019). When looking at disability identification, Black and Hispanic/Latinx students are twice as likely to be identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder, and Native American students are twice as likely to be identified as having a learning disability in comparison to their White peers (Harper, 2017). Likewise, limited research has examined the racial/ethnic disparities in identification for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), specifically the increased prevalence among Black youth (Yuan et al., 2021). Similarly, when looking at attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), researchers have found an under-diagnosis and under-treatment for Black and Hispanic/Latinx children (Coker et al., 2016; Moody, 2016). This same pattern of lack of services for those who need it can be seen again for Black and Hispanic/Latinx children when examining identification of speech and language impairments (Morgan et al., 2017).

Clearly, disparity in disability identification for students of color is an ongoing problem, but it is not the only problem students of color face. Students of color are also more likely to receive office discipline referrals, suspensions, or expulsion for the same behavior their White peers display as well (Bell, 2016). When examining disability, specifically students with high incidence disabilities, the disproportionate rates of discipline are evident too (Green et al., 2019). As such, students of color with high incidence disabilities are also disproportionately removed at higher rates than their statistical representation from classrooms and schools (Mallet, 2012; Mallet, 2014b). Subsequently, these students are susceptible to adjudication and, ultimately, incarceration (Castillo, 2014; Christle et al., 2005). Both practice and research suggest that adjudicated youth of color with disabilities are seen as uncontrollable and as a result, good intentioned or not, the educational and juvenile justice systems tend to seek control over their behaviors through harsh, exclusionary, and punitive measures (Monroe, 2005). Scholars have also noted legislation at the federal level as a cause of the disproportionate discipline as well (i.e., Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994) which all played a role in linking behavioral expectations with school funding (Hermosura, 2016). While these laws had ambitious intentions on targeting the increasing drug use among youth, they subsequently linked necessary school funding with harsh zero-tolerance policies (Hermosura, 2019). Hermosura (2019) explains this phenomenon further in a dissertation study noting that, “The structure of requiring zero-tolerance for public schools to receive anti-drug formula funding created a precedent for the expulsion and referral of students directly to the justice system, thereby influencing school environments to reframe students from being learners to being suspects” (p. 13). The pattern of policy and practice coalescing to pushout youth from

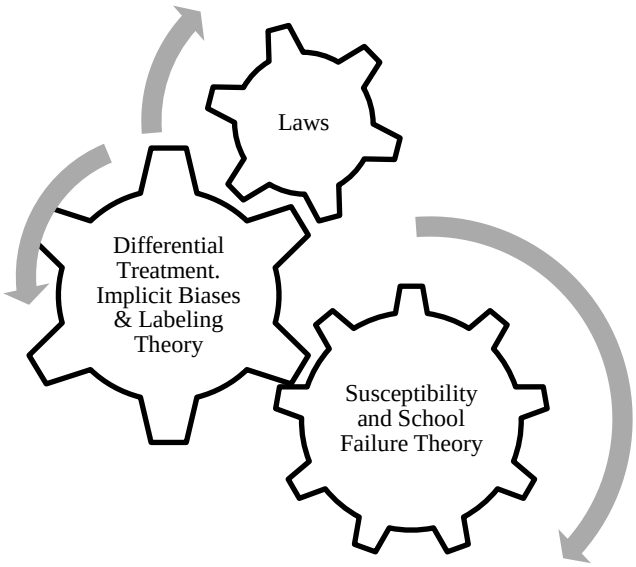
schools, resulting in an increased risk of incarceration is known as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP; Mallet, 2017).

Theoretical Perspectives

Investigations into the STPP phenomenon typically examine the correlation between school and legal practices, noting changes in how both educational and juvenile justice institutions embrace punitive and zero-tolerance policies that exacerbate factors (e.g., rates of dropout, truancy, retention) that lead to adjudication and/or incarceration (Christle et al., 2005; Gonsoulin et al., 2012). Beyond legislation, other explanations for the embrace of zero-tolerance policies in schools are rooted in psychology or sociology (see Figure 1), including implicit biases, labeling theory, and differential treatment theory (Rutherford & Nelson, 2005; Skiba et al., 2002). Implicit biases refer to the attitudes that affect our actions and decisions in an unconscious manner; action research in education suggests that teachers may be implicitly guided by gender and/or race-based stereotypical perceptions. Similarly, labeling theory, or the idea that a bad action makes you a bad person, manifests itself in educational and juvenile justice systems as well; it is most often utilized against racial minorities (Rutherford & Nelson, 2005; Skiba et al., 2002). Both of these perspectives can result in differential treatment, which refers to biased interactions, expectations, and responses to youth based on disability, race, and/or gender (Pesta, 2018). In sum, laws such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 (SDFSCA), alongside implicit biases, labeling theory, and the differential treatment theory drive the cogs of the STPP.

Figure 1

An Illustration of the Embrace of Zero-Tolerance Policies



As a result, youth of color with disabilities are pushed out of schools, and adjudicated youth of color with disabilities are funneled into prisons, the most common being emotional/behavioral disorders and learning disabilities (Krezmien et al., 2008; Ochoa et al., 2021; Quinn et al., 2005). Once incarcerated, the plight of this population continues. Kincaid & Sullivan (2020) examined adjudication and disability in a study that included a majority of adjudicated youth with high-incidence disabilities (n = 6,193; 65%), finding that youth with disabilities had a higher likelihood of being placed in alternative placements (i.e., alternative school, juvenile detention centers) for a longer period than those without disabilities (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2020). Similarly, Mallet (2014a) found in a case study of former juvenile offenders (N = 433) that adjudicated youth with learning disabilities (n = 134) were more likely to be held in detention centers, more likely to be suspended from school after release, and had been adjudicated at a younger age compared to peers without disabilities (Mallet, 2014a). Likewise, Smedley et al. (2003) also explored outcomes after adjudication and found that adjudicated youth

with LD and E/BD who are in juvenile detention centers may have a higher risk of unemployment or losing employment compared to non-adjudicated youth (Smedley et al, 2003).

While most research focuses on recidivism for adjudicated youth with disabilities, other transition outcomes after incarceration have also been explored. Research suggests that as much as 43% of youth who leave detention centers never reenter school, 60% dropout, and 28% are employed after a year from release (Bullis et al., 2004; Ochoa et al., 2021). In response to these findings, there is a growing body of research focusing on transition planning within juvenile justice systems, specifically for students with high-incidence disabilities, to help adjudicated youth reenter schools, the workforce, and the community (Hagner et al., 2008; Unruh et al., 2009). Transition planning is defined as the cooperative effort between the school, the child, the family, and other agencies that support the child's transition from school, and it is but one of the built-in supports afforded to students under IDEIA (Rutherford & Nelson, 2005). Disability law offers other rights and safeguards for families and students specific to disciplinary procedures, including manifest determination, disciplinary change of placements, functional behavioral assessments, and behavior intervention plans (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Still, while parents' advocacy has historically been integral in defining special education law, researchers have found that many parents and their children today have trouble navigating the special education system, including transition planning and the IDEIA safeguards offered to them if experiencing discipline issues at school (Harrison et al., 2017; Ochoa et al., 2021; Rossetti et al., 2021; Sanderson et al., 2022).

Further, culturally and linguistically, the legal burden and obligation of parent advocacy can be unreasonable as parents navigate other systemic barriers throughout the IEP process (Rosetti et al., 2021; Trainor, 2010). Rosetti et al. (2021) found that school personnel expect

parents to possess the social capital resources optimal for an exchange of information and the disposition or knowledge to advocate for their child (Rosetti et al., 2021). Trainor (2010) explored this by conducting focus groups and interviews, finding that school professionals perceived White parents who used jargon and literature on disability as more engaged, and easier to collaborate with as decision makers (Trainor, 2010). In comparison, Latinx, Black, and Native American parents tended to advocate in terms of individual needs of the child rather than suggesting changes to the system or remarks on the disability (i.e., policies, practices). School professionals were less responsive to advocacy based off of intuition, making any meaningful change difficult for those parents. In sum, the more effective change agents were the parents who possessed the social capital and educational background to operate as disability experts, versus the parents who used intuition and the knowledge of their child; further, the line between disability expert and intuitive advocates was often drawn by race (Trainor, 2010).

Within the juvenile justice system where transition is referred to as "community reentry," Walker et al. (2015) note that parents have historically been blamed for juvenile delinquency, and may feel a sense of shame, stress, and distrust, making their collaboration with school professionals even more difficult as a result (Walker et al., 2015). As such, successful implementation of transition programs and services within juvenile detention facilities become even more challenging, with family and student input being lost in the process (Bullis et al., 2004; Unruh & Bullis, 2005). Still, while research is limited surrounding parent involvement in the transition planning process for adjudicated youth of color with disabilities, the research is also limited regarding student involvement in the process despite empowerment practices being viewed as essential, both theoretically and anecdotally, for incarcerated juveniles (Freasier, 1986; Mikytuck et al., 2019; Waintrup & Unruh, 2008; Unruh & Waintrup, 2009).

Purpose and Overview

Despite Black males with high-incidence disabilities being pushed out of schools at disproportionate rates, and disproportionately populating juvenile detention facilities, very limited research focuses on their lived experiences, and more specifically, the ways in which those lived experiences influence their transition wants and needs. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to further explore the lived experiences of high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities currently placed in alternative placements (i.e., alternative school). Specifically, I was interested in the feelings, meanings, and reflections participants assign to the transition process, including their involvement in the development or implementation of the transition plan, and have organized this investigation across an additional four chapters, in addition to figures, tables, appendices, and references for clarity.

For this dissertation study, a hermeneutical phenomenological methodology was utilized rooted in Gadamer's approach on expanding horizons during data collection, analysis, and reporting (Gadamer et al., 2004). Purposeful sampling was used across four settings (e.g., District A, District B, alternative school, and a juvenile detention center). In the end, six participants from both districts attending the alternative school were found eligible for the study, with two participants from District B ultimately completing the study (see Table 2). Each participant was a Black high school male with a high-incidence disability receiving their educational and IEP services at an alternative school. Data was collected through (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) a document review of the participant's Individualized Education Program (IEP), including the transition plan, (c) member checking with initial themes and complete transcripts, and (d) an examination of memos and a reflexive diary (Mortari, 2015).

Data analysis included a six-stage framework rooted in Gadamer's philosophy of maintaining rigor and trustworthiness during the process: (1) immersion, (2) understanding, (3) abstraction, (4) synthesis and theme development, (5) illumination and illustration of phenomena, (6) integration and critique (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). The first two stages began during data collection by keeping memos on body language during the interviews, and a reflexive diary before and immediately after the interviews (e.g., immersion and understanding). Data was then immediately transcribed by hand by listening to the audio recordings, and checked using a transcription software, Otter.ai, before being inputted into a data analysis program, MAXQDA (e.g., abstraction). The transcripts, which now included memos on body language, alongside the reflexive diary, were coded separately for initial themes, before examining common meanings across all three data sources (e.g., synthesis and theme development).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions guided this dissertation study and are used across all five chapters:

Male. Any person or participant who self-identified as the male gender.

Black. I used the all-inclusive term, Black, to include Blacks or African Americans having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Adjudicated Youth. An adjudicated youth was a juvenile found by the courts to have committed a crime as a juvenile.

Youth. Although students receive services until they are 21, I defined youth as under the age of majority (i.e., under 18).

Juvenile. A juvenile was a dependent child or youth who has violated the law and been charged prior to reaching 18 years.

Alternative Placement. An alternative placement or setting was an educational environment designed to accommodate behavioral or educational needs of a student.

Pushout. Pushout was defined as the action(s), purposeful or inadvertently, that removed a student from their home educational environment.

High-Incidence Disabilities. Students with a high-incidence disability are the most prevalent. When this term was used, it included students with learning disabilities (LD) and students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (E/BD) as either their primary or secondary diagnosis.

Transition Services. I used the IDEIA definition of transition services (IDEIA, 2004). IDEIA defines transitions services as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability focused on facilitating movement post-school. These activities include instruction, related services, community experiences, employment, housing, daily living skills, and should be based on an individual's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests.

Transition, Transition Plan, or Transition Planning. When considering juveniles or adjudicated youth, the IRIS Center defines transition as, "Each move during the youth's contact with the juvenile justice system, including placement changes and exiting the system (The Iris Center, 2017)." Therefore, for this dissertation study, I was interested in determining how participants viewed the word "transition" in general, and if they view the nominalization of transition planning (i.e., transition plan) synonymously to the IEP. Additionally, I investigated whether they viewed transition planning as an ongoing action, or a one-time action. To that end, I began interviews providing the definition of transition planning, and then merged the participants' horizons and meanings of the term to develop a shared definition as detailed in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5.

Horizons. Gadamer used the term horizon to mean, "a vision that incorporates everything seen from a specific vantage point" (Gadamer et al., 2004). It is used synonymously with "viewpoint" and "pre-understandings" in the next four chapters.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Search Procedures & Parameters

To identify relevant, peer-reviewed studies, I conducted a search including databases that specialize in or feature topics in education, special education, students with disabilities, social work, and the juvenile justice system (i.e., Academic Search Complete, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycINFO, Communication Source, Education Full Text, ERIC, Primary Search, Professional Development Collection, Social Work Abstracts, and Teacher Reference Center). Multiple strategic searches were conducted with results overlapping in each search. Truncated search terms, as indicated by an *, helped widen the net of articles in both set of results. A hand search was conducted among all empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria, as well as conceptual studies, reports, and literature reviews.

Search terms, including Boolean terms OR and AND, included:

alternative schools or alternative education OR pushout OR youth incarcer OR youth delinquen* OR juvenile defenders OR adjudicated youth,*

AND, Black OR African American OR ethnic OR minority OR rac*,*

AND disab OR iep OR individualized education*, OR transition*, OR reentry,*

AND men or male or man.

Inclusion Criteria

I reviewed and classified articles according to the following criteria: (a) qualitative, or mixed-method studies; (b) settings that included an educational institution, juvenile facility, or adult prison; (c) studies where one or more of the study's target demographic (i.e., male, Black, high-incidence disability) were reported; and (d) studies investigating transition plans, transition interventions, or reentry programs.

Exclusion Criteria

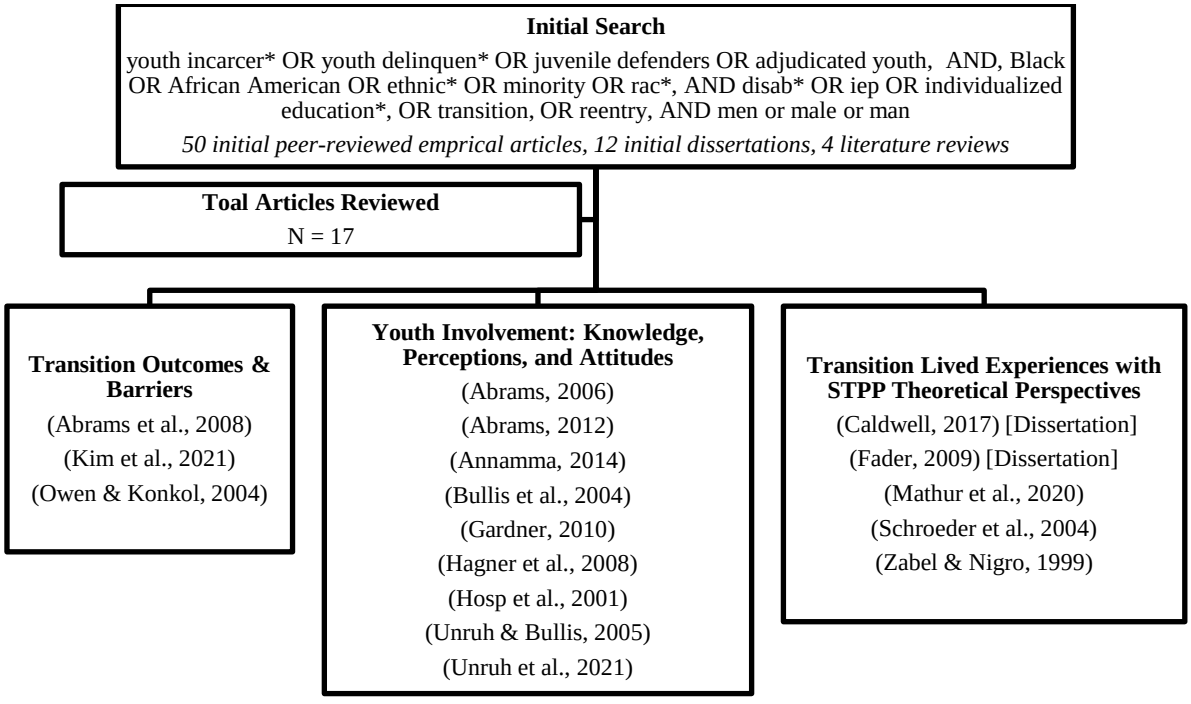
Studies examining youth with disabilities outside of the United States were not included in this literature review. Conceptual articles, reports, and literature reviews were also not included in this study. Lastly, studies solely focusing on low incidence disabilities were also excluded.

Article Coding

I used the following categories to code each study: research design, purpose, descriptive elements (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, disability, age) and relevant findings. For clarity, a literature table was included in this study (see Table 5). The initial results yielded fifty peer-reviewed empirical articles, twelve dissertations, and four literature reviews. Ultimately, after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a hand search, a total of seventeen studies were included in this literature review (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Search Parameters and Relevant Results (Including Initial, Reference, and Citation Search)



Literature Review Findings

The literature base on school pushout as a susceptible practice to the school-to-prison pipeline currently investigates the phenomena itself, mainly centering on race, and providing ways schools can intervene. A majority of the transition planning literature reviewed for this dissertation study focused on students who were pushed out of their home school through suspensions, expulsions, or dropping out, and then adjudicated. As such, the primary setting of the studies was in a juvenile detention center (see Table 5). While the focus of all of the studies centered on transition planning, and included the demographic being investigated (i.e., Black males, students with high-incidence disabilities), the findings were still unique enough to be categorized into three groups (see Figure 2). Studies revealed insight on student outcomes and barriers to successful reentry and/or transition planning (e.g., transition outcomes and barriers), discovered the importance of student agency in developing transition plans (e.g., youth involvement), or examined how lived experiences influence transition/reentry and/or transition planning (e.g., lived experiences with transition planning).

Transition Outcomes & Barriers

Kim et al. (2021) investigated risk factors for juveniles with disabilities on probation in Washington (N = 4317), but shed light on juvenile justice perspectives on transition planning. (Kim et al., 2021). The findings indicate that probation youth with special education needs are more likely to recidivate compared to their counterparts without special education needs. Additionally, school exclusion has a more significant impact on recidivism for justice-involved youth with special education needs. These findings have implications for understanding the factors contributing to continued involvement in the justice system and for designing effective services and treatment plans for probation youth, particularly those eligible for special education.

Difficulties regarding the implementation of transition planning once students enter the juvenile justice system included loss of records, delay in the transfer of records, and adjudication before a full evaluation or identification of a disability is complete (Kim et al., 2021). Similarly, Abrams et al. (2008) used a qualitative approach to collect interview data from both juvenile detention staff and youth regarding logistical barriers and found disparate responses. They found that some youth felt that some of the transition interventions (i.e., obtaining a library card to promote literacy) were a waste of time or too long, while staff rated these experiences highly effective and useful (Abrams et al., 2008). This suggests dissonance as the barrier between the transition services institutions seem valuable and the value those they serve place on those services.

Abrams et al. (2008) noted additional common barriers in this juvenile detention center included difficulty in forming meaningful relationships during and after reentry (Abrams et al., 2008). A youth who was there for much longer participated in a transition program that linked him with a mentor in the juvenile detention center, as well as targeted programming focusing on employment and reducing recidivism. Yet, he felt dissatisfied with, “I don't like to build relationships like that, where you live with someone for almost a year [referring to seeing the juvenile detention worker for a year] and then it's just like... you're done! You're on your own” (p. 532). Likewise, a staff member concurs with, “I just don't think that [the staff] are given an opportunity to really get into what's going on with the kids. Whether that's the kid's fault because they're not disclosing or the system's fault for making people so busy with paperwork, they can't really get into stuff” (p. 532).

It was hard to determine the exact perceptions of non-adjudicated youth with high-incidence disabilities, but one study did include youth at alternative school who were referred not based on their adjudication status (Owens & Konkol, 2004). Owens & Konkol (2004)

investigated the perspectives that six high school youth with emotional/behavioral disorders placed on their transition to and from alternative school (Owens & Konkol, 2004). The study, which included four males, two of which were Black, split the six participants into two focus groups. Focus Group A consisted of three students ready to transition back to their alternative school, but had decided to stay after an IEP meeting. Group B consisted of three students who transitioned back to traditional school, but were placed back at the alternative school after being unsuccessful within the semester, as determined by the IEP team.

Using interviews and those focus groups, the students expressed stories of feeling more comfortable at the alternative school due to (a) smaller class sizes, (b) having personal connections with teachers, (c) staying in one classroom, (d) knowing classmates, (e) being able to work at their own pace, and (f) feeling included regardless of their disability. Group B noted feeling (a) feeling ill prepared to deal with anger issues, (b) having no positive relationships with teacher, (c) too large class sizes, (d) having no one to go to when situations arise, and (e) an absence of clear rules and consequences. Common barriers across groups include class sizes and the opportunity to form strong relationships with teachers.

Youth Involvement: Knowledge, Perceptions, and Attitudes

Transition services were helpful in obtaining employment and reentering adjudicated youth back into the community at younger ages which reduced risk for recidivism (Bullis et al., 2004). However, Hosp et al., (2001) found that the skills that participants learned during transition planning and knowledge of the transition plan existing, or of having awareness and perceptions of their disability in general, were limited, with some participants having no recall of a transition plan or of setting relevant transition planning goals prior to incarceration (Hosp et al., 2001). For example, participants where asked, “Do you know what a transition plan is?,” “Do

you know what your transition plan says?," and "Do you think your transition plan is helping you with these things?" as well as seven other questions focusing on employment. Participants found transition services that focused on teaching employable skills to be helpful but disconnected from their job specific IEP transition goals, for participants aware of them (Hosp et al., 2001). Similarly, Annamma (2014) found that participants viewed the emphasis on "soft-skills" (i.e., self-regulation, socialization) as too focused on control and compliance, noting an absence of academic skills they felt necessary for a successful transition back to school; however, some attributed these skills and their IEP to their academic success (Annamma, 2014).

In regards to the feelings that adjudicated youth assign to transition planning after incarceration, studies focusing on reentry gave insight on this (e.g., Abrams, 2006; Abrams, 2012). Using convenience sampling, Abrams (2006) investigated barriers to successful reentry of adjudicated male juveniles (n = 10), 5 who were Black males (Abrams, 2006). Overall, juvenile males regardless of race anticipated the overwhelming pressure to revisit old influences (i.e., gangs, friend groups), enough to override their fear of returning to incarceration (Abrams, 2006). Similarly, Abrams (2012) investigated the motivation to change for adjudicated male juveniles (n = 20) from various races/ethnicities, 9 of which who were Black males. Despite the transition supports, youth felt there were far too many challenges ahead. Conversely, Gardner (2010) analyzed the voices of adjudicated male juveniles (n = 25), seven of which who were Black, and found that although some youth may feel ambivalent about change, they acknowledge a willingness to try to better their lives for (a) loved ones, (b) themselves, (c) fear of adult prison, or (d) fear of death (Gardner, 2010). Despite the males in these studies having different lived experiences and views on reentry, ultimately, youth felt like their ability to change was intrinsic

rather than the presence of and the reliance on an external support (Abrams, 2006; Abrams, 2012; Gardner, 2010).

The participants who did not recidivate reported utilizing self-regulation strategies, cognitive planning, and self-talk to envision future versions of themselves (Abrams, 2006; Gardner, 2010). Similarly, Hagner et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative study (n = 33) to examine outcomes of a transition intervention program called Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work (RENEW) that included Black males with E/BD or LD (Hagner et al., 2008). The study revealed that positive, affirmative, and goal-oriented person-centered planning was successful within transition planning with more than half of the participants returning to high school and thriving due to having structured support and assistance in obtaining credits (Hagner et al., 2008). While the link between race, disability, and gender is unclear due to reporting, it is clear that shifting the focus to person-centered goals and person-centered transition planning, rather than a focus on avoiding negative behaviors, is more effective in achieving academic success and preventing recidivism (Hagner et al., 2008). Another example of this would be transition interventions like Project SUPPORT (Service Utilization to Promote Positive Outcomes in Rehabilitation and Transition for Adjudicated Youth with Disabilities) which stresses self-determination, social skills, and transition services based on the needs and strengths of the juvenile offender, resulting in reduced recidivism, regardless of disability label, gender, and/or race (Unruh & Bullis, 2005). Similarly, another promising intervention, Project STAY OUT (Strategies Teaching Young Offenders to Use Transition Skills), focuses on teaching and modeling social skills, self-regulation, networking, and education while providing employment opportunities (Clark & Unruh, 2010).

Transition Lived Experiences with STPP Theoretical Perspectives

Three theoretical perspectives to the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) emerged as integral to understanding the lived experiences of Black males at risk for adjudication, and adjudicated Black juvenile males (e.g., school failure theory, susceptibility theory, differential treatment). School failure theory posits that a student's academic performance is influenced by the interaction between individual (i.e., health, family background, disability, race, gender), school (i.e., size, supports, resources, policies) and societal factors (i.e., economic disparities, social inequality) rather than attributing failure to a lack of ability or intelligence (Dressman et al., 2005). In other words, school failure is complex, thus requires a complex approach when considering systemic changes. Likewise, Belsky et al. (2021) notes that susceptibility theory, which explores the idea that certain students are more vulnerable to school discipline based on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and disability, also highlights the need for systemic changes (Belsky et al, 2021). Similarly, differential treatment or differential selection refers to the stereotypes people hold towards certain youth based off a number of factors (i.e., race, gender, disability, socio-economic status) resulting in biased treatment and a disproportionate selection into the juvenile justice system (Piquero, 2008).

Schroeder et al. (2004) provides insight into how Black males with disabilities face systemic barriers through multiple aspects of their lives that they have little to no control over through interviews of Black males on death row (Schroeder et al., 2004). For one youth, Burton, who was identified as having a learning disability at 11 and 15, the school system's attempt to intervene was not appropriate to meet his needs (e.g., school failure theory). For another youth, Freddy, educational, welfare, and juvenile justice interventions were too little and too late to combat his upbringing, the substance abuse, and his untreated emotional disturbances that

elevated his learning disability (e.g., susceptibility theory). Lastly, with Jack, his background, previous experiences in the criminal justice system, and undiagnosed schizophrenia led to him being in the school-to-prison pipeline (e.g., differential treatment/selection).

Fader (2008) also examined lived experiences of Black and Hispanic males reentering the community and entering adulthood and found other systemic barriers including hiring practices not necessarily matching the racial or cultural code of young incarcerated men of color who often have to choose to strip away parts of their identity to conform to a society that they perceive has already given up on them (Fader, 2008). This idea of conforming to societal standards was mirrored in Mathur et al. (2020). Mathur et al. (2020) examined challenges male youth (n = 4) with emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD) and learning disabilities (LD) face when transitioning from juvenile detention centers including exposure to gangs, drugs, and family or friends that promote a sense of hopelessness (Mathur et al., 2020). Fear of having poor academic success emerged as a self-reported barrier as well (Mathur et al, 2020).

Caldwell (2017) explores the educational experiences of two Black American juvenile males who attended an alternative school in the Southeast (Caldwell, 2017). The study uses phenomenological and narrative methods to provide in-depth analyses of the participants' experiences. The findings highlight the participants' experiences of instability in their home lives and education (e.g., susceptibility theory), encounters with law enforcement from an early age (e.g., differential treatment theory), varied experiences in the alternative school setting, and their feelings of uncertain hope for their future lives. These findings shed light on the complex and nuanced experiences of Black American juvenile males in alternative schools (e.g., school failure theory) and provide valuable insights into the challenges they face.

School failure theory, susceptibility theory, and differential treatment theory emerged in another qualitative study as well. Annamma (2014) found that 80% of the adjudicated young women of color with disabilities were in the system for simple status offenses (e.g., differential treatment) and each woman of color felt like school would never be an option for them due to their disability (e.g., school failure theory) and the connotation around the label. The achievement gap led to behavior issues which ultimately led to contact with the juvenile justice system (e.g., susceptibility theory). Other similarities beyond race, gender, and disability of adjudicated youth across all studies include socio-economic status, attendance, school discipline, and family history with the justice system; suggesting a need for comprehensive, ongoing intervention with respect to lived experiences in supporting adjudicated youth of color with high-incidence disabilities (Annamma, 2014; Zabel & Nigro, 1999).

Significance of the Problem

The literature on transition interventions signal the importance of a strong focus on making transition planning intentional, self-determined, and person-centered. However, the existing literature focuses on the outcomes and effectiveness of the interventions rather than the perceptions and attitudes adjudicated and at-risk non-adjudicated youth have surrounding said interventions (Abrams et al., 2008). It is important to both value and elevate the juvenile voice throughout transition planning. In fact, Clark & Unruh (2010) argue that students should have an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) as soon as they become adjudicated in order to center the student in the planning process. Unfortunately, Gardner (2010) found that more often than not, we build transition services based on perceived needs for adjudicated youth, rather investigating their actual needs (Gardner, 2010). Given the limited literature on the transition planning of non-adjudicated youth, their lived experiences are also being left behind. In sum, the perspectives of

adjudicated youth of color with disabilities with respect to transition planning have rarely been captured in empirical literature, leaving a considerable gap in addressing those transition needs (Abrams, 2006). Further, when considering the perspectives and transition needs of Black youth with disabilities, specifically Black males with disabilities, at-risk for adjudication, the lack of literature persists (Mallet, 2017). Thus, the dissertation study at hand was designed with the idea that it is important to center the lived experiences of those most vulnerable to the disproportionality found in the literature. As such, the framework described in Chapter 3 was needed to help guide a study that could address this urgent research gap.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

We must seek to make meaning of the lived experiences of both at-risk non-adjudicated youth and adjudicated youth with respect to their gender, race, and disability as to best support them. While there are a few studies that attempt to center student voice (e.g., Mathur et al., 2020), far too few seek to understand if and how race, gender, and disability intersect to influence the transition and reentry process overall. Thus, it is urgent that researchers and practitioners seek to understand the following proposed research questions:

1. How do high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities who are currently in alternative placements describe their transition planning and/or needs?
2. To what extent are high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities who are currently in alternative placements participating or centered in the development and implementation of their transition planning?
3. How do lived experiences shape the transition process for high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities currently at alternative placements?

Researcher Identity

Beyond capturing lived experiences, my work was rooted in social justice, promoting equity, access, participation, and harmony for culturally diverse populations (Lyons et al., 2013). Specifically, this study acknowledges that the status quo is failing Black males with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., equity, harmony). As a result, I decided to examine and analyze the transition planning experiences (e.g., access) of participants and their involvement (e.g., participation) in the development and implementation of their transition planning. As such, my positionality as a Black male high school special educator was integral to the study; however, I was transparent emphasizing my role as a high school special educator and a doctoral student

with participants and school personnel (i.e., regional alternatives school administrators, school district administrators) throughout recruitment communications, and at the beginning of each interview. In doing so, I cultivated a space that enhanced communication (Flick, 2022).

Analytical Framework

After reviewing the literature and examining the theoretical perspectives as well as the research gaps, an analytical framework was needed to better understand the perspectives of youth susceptible to pushout, and ultimately the school-to-prison pipeline. Given that transition/reentry, transition planning, and the presence and/or knowledge of a transition plan were reoccurring themes among the lived experiences of both non-adjudicated and adjudicated Black males with disabilities, a framework that centered the participant's voices was necessary. Alsaigh & Coyne (2021) created a framework for both data collection and analysis that was well suited with this investigation's research questions and method (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; see Figure 3). The framework, rooted in Gadamer's philosophy, focuses on expanding the horizons of both the researcher and participants, a necessary task in order to center the voices, lived experiences, and perspectives currently limited in the research surrounding transition services, transition planning, and the transition plan.

Lived experiences are ever changing, as is their interpretation. As such, the framework is represented as a cycle or circle, to signify an ongoing process as data comes in, and as data is initially analyzed, and analyzed again with the participant. Within the cycle, Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021) utilized other interpretations of Gadamer's framework to provide five steps that include three essential pre-steps for entering and exiting the cycle (Ajjiwa & Higgs, 2007; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Fleming et al., 2003). As such, this framework informed Chapter 2, and is referenced in Chapters 3 and 4. An overview is provided below.

Step One: Questioning

Gadamerian hermeneutical research attempts to gain deep understanding of a phenomenon (Gadamer et al., 2004). The phenomenon investigated in this dissertation study was the school-to-prison pipeline, specifically the pushout of high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities. To uncover these lived experiences, the interview questions used in this study were purposely open-ended and relied on elaboration and clarifying probes, another tenet of Gadamer's (Gadamer et al., 2004). Semi-structured interviews were designed to be intentionally conversational, rather than prescribed on my understandings/horizons on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) phenomena.

Step Two: Identifying Pre-Understandings

Examining pre-understandings and prejudices is important to qualitative researchers, but essential under the Gadamerian philosophy of expanding the investigator's viewpoints (e.g., horizons) to better understand a phenomenon through the eyes of the participant(s). As a Black special educator watching his Black male students being pushed out from school during the duration of this dissertation study, the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) was more than a metaphor found in literature or pop culture. As such, it was even more important for me to bracket out my experiences in order for me to enter the hermeneutic circle. Feelings and pre-understandings surrounding the STPP phenomena were consistently documented on the reflexive diary in order for me to remain oriented, and served as an additional data point to help make sense of findings (Fleming et al., 2003).

Step Three: Gaining Understanding (Dialogue with Participants)

The third and final step before entering Gadamer's cycle of interpretation is gaining understanding through dialogue with participants. Gadamer remarked that language and text

should be co-created by the researcher and participant (Gadamer, 2004). Interviews should not be viewed as data collection, or a means to collect information, rather an opportunity to gain understanding by infusing the interviewer's horizon with the participant's horizon. In order to do so, I would need to act as an active research instrument. As such, the reflexive diary served as a tool to merge my horizons with my prejudices and history together to better understanding how those experiences could influence the research, and then later incorporate those new horizons into the study.

Step Four: Gaining Understanding (Dialogue with Text)

Gadamer stressed the idea of relying on both written transcripts and spoken word, viewing 'text' as a collection of transcripts, recordings, comments made by the researcher, and memos of contexts and emotions not captured on the recording (Gadamer et al., 2004).

Stage 1: Immersion. Using audio recordings of live sessions, interviews were transcribed by hand in order to preserve language without the interference of auto-correct, and in order to ensure accuracy. Interviews were then placed into Otter.ai, a web-based transcription software. Those transcriptions were compared to the transcriptions done by hand for accuracy and corrections. After this, final comparisons were done by reading through the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings repeatedly. Using MAXQDA, transcripts were annotated with memos to add significance to ideas that emerged around the phenomena. Any pre-understandings were documented on the reflexive diary prior to this stage; however, during the immersion stage, both my horizon and that of the participant were merged into tentative interpretations.

Stage 2: Understanding. As noted in chapter 3, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the text, MAXQDA was used to investigate every line of dialogue including the reflexive diary and the transition elements on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) when provided. The purpose was to capture the horizons of each participant in their own words/phrases by codes (see Appendix H).

Stage 3: Abstraction. MAXQDA was used to better organize the first set of codes (e.g., IEPs, Lived Experiences) into sub-themes. These sub-themes were abstractions of new meanings and interpretations constructed using theoretical perspectives to reexamine the texts (i.e., interview transcripts, IEP, reflexive diary).

Stage 4: Synthesis and Theme Development. At this stage, Gadamer suggests meshing the horizons by grouping themes and sub-themes. From there, themes are elaborated on, relating them to the phenomena as a whole (as seen in chapter 4). This movement from interpreting parts of a text back to the whole is an attempt at expanding the meaning of the parts in the event they are still being guided by pre-understandings (Gadamer et al., 2004).

Stage 5: Illumination and Illustration of Phenomena. During this stage, literature was linked to the themes and subthemes identified from the entire data set. Their experiences were then constructed into narratives detailed in chapter 5.

Stage 6: Integration and Critique. Integration calls for the fusion of horizons, but in order to do so, the Gadamerian researcher must critique the themes as related (or not related) to the literature.

Step Five: Establishing Trustworthiness

Cohen et al. (2000) notes that, "hermeneutic phenomenology is research into how people go about understanding the world in which they live" (p. 6). To that end, Gadamer (1989) notes that hermeneutical phenomenology is meant to investigate and interpret the interactions and overlapping horizons between researcher and participant accomplished through trustworthiness, or accuracy of those interpretations (Gadamer et al., 2004). While this tenet was originally situated in nursing research, the importance of trustworthiness in both educational and juvenile research is also important. I moved back and forth and in and out of the hermeneutic circle (Figure 3) to ensure that the research questions, literature, data collection, and data analysis were in constant harmony while relying on member checking, reflexivity, and direct quotations to give both the reader and participant validation in the data.

Participants

I interviewed two non-adjudicated Black males with high-incidence disabilities currently placed at a regional alternative school whose home schools were from one school district (see Table 1). My original goal was to connect with parents directly, face to face, or via phone, in seeking permission. I felt it was important for parents to *see* me first as a Black male educator versus a researcher. Connecting in person would help accomplish this in a way the consent and recruitment materials could not. I also wanted to explain the goals of the study and answer any questions in laypersons terms. Unfortunately, despite IRB approval, administrative personnel from the participants' school district preferred to make this initial contact. Additionally, consent to view the IEP would have to come at a later time and through a different consent form once permission to interview had been granted.

This led to a lengthy recruitment process spanning nearly five months with parents that did not include me until data collection (see Table 4). I first shared recruitment materials with the district personnel who oversaw research, but was granted permission to contact principals and case managers directly when permission forms were not returned after two months. After winter break, and another month of not receiving any signed permission forms, I was granted permission to go through the alternative school personnel in attempting to get forms returned. Over the next two months, an eligible student was dropped from the alternative school due to attendance, another eligible student was opted out of the study by his guardian, and another two students were not included in the study due to the permission forms never being retuned. Eventually, signed parental permission forms for two participants were returned to the alternative school, granting me permission to meet with the participants in-person.

The two participants, as summarized below, received information on how the interview would be conducted in-person through an additional individual visit from me. Informed consent was also provided at this time which included information on how data would be collected, managed, and stored (see Appendix B). Two pseudonyms were developed for the participants at the conclusion of the study to best capture the idea that these students are "of potential," rather than "at risk."

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant Numeric Transcription Code	Participant Pseudonym	Year in School	Disability
001	Prosper	12th Grade	High-Incidence Disability: UNKNOWN
002	Kadir (Arabic for competent, capable)	12th Grade	Primary: Other Health Impairment – ADHD; Secondary: Learning Disability – Basic Reading Skills & Fluency

Setting

I originally sought research participants from both a juvenile detention center and a regional alternative school. I felt that selecting adjudicated participants in a juvenile detention center was optimal as participants would have had additional transition planning processes in place as required by law, and this was the most predominate placement in the literature. However, due to the slow transfer of records, personnel at the juvenile detention center could not verify if anyone met the criteria. In the end, a regional alternative school in Illinois which serves multiple school districts in the area became the setting for this dissertation study (see Table 6).

Criterion sampling was used to recruit participants. In order to be eligible for the study, the participant needed to be a high-school Black male with a high-incidence disability and currently placed in an alternative setting such as an alternative school or a juvenile detention center, if this change of placement happened during the study. Over a period of five months, six

Black males across two school districts, all residing in one regional alternative school, were identified as possible participants. Given the length of the recruitment period (i.e., nineteen weeks), I kept information on the students who were sent recruitment materials as described by the alternative school principal, as summarized below.

Table 2: Recruitment & Retention

Information Known Prior to Permission and Consent

Student's Home District	Status by April 1, 2023
District A	Withdrawn from regional alternative school
District B	Parent opted out of participation
District B	Withdrawn from regional alternative school
District B	Parent never returned permission form
District B	Permission and consent obtained; interviewed
District B	Permission and consent obtained; interviewed

Research Design

This dissertation study posits that there is a lack of student involvement and engagement in the transition process which may be exacerbated by biases based upon race and/or gender. Therefore, I examined the lived experiences of non-adjudicated high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities currently placed in alternative settings to uncover multiple perspectives surrounding this theory of awareness and inclusion in the transition planning development and implementation. While my sample was homogenous, their lived experiences surrounding the transition planning process were not. As such, the meanings they assigned to transition planning were vast and unique. To understand these meanings, I needed to embrace multiple realities while collecting detailed evidence to report themes among these different perspectives with the goal of building knowledge, a goal best met through qualitative research (Tarozzi, 2022). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as a "situated activity that

locates the observer in the world of the participant" with a goal of interpreting phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Further, phenomenology best addressed my research questions (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Phenomenology inherently rejects the positivist approach, and rather seeks to describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon, including what they experienced and how they experienced it in order to convey an overall essence of the experience, or commonalities among the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Specifically, hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology focuses on producing rich, textual descriptions of a phenomena in order to clarify meaning (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Alsaigh & Coyne (2021) provide a model; the steps along with my procedures are summarized below.

Deciding Upon a Research Question

Black males with high-incidence disabilities are especially susceptible to the school-to-prison pipeline; continually adjudicated at disproportionate rates and tend to recidivate, despite laws, policies, and practices in place to protect them. When constructing my research questions, I pondered whether stakeholders (i.e., school and juvenile justice personnel) were meeting the needs of this population. Thus, findings from my questions inform stakeholders on tangible ways disrupt the pipeline.

Identification of Pre-Understandings

From the literature review, it was clear that (a) person-centered transition planning interventions were being explored as a way to empower incarcerated juveniles, (b) in some cases, parents and students were not aware of their transition plan or how it is developed and implemented, and (c) adjudicated youth felt that cultural and historical situations influenced their

adjudication and could continue to influence their reentry. However, there were limited studies that focused on non-adjudicated and adjudicated youth with learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders with respect to the role race and gender played in their lived experiences.

This step also calls for the researcher to examine their own prejudices and pre-understandings underpinning the study. In my case, my professional experiences as a case manager implementing transition plans and my personal experiences as a Black male were a point of reflection throughout the process via regular communication with my dissertation committee and a reflection so that I could better situate myself in the phenomena before me; those understandings were included in the final report (see Appendix I; Mortari, 2015; Valandra, 2012).

Gaining Understanding Through Dialogue with Participants

As alluded to earlier, gaining understanding is essential to hermeneutic phenomenology. In that vein, in addition to the procedure outlined by Alsaigh & Coyne (2021), I used bracketing prior to and during the interview process. Husserl (2001) describes bracketing as a conscious, intentional process where the researcher abandons their own lived reality (e.g., horizons), prior knowledge, and biases (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology calls for gaining understanding vs. simply gaining data (Gadamer et al., 2004). As such, I acted as an active research instrument, expanding my horizons to understand the vantage points of my participants. Again, the reflexive diary kept during data collection, analysis, and the write-up of findings was essential in accomplishing this (see Appendix I).

Data Collection

I used semi-structured interviews with an alternative educational placement in Illinois as a research site. One IEP document was also examined for one of the two participants for whom this documentation could be obtained. My complete data collection timeline is summarized below:

Table 3: Data Collection Timeline

Date	Mode	Action
March 1, 2023	In-Person	The interview for Prosper was conducted.
March 22, 2023	In-Person	The interview for Kadir was conducted.
April 10, 2023	Email	Member checking was conducted.
April 13, 2023	Email	Both participants agreed with preliminary themes and interview transcripts. Permission to review IEPs was requested.
April 18, 2023	Email	Permission to review IEP for Kadir was returned.
April 24, 2023	Email/Phone	Kadir's IEP was obtained. A follow-up phone-call for permission to review the IEP for Prosper was made.
May 13, 2023	In-Person	A follow-up visit to the school to send home a new permission letter to review the IEP for Prosper was delivered.
May 17, 2023	Email	Permission to review IEP for Prosper had still not been returned, and is unlikely with graduation approaching.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C) were broad enough to capture the individual lived experiences of participants, but guided to help focus on my transition planning research questions. Additionally, these questions were tested on an incarcerated Black male with a high-incidence disability for possible revisions prior to starting the interviews (see Appendix A). In-person interviews allowed me to enhance communication in a natural setting. I noted and described body language in my reflexive diary while audio recording live sessions (see Appendix I). Interviews were conducted in-person at the alternative school during their morning block of school since both participants were released for work in the afternoon. On average, the

interviews lasted an hour. An interview guide was used to help keep both the researcher and participant on track (see Appendix C). The interview guide was there to help draw on similarities across the participants. However, as expected, new interview questions organically emerged as the interviews went on as reflected in the transcriptions. I utilized Roulston & Halpin (2022) to formulate phrased designed for elaboration, including but not limited to: "You mentioned ___, tell me more about that," "What happened then?" and "Can you describe what that felt like?"

IEP Document Review

Permission to view the IEP was only granted for one participant, Kadir. The permission was obtained after the interview had been conducted, and after analysis had begun. However, the analytical framework allowed me to use notes from the interview (as documented in the reflexive diary), and the interview transcript to triangulate some of the interpretations from Kadir's responses. The IEP was analyzed in its entirety, and pertinent information from the transition plan pages, IEP goal pages, present levels of performance pages, notification of conference pages, and additional notes pages were included in the IEP document review (see Appendix F). The IEP was reviewed twice. For the first review, I kept note of words, phrases, and information related directly to the research questions (i.e., descriptions of transition planning, involvement in transition planning, lived experiences) by hand. For the second review, I coded within MAXQDA based upon the established themes detailed in Chapter 4 (i.e., experiences with IEPSs and disability, lived experiences with transition planning and identity) searching for keywords and phrases to assigned meaning to their experiences.

Data Analysis

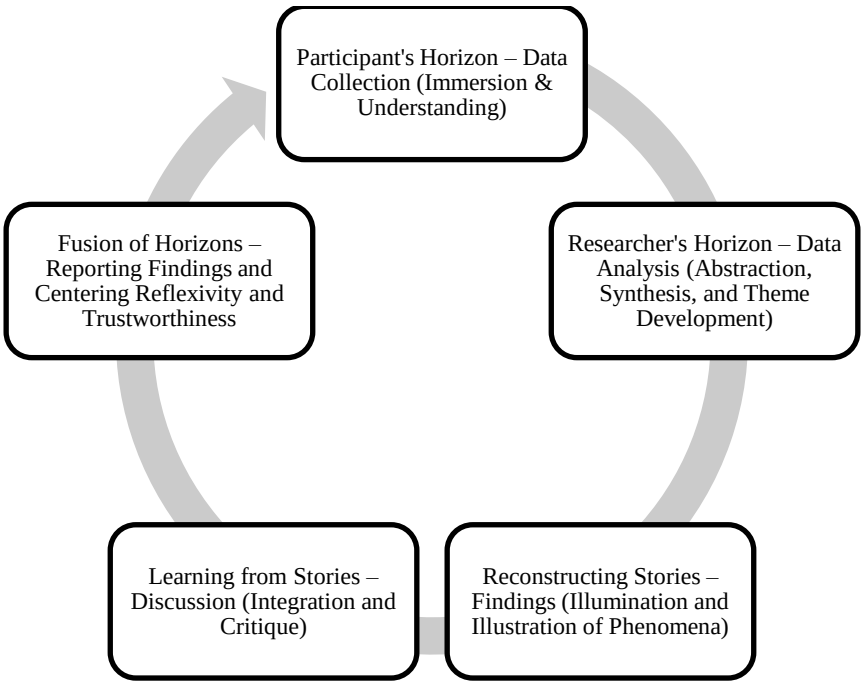
Gadamer called on hermeneutical researchers to remain open in their horizons, or looking past what is familiar, and then fusing those horizons with that of the participants in order to seek

meaning (Gadamer et al., 2004). As such, I sought to understand how my personal feelings and experiences could influence the research and then incorporated this understanding into the study by using a reflexive diary (see Appendix I). Valandra (2012) provided guidelines and a model for a reflexive diary specific to phenomenological research which was used in this dissertation study (Valandra, 2012). In addition to the diary, I relied on semi-structured interviews, memos, transcripts of interviews, a re-examination of the literature, and a review of one participant's IEPs to gain understanding in a six-stage framework: (1) immersion, (2) understanding, (3) abstraction, (4) synthesis and theme development, (5) illumination and illustration of phenomena, (6) integration, and critique (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021).

Using Alsaigh & Coyne (2021)'s framework allowed me to continuously collect data on a timeline that was otherwise out of my control (i.e., scheduling and rescheduling interviews, access to IEPs, receiving feedback from participants), and that I would be reflecting throughout the process. As such, I needed a model that would allow me to begin data analysis while additional data continued to come in. The six stages of interpretation were a continual process as new understandings emerged alongside new data. For example, a participant identifying parts of his disability or transition plan was integral to my analysis, and confirming whether his identification reflected what was on the IEP was also important. However, given the parameters that were set by the participants' home school district, I knew that I would not have access to the IEPs during the interview as I had originally intended. Thus, not only did my horizons need to remain open once I received consent to view the IEPs, but the horizons of the participants needed to remain open as well once final member checking was initiated. In sum, interpreting the data was a continual cycle. A visual of the complete interpretation cycle can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Analytical Framework: Gadamerian Hermeneutic Circle of Data Interpretation



To ensure consistency, my transcription of interviews was guided by a protocol (see Appendix E).

Gaining Understanding Through Dialogue with Text

During immersion, I repeatedly listened to the interviews as transcribed by Otter.ai, and again while editing the transcripts for accuracy to include my field notes (see Appendix G). Next, I repeatedly listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts, continuing to tag moments of significance in MAXQDA. This repetition was important in order to ensure every interaction with the text was based on the participants horizons, not my pre-understandings. Hycner (1985) suggested listening to the interview for a sense of the whole as a guideline for phenomenological research listening to the non-verbal and para-linguistic levels of communication including intonations, emphases, and pauses (Hycner, 1985). Valandra (2012) provided an excellent model and example of analyzing non-verbal and para-linguistic

communication through the use of reflexive journal during interviews and during data analysis (Valandra, 2012). During the understanding stage, I coded the participants' ideas by deeply examining their words and phrases that provided understanding of their lived experiences. During abstraction, I began to examine relationships between codes to identify themes. I used my pre-understandings, theoretical perspectives, and horizons to investigate additional themes while reviewing IEPs and the transcripts to develop preliminary themes from the coding schemes. Next, themes were synthesized and developed into larger themes (e.g., synthesis and theme development), linked to the literature (e.g., illumination and illustration of phenomena), and finally, findings were recorded (e.g., integration and critique). The themes were finalized with respect to the research questions and the literature links are summarized in Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9.

Trustworthiness

It was important that lived experiences were examined and reported as closely as possible to how they were actually lived by the participant. Therefore, in order to establish trustworthiness, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) note the importance of reflexivity as an integral component in amplifying integrity and credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using a reflexive diary provided me that opportunity (see Appendix I). I used Valandra (2012) as a guide for reflexive questioning: "What do I already know about this topic? How do I know what I know? How have my personal and professional experiences shaped what I know? What assumptions, biases, attitudes and beliefs shape my construction of this idea? What am I passionate about regarding this topic/idea? How are my life experiences shaping the design of this study? (Valandra, 2012)." Additionally, meeting the two participants in their school was intentional in order to reduce the insider/outsider distance formed between the researcher and participant

(Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022). It was during this time that I was able to explain the process of centering the participants' voices through member checking (i.e., transcript review, review of themes) while also communicating their role in the dissertation study as a whole. This gave me an opportunity to answer any questions in the event that parents had not gotten a chance to discuss the study with them, given that I was not able to discuss it with them myself. Upon completion of the interviews, transcription of the interviews, and preliminary findings of themes, member checking was conducted with both participants (see Appendix D). Both participants replied that they agreed with the transcriptions, preliminary findings, and final findings.

Data Management

Creswell & Poth (2018) note that phenomenological research is built upon finding meaning and commonalities among significant statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, in order to best capture these statements and meanings, I voice recorded and transcribed each interview by hand with support from Otter.ai. MAXQDA was used to organize and code data (see the codebook in Appendix H). All data was stored within MAXQDA, and backed up on a cloud drive using alphanumeric coding.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The findings presented below are an examination of the horizons of both the participants and the researchers organized by themes emerging from the hermeneutical interpretative analysis of the interviews, IEPs, and reflexive diary (see Figure 3). While transition planning was the core focus of this dissertation study, two primary themes (i.e., Experience with IEPs/Disability, and Lived Experiences) emerged while participants conceptualized what transition planning meant to them. Within those themes, two secondary themes with respect to experience with IEPs and/or disability (i.e., Disability Identification, Recollection of IEP Meetings) emerged after repeatedly examining transcripts and the reflexive diary. Likewise, three secondary themes with respect to lived experiences (i.e., Experiences with Alternative School, Perceptions and Experiences with Transition Planning, and Perceptions of Identity) emerged as well. Those findings are reported below. A matrix of the themes in respect to the research questions have been presented at the end of the report (see Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9).

Experience with IEPs and Disability

Two themes emerged surrounding the participants' transition planning experiences with IEPs and their disability. In order for the participants to describe their involvement in transition planning, it was important that I first gather information on (a) their disability identification, and (b) details surrounding their last IEP meeting. During the interviews, the participants were able to identify their disability, or at least identify aspects of their disability (or identity), they recognized impeded their everyday lives. They also associated the identification of their disability (i.e., learning disability) with IEP meetings and transition planning and were very descriptive in their recollections of those interactions.

I Ain't Never Really Know: Disability Identification & Understanding

Both participants were asked if they could identify the reason they received IEP services. For Prosper, the term, "IEP services" seemed to be confusing as evident by memos and the reflexive diary that noted a nervous laugh from the participant as he shifted from a slouch to an upright position in this seat, when saying, "Like…what that mean?" This was followed by a frown when saying "So, yeah, I don't know," to the follow up clarifying question that asked what his disability was. Shortly after, with additional clarification and elaboration probes, Prosper reported a possible learning disability and a speech/language disorder or speech/language related services, but could not articulate the nature of his learning disability, as evident by, "Ain't it like, for the learning (2.0) like. I don't know. I ain't never really know. Learning. I get speech." Permission to review the IEP documentation for Prosper was never returned; however, the participant did go on to mention the presence of a speech/language pathologist at his meeting again with, "…and then it's this one teacher, another teacher that comes for speech or something like that." Given that the participant was flagged as eligible for this dissertation study, I know that he has a high-incidence disability, but the specifics behind how that disability impacts his learning, and therefore his transition planning, is unclear. I attempted to provide additional probes to get the student to articulate more about the nature of his high-incidence disability, but those probes led to more uncertainty for myself as the researcher.

The continual mention of a speech therapist suggests that speech therapy has played a prominent role in Prosper's schooling. Additionally, Prosper mentions having conflicts with teachers at his home school and used the word, "bad" at first to describe himself. For example, "I was being bad, not being bad, but just, you know, if something messed with me, I would catch an

attitude." The participant uses the word "attitude" four times to describe himself, and once in the context of his last IEP meeting. While both participants describe students at the alternative school as "bad" before coming to the school, Prosper links his perceived attitude with that label of bad, and reflects that he does not get into trouble as much anymore while reflecting on his recent visit to the principal's office at the alternative school. His perception of what "bad" and "attitude" is, as informed by interacting with school professionals, could suggest a connection to numerous school-to-prison pipeline theories (i.e., differential treatment, labeling theory/implicit biases, school failure theory) or the presence of a functional behavioral assessment and a behavior intervention plan as well. However, without the IEP documentation, I am unable to confirm whether these were ever conducted.

Conversely, Kadir was able to respond to the question, "What do you receive IEP services for?" without any probing. He replies, "Like, specific learning disorder. Like, for reading or whatever. I can't comprehend what I read that well." Review of his IEP documentation found that he is correct. He does receive services for a learning disability in basic readings skills, and reading fluency as a secondary eligibility. When asked directly about transition planning moments with adults, the participant noted that, "And I can't really understand what I read like that," in reference to areas he would like to improve in before leaning into certain career paths. So, it would appear that the participant has reflected deeply on how integral his learning disability is in transitioning out of high school. However, most of the documentation shows how his primary diagnosis of other health impairment (OHI: ADHD) has impeded his academic progress over the years. Interestingly, no mention of OHI nor ADHD was ever articulated or hinted at from the participant during the interview, despite its prevalence in the IEP.

Still, Kadir confidently, and routinely mentioned his academic deficits and how conversations around his IEP shaped his understanding of those deficits, and his career goals. He states, "…So like, nursing and stuff like that, you got to understand measurements of milliliters and stuff like that. And I'm not good at that stuff." According to my memo from this portion of the interview, he shrugs his shoulder almost as to say, "oh well," when mentioning taking nursing off of his transition plan due to the emphasis on math. Again, contrary to the IEP documentation though, he had nothing to say about how his ADHD impacted his learning or transition plan. This IEP provides context on how ADHD has impacted Kadir's independent functioning (i.e., absences, low self-advocacy, time on task), and in turn, his academic progress (i.e., loss of credits), which ultimately resulted in his placement at the alternative school (see Appendix F). Additionally, while the participant feels like he is needing more support in math, this feeling is in disharmony with the IEP that only lists deficits in reading skills and fluency.

Didn't Really Know What I Was Talking About: Recollection of IEP Meetings

Awareness of the IEP and IEP meetings was also explored through a series of questions. Prosper reflected on the IEP meeting that placed him here in the spring of 2022, and at least one recent meeting due to a conflict with a teacher at the alternative school. He recalls being asked about his plans after high school back at the initial meeting that placed him at the alternative school in the spring of 2022; however, at the time he reported not having any concrete goals for life after high school, and being unable to articulate them at this meeting. For his most recent meeting, he recalls, "We was talking about my graduation and stuff, my graduation (pause) and you know, how I'm doing like, you know, like doing better with my (pause) my attitude, from like, my old school and stuff. That's what she was talking about." He also recalls who was at the meeting when asked about who "she" was referring to. "She's someone, like my case (manager),

that comes and make sure I'm going alright, and then it's this one teacher, another teacher that comes for speech or something like that." The recollection of his case manager and speech therapist suggests that they are key members, possibly reoccurring members, of the IEP team that help him recognize those as formal IEP meetings. He mentions additional meetings after pointing to the main office during our interview. When asked probing questions, he elaborated that these were due to "confrontations with teachers," and states that, "I had (pause) had incidents with a teacher, because I came too late, and then (pause) you can't like -- around in here -- you can't walk around. And I went to the other side, and then, that's what happened, and then we had to have a meeting about what happened, about me being mad, and going to the other side." In this participant's case, while the IEP meetings were coming from a place of support, he did leave those meetings holding onto the fact that he is perceived as having an attitude, or at the very least, that he was in trouble – despite him willingly coming to the regional alternative school to escape that feeling.

When asked about his last IEP meeting, Kadir responded with, "So, my last IEP meeting, it was alright. There was just a lot of silence. And well, my dad wasn't there. So, I had to answer most of it. And didn't really know what I was talking about. Just knew it was about me and how I was doing in class. And I guess I was doing all right. But I thought I could do better somewhere else." IEP documentation confirms that his dad was not there, but his mom was. The participant describes the pressure of having to answer questions he was not confident in addressing, and in the same breath describes himself as quiet, which suggests discomfort in this meeting. I probed to get a better understanding of where this discomfort was coming from, and he responded with the phrase, "didn't really know what I was talking about" while sinking into his chair, suggesting that this sense of discomfort has stuck with him. When asked clarifying questions regarding

transition topics at this meeting, he states, “I think it was connected to my IEP, because they've been trying to help me find out what I think it's best for me as well. Because I'll give them ideas about what I want to do.” The IEP also reflects this, with documentation of a transition survey being conducted prior to his last meeting, the invitation of several stakeholders in transition (i.e., job coach, work program advocate, the Department of Rehabilitation Services) and evidence that the topic of transition came up at the meeting as well (see Appendix F).

Lived Experiences

While both participants struggled to articulate their disability as legally defined by IDEIA, both participants were able to describe their IEP meetings with greater detail including who was present at the meetings, what happened prior and during the meetings, and when and where those meetings happened. While doing so, key themes regarding their lived experiences emerged as well including: the perceptions and experiences with alternative school, the perceptions and experiences with transition planning, and the perceptions of identity.

I Thought Alternative Was Different: Perceptions and Experiences with Alternative School

Prosper discusses their initial reactions to being placed in alternative school and how it differs from their initial expectations. He smiles, chuckles, sits up in his seat, and says, “I was mad. I was mad, cuz I really thought alternative was like different. I really thought it was like you go, and then it be like (pause) you know it was bad. I thought it was like a different type of school, but it’s not that bad. So (sighs), I don’t really care about that anymore. Like it’s not bad. Like, I thought, I thought it was gonna be bad you know. The students were gonna be bad, the teachers, but it’s a good school.” He goes on to describe feeling welcomed and being held accountable, while also giving feedback on the behavior expectations and the way the school day is structured compared to his home school. “I’d still like to go to a regular high school, just for

the experience (pause) I be in one little room, one little room (laughs). But yeah, that's how I feel. I would've taken it serious." He later states that while he feels like he's missing out on the traditional school experiences, he still feels that this alternative school is the best place for him.

Likewise, Kadir discussed similar initial reactions of being place in alternative school. He was nervous about fitting in, as he prefers to keep to himself. He also did not want the label of "bad kid" to follow him around, as he did not identify as one. "I felt, well, I was excited. But I was also really nervous at the same time, because I didn't know how people were going to perceive me. I know. I knew that I wasn't gonna fit in as well. And that made me scared (pause) people here (pause) you don't know like alternative schools are known for bad people. But I'm not like that. I don't have felonies and stuff. So that just made me a little bit nervous." When asked to elaborate, he adds, "So, I felt like the people here were gonna judge and because I'm not like (pause), I'm a quiet kid. I stick to myself, and I don't like to get into trouble like that so…" Just like with Prosper, he was pleasantly surprised at the level of support and welcoming environment. He too has valued the expectations and school structure that has allowed him to work within the typical school day schedule.

Both participants' experiences were vastly different from their perceptions of what it was going to be. In fact, in revealing my bias, I too had preconceptions on what I believed an alternative school is, and who they serve. So, the principals adamant efforts to get me to tour the school prior to starting the study were essential in expanding my horizons. During the tour, the interactions were very pleasant, welcoming, and warm, mirroring the experiences of the two participants. An excerpt from my reflexive diary reads, "I really did appreciate the tour, the history, and the background on what this school offers not only our kids, but our community. My perceptions about the school were incorrect."

Moving to the Next Thing: Perceptions and Experiences with Transition Planning

After I explained what a transition plan is, I asked the participants if they are aware that they have one. The participants were unaware of this even after an explanation of what a transition plan is. However, with redirection and elaboration probes, participants were able to come up with a simpler, workable definition of transition, and seemed pleased that we were discussing life after graduation. Prosper described transition as "moving to the next thing," while Kadir described transition as "next steps, like moving on up to a better me, …on to different points in life." Additionally, by the end, they were both able to articulate prior conversations and involvement surrounding transition planning, and personal goals surrounding transition in general. Both participants have a strong interest in employment, but neither has concrete plans. Now, as seniors, they are clear on wanting to continue on into the workforce. Additionally, they each express a need for more support in finalizing the pathway to larger, fruitful workforce goals which could include a post-secondary education.

When questioned about Prosper's definition of transition as "moving to the next thing," he eventually was able to reflect on being given a transition interview or survey, and expresses a need for support in finding a job. "Like a good paying job. I was thinking about going to a community college but (pause; slouches down in seat), but that's what I've been telling them, a community college. Because I've been trying to get a job. You know, I was thinking construction, but I don't think I need to go to college for that." It seems that the participant knows that construction is potentially a lucrative career pathway, but is hesitant to state an intention of attending of attending community college. I asked him some additional probing questions (i.e., did he have enough information on it from his last meeting) to get at the heart of why his body language changed at the mention of community college. He stated, "No, it wasn't

like more questions. But I just be hearing it, but I don't actually move on it. But I just let it be. If that makes sense. Like I don't be asking the questions that I need." In other words, Prosper ended his last IEP meeting with many unanswered questions. This suggests that perhaps he is receiving too much information at these meetings, or that there is not enough time built in to seek the clarification needed prior to the end of the meeting. I wondered if Prosper not "moving on" questions was due to the meeting moving too fast, or if the content was not packaged in a digestible way. I was curious about these ponderings on my next line of questioning.

When asked what he thought should absolutely be on his transition plan, he states, "I would want to talk to someone from community college. Try to get into that. Because I need a good job, and I know community college gon do it. Scholarships. So yeah. Somebody to talk to about community college, a construction site or something. That's what I would want on there." Prosper sits up in his seat when I mention the word construction three times. Additionally, the participant connected a good job to college, but also alluded to a barrier regarding attending college at the mention of scholarships. When saying, "scholarships," there is a shift down in tone, and his shoulders slumped as if scholarships are a bad thing. His reaction to the word "scholarship" suggests that he may be associating scholarships with the daunting task of financing college, or maybe mistook scholarships for loans, suggesting a need for more education on financing college. It is clear that Prosper has pondered a future in construction, but still has unanswered questions, and needs meaningful experiences centering around those questions.

Kadir is able to articulate his own definition of a transition plan, despite not being aware he has one. "Transition plan. Like when I think about a transition plan, I think about the next steps, like moving on up to a better me I believe, and like on to different points in your life."

When asked to describe what he thought should be on his transition plan, he stated, “So like, I want to go to culinary school, and I want to start my own business, I want to start my own bakery. It's going to be an infused bakery. But I want to get started with that. And then after that, like, work my way into the acting industry. Just go from there.” He goes onto to mention that he has also wanted to be a counselor in the past, and that his case manager always asks him about his career plans. When Kadir was asked to elaborate on if he had enough support to reach his future career goals, he shared that he is more focused on the task at hand (i.e., getting his credits and graduating), rather than thinking ahead to the future.

After reviewing his IEP, it is clear that the case manager has played a huge role in shaping the contents of the transition plan in a student-centered way (see Appendix F). Each career mentioned in our interview (i.e., acting, nursing, culinary) is also documented on the transition plan, with the exception of being a guidance counselor. However, given that the participant took this off of the table during the interview, it makes sense that it would not be on the IEP either. Beyond accurate documentation of transition goals on the transition plan, the case manager also has numerous supports in place to help Kadir gain valuable work experience (i.e., two vocational classes, a job coach, and support in working at a local gas station). At the time of the last meeting, Kadir was going on year two of being enrolled in vocational classes offered at his home school, which helps students get onsite work experience outside of the classroom. As such, both vocational classes have a strict attendance requirement for not only the class, but the job they help place students in too. Kadir had been struggling with attendance in both of these areas which had affected his grade in the work experience class, and his vocational class – both classes aimed at graduating students who are ready to enter the workforce.

Given that this was year two of attendance being a problem, an additional support, a functional and transition goal, was crafted to support Kadir's areas for improvement at work. The IEP states that, "Given a training site, Kadir will make progress in the areas of communication and work habits on 2 out of 4 quarterly evaluations." Additional notes from the goal state that the participant is approaching the threshold of absences for being let go of the job that was arranged through the vocational class. While Kadir's communication with the manager has improved in consistency and frequency resulting in an increase in attendance at work, this communication is being initiated by the manager, and not the student. Additionally, at the time of the IEP meeting, it was noted that the participant felt it would be easier to get a different job. The IEP team noted a history of jumping from job to job, and encouraged the participant that seeing this job through was not only more socially appropriate, but more beneficial for his goals of owning a business someday. Parents have also been essential in shaping the transition experiences for Kadir. The IEP documentation notes that parents were given a transition survey, and also see their son going into nursing, a shared goal, or being a chef, which is in tune with his goal of going to culinary school. They too, like the case manager, would like to see him improve on being on time, being patient, and being on task as transferable work habits, but were also concerned about the loss of so many academic credits. In the end, the IEP team, with Kadir at the center, decided alternative school would be ideal for credit recovery, and would provide additional transition opportunities and supports.

It's All About Opportunity: Perceptions of Identity

This study posits that race, gender, and disability intersect to shape the educational lived experiences of Black males with high-incidence disabilities who are pushed out of their schools and placed in an alternate educational setting (i.e., alternative school, juvenile detention center).

However, while Prosper describes his experiences and disagreements with his former teachers from his home school with regret, he does not attribute those disagreements or placement at alternative school to his race, gender, or disability, but rather his maturity at the time. After he articulated his dreams and the hypothetical conversation surrounding that dream, I asked him, "Do you feel like if you would have had those sorts of conversations, freshman and sophomore year, you'd still be at your home school?" I was trying to decipher whether having the goal, the goal that makes him sit up in his chair with a smile, back then would have made his home school experiences different. He stated, "No, it's two different things because like, I was being bad, not being bad, but just, you know, if something messed with me, I would catch an attitude." He continued to expresses hesitancy in wanting to go back. "I ain't gonna lie, imma stay here. Because I heard a lot, like a lot of people go back, and it'd be the same thing over and over. Because they be on you more, because you came back from alternative school. So, I might as well stay here because I'm getting my classes done quicker."

He adds, "I don't know. First of all, I thought I was going back to (redacted) [my home school] but, the first meeting was like a uhm (pause), like a, if you doing good, you know, you'll probably transfer back, but I'm doing good here, you know, getting my credits and stuff." Notes from my tour provide more context. The goal of the alternative school is to reunite students with their home school as soon as possible. So, the fact that this is year two of Prosper's placement at the school, despite making great progress, suggests that he or his parent/guardian continually advocated for this placement at the annual IEP meeting. His perception that alternative school was a bad place at first has completely shifted to new fears of returning to his home-school, and being treated differently from simply having attended the alternative school. His comments also suggest that he stays in contact with people who do ultimately return, or has seen it happen

himself prior to coming here. This also shows a lived experience of a school-to-prison pipeline theory (i.e., differential treatment). So, while he may not have attached his status as a Black male with a high-incidence disability to his lived experiences, these comments suggest his new identity as a productive student at alternative school seems stronger than his old identity as a "bad" kid with an "attitude" at his home school.

Similarly, Kadir has also leaned into his identity as a student at alternative school vs. other identifiers such as race or gender. When asks why he feels that none of those identifiers played a role in his placement he states, "Because I feel like they gave everybody an equal opportunity because I've had multiple friends talk about how they had the opportunity to come here and stuff like that to get caught up. But they didn't take the chance, because what they perceive about alternative school is bad, but it's not like that." His successful experiences at the alternative school has helped him reframe alternative school as an opportunity, positioning him as an advocate for the school, despite the literature suggesting a correlation between pushout and delinquency, something he once feared. Additionally, I want to make note that he too mentioned peers from his home school warning him about coming to the regional alternative school from his home school which helped shape his perception of what alternative school was; however, he now reflects that his opportunities for success at the alternative school have been greater than that of his peers outside of the school. When probed, Kadir goes on to describe that he is recovering lost credits faster in the alternative school setting, and likes the structure that is being provided. Like Prosper, this is a shift from his earlier fears that alternative school was not going to be a pleasant, welcoming, or safe experience.

While both participants are Black, only one participant, Prosper, remotely mentions race when asked if he felt like his gender, race, or disability played a role in his transition planning.

He states, “Like being a Black male? I don’t know. I be saying that but at the same time, I don’t think so, because everybody, there’s a lot here, but I don’t think so. I don’t think that’s ever been a problem. There’s a lot of Blacks here, but I can’t really pinpoint that, because there’s other Black kids who have it worse, but you know, no, I don’t think it’s that.” It would seem that the participant is beginning to assign meaning to the overrepresentation of Black males at the alternative school, and how that relates to his experiences at alternative school, but isn’t quite ready to dive into those experiences or meanings.

Additionally, while both participants have a high-incidence disability, only one participant, Kadir, seems to reflect on how his disability is linked to his transition planning experiences. Prosper mentions that he *may* have a learning disability in the beginning of the interview, but never revisits how that disability, directly or indirectly, influenced his experiences at his home school, alternative school, or his transition experiences. On the other hand, Kadir mentions how his deficits in reading may prevent him from his future career goals in nursing, and even includes perceived deficits in math as a possible future barrier. In looking at the IEP, those concerns are documented there as well. The participant has expressed his frustration with reading at prior IEP meetings and/or conversations with his case manager. He notes that he is frustrated on how he “sounds like a robot” when reading aloud, the difficulties in transferring what he is reading to the appropriate sound out loud, and that he is frustrated that he is not getting better after “working on skills since 2nd grade.” These areas for improvement have stayed with Kadir for nearly a decade, to the point that his reading ability is front and center when conceptualizing his future. This suggests that perhaps a more strength-based approach to IEP data collection, IEP implementation, and transition planning could help empower students with

high-incidence disabilities to see the interventions that school professionals use as good, not as shameful.

The findings presented in this section provide an analysis of the participants' experiences and perceptions related to transition planning, with a specific focus on their experiences with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and their disabilities. The participants varied in their ability to articulate their high-incidence disabilities, with Prosper struggling to define his learning disability at first, while Kadir confidently identified his secondary disability of specific learning disorder. Both participants recalled their IEP meetings, highlighting the presence of certain professionals and discussing topics related to their transition planning. Additionally, both participants initially held negative perceptions of alternative school but later found it to be a positive and supportive environment. They also discussed their understanding of transition planning and expressed a need for more support in achieving their career goals. In terms of identity, Prosper did not attribute his placement at the alternative school or his transition planning experiences to his race, gender, or disability; likewise, Kadir emphasized the equal opportunities provided at the alternative school and his successful experiences there. These findings shed light on the participants' perspectives surrounding identity, alternative school, transition planning while also highlighting the importance of support and clear communication in the transition planning process which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to better inform researchers and practitioners on best practices to ensure that their transition planning practices are person-centered and culturally responsive. This chapter begins with a reflection on how this investigation's findings compare to the literature base. Next, a discussion is detailed and organized into three main issues: (a) IEP education, (b) transition education, and (c) alternative school education. This chapter concludes with a description of implications for research and practice, as well as limitations.

Reflection on the Literature

The literature points towards many barriers to transition planning for at-risk non-adjudicated youth, and adjudicated youth face including: barriers within the educational institutions, societal barriers, and systemic barriers, as well as knowledge and perceptions of disability serving as a barrier (Fader, 2008, Hosp et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2021; Mathur et al, 2020; Schroeder et al., 2004). The literature painted a stark reality for both adjudicated and non-adjudicated Black males in alternative placements, whether that placement be at juvenile detention centers, alternative schools, or a recent exit from incarceration. Overall, the literature points to a sense of hopelessness among those adjudicated or at risk for adjudication, different from the hope I saw in the two young men I interviewed. Still, while a majority of the reviewed studies centered on adjudicated males, and while the setting for a majority of the reviewed studies were juvenile detention centers, their findings in relation to this dissertation study are worth discussing.

Fader (2008) investigated the feelings Black male youth assign to their lives after being incarcerated through a three-year ethnographic study using observations and interviews once they had been released. The participants held similar worldview opinions of injustice that

Prosper was beginning to uncover, but overall, displayed a sense of hopelessness and pressure to fall back into old habits, unlike both of the participants in my dissertation study (Fader, 2008). In other words, Prosper noted that there were "a lot of Blacks" at his alternative school, but viewed his placement as an opportunity for himself and others. This suggests that the experiences of those at alternative school may be vastly different depending on their history with incarceration. Fader (2008) found that many young men felt like their arrest was an attack on their culture (Fader, 2008). In turn, they rejected the notion that the system was interested or effective in rehabilitating them. In Fader (2008), only one participant committed to change, and he still felt like he was conforming to the working man/good father myth, and that his identity was being stripped. These Black and Hispanic/Latinx men were very in tune with how their racial identity shaped their experiences when transitioning to and from their educational institutions. Conversely, the participants in my dissertation study had not assigned meaning to race and its role in their transition goals, career choices/pathways, or placement in alternative school. Additionally, they were also enthusiastic of the alternative school system and its role in supporting their education. These differences suggest that incarceration, something the participants of this dissertation had not experienced, shapes the worldviews of individuals negatively, in respect to the intersection of racial identity, society, and rehabilitation.

Similarly, Caldwell (2017) also interviewed two high school aged Black males who were enrolled in an alternative school after being adjudicated. While the two Black males from Caldwell (2017) had been adjudicated, their lived experiences surrounding transition planning had some similarities to the two Black males from this dissertation study. Family and kinship were important factors in reaching success after being adjudicated, as well as relationships to school personnel (Caldwell, 2017). In regards to family, IEP documentation for Kadir points to

an active presence of family at IEP meetings, and their active involvement in helping to shape his transition process. Both the student and parents have focused on areas of improvement to make before the student can fully lean into each career path as well as evident by the IEP documentation which collected feedback from the mom. Additionally, Kadir mentioned that he had to do a lot of talking at his last IEP meeting due to his dad's absence, which suggests that his dad is a strong advocate for his child during meetings. Likewise, for school personnel, interactions between both participants and the alternative school principal were warm and affirming which set the tone for our initial introductions led by the school principal, and eventually our interviews. The school principal was more than willing to send my recruitment materials to eligible families and persistent in resending them, or ensuring that they were returned (see Table 4). Of the six eligible students, one family never responded, but three families did with one not providing permission (see Table 3). It cannot be understated that family and school personnel involvement was essential in getting consent to begin this dissertation study in the first place.

When examining relationships, both Prosper and Kadir allude to the notion that they have stayed into contact with peers from either their home school or the alternative school. That influence from peers has helped keep them on track to graduate, and thriving in a place that they viewed as dangerous before. This outside influence was also mirrored in Caldwell (2017) which found that participants perceived that they were "othered" and were able to link their treatment throughout the judiciary process to other high-profile cases in the news. Prosper noted "othering" when reflecting on how he could be treated (i.e., differential treatment) if returning to his home school, and the pressure to conform to higher standards of compliance from teachers at his home-school if he we ever to return (Mathur et al, 2020; Schroeder et al.,

2004). For Prosper, this pressure was due to his perception of what a typical alternative school student is, rather than the criminalization of Black males often perpetuated in the news. It seems that, once adjudicated, Black youth are more likely to have a firmer grasp on how their racial identity is shaping their experiences and feelings, even beyond transition planning, while alternatively placed non-adjudicated Black youth are still unpacking aspects of their identity and the role that identity plays in their placement (Fader, 2008, Mathur et al., 2020).

Speaking of identity, I set out with hopes of including participants who had been adjudicated in order to investigate their transition planning lived experiences with respect to race, gender, disability, and/or the intersection of those identities. However, the barriers found in the literature (i.e., loss of records, slow transfer of records) were evident at the beginning of my study when approaching the superintendent of our local juvenile detention center (Kim et al., 2002). Still, interviewing non-adjudicated youth in alternative placements did yield some interesting findings in regards to disability identity. Hosp et al. (2001) found that adjudicated youth in their study were not aware of their IEP, disability, or transition services, which was mirrored in my two participants (Hosp et al., 2001). In that study, 17 students reported different goals in the interview than what was actually on their transition plans (Hosp et al., 2001). In this dissertation study, Kadir was confident in his diagnosis of learning disability, and even provided anecdotes of past struggles in reading at his last IEP meeting. Clearly, his self-identified and IEP verified struggles with reading is a core part of his identity. Similarly, Prosper's eventual certainty that he has a learning disability and sees a speech/language pathologist also suggests he views his disability as a core component of his identity.

Understanding IEP Supports

There is dissonance between the legal terminology stakeholders use to provide services to students with disabilities and their understanding of that terminology. The term "transition" can mean a multitude of things to students with disabilities, as can the term "transition plan." For example, when Prosper was asked about his last IEP meeting, he said, "Like when I was transitioning here?" Later on, when asked what he felt or thought when I used the phrase, "transition plan" in my introduction, he responded with confusion. "I don't know. I don't know. I just thought about transitioning." When asked to describe the meaning he assigns to the word, "transition," he responded with, "Moving right. Yeah, you know, like moving to the next thing. Transition." Afterwards, he was given the formal definition of transition plan, and asked if he was aware that he had one. He responded with no. As the interview went on, it was clear that he has had conversations rooted in transition planning; he even mentions not being ready for those types of conversations back then. Prosper's definition of "transition" is user friendly and meaningful to him, but his lack of awareness of whether a formal transition plan was in place for him suggests that those conversations surrounding transition are either not explicitly explained as transition planning, or the documentation has not been reviewed with him.

Kadir also describes transition planning in his own words with, "Transition plan. Like when I think about a transition plan, I think about the next steps, like moving on up to a better me I believe, and like on to different points in your life." When given the formal definition, and asked if he had one, he too responded with a no. In reviewing his IEP documentation, and the interview transcripts, he also has had conversations surrounding transition planning with his case manager, parents, employer, and his job coaches. The IEP provides evidence of these conversations being student-centered, by listing dates he was provided the transition survey,

first-person concerns that Kadir has for his future, and the IEP includes a transition goal. However, the fact that he is unaware of the actual transition plan attached to his IEP, also suggests that he either has not been shown his IEP in full, or he needs support in navigating the paperwork.

Beyond transition planning, the term "IEP services" also seemed to cause confusion. Both Prosper and Kadir felt confident in answering questions with terms that included "IEP," or "disability," but needed clarification on the term, "IEP services." They were able to find meaning when I provided synonyms; however, it is important to bridge the gap between the words students with disabilities use to describe their experiences and the words IDEIA has prescribed practitioners to use, which ultimately end up in research. Prosper has now graduated and has transitioned out of high school not fully grasping what he was receiving supports for, highlighting a missed opportunity for education on what the IEP is, does, and means. Likewise, Kadir's graduation is pushed back a semester, but like Prosper, has concrete career goals, with little direction on how to achieve them, despite the many numerous attempts of his home district in getting him work experience. This highlights a missed collaborative opportunity between the home school and the alternative school in ensuring the transition planning processes he began at his home school continued on into his years at the alternative school.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, participants were able to identify parts of their disability that resonate with them (i.e., deficits in reading or the presence of speech/language services) suggesting disability is a core part of their identity. Yet, there was an overall lack of awareness on what was on the IEP in regards to their diagnosis. It is excellent that both participants were able to articulate their personal struggles and goals to overcome them, but it is also important that every student, especially those susceptible to the school prison pipeline, be

able to navigate their IEP including knowing what their services, accommodations, and diagnoses mean in the context of their lives. This dissertation study suggests that the IEP is an abstract document for the student that only adults look at, despite it being student-centered, and student-driven. So, while it is great that the heart of Kadir's interview was documented on the IEP (i.e., transition planning experiences, disability identification, career goals), it is just as important that students understand how to navigate the IEP when transitioning out of K-12 schools.

Understanding Transition Planning

Similar to the terminology we use within the IEP, the terminology surrounding transition can also be confusing. Not only does the term "transition" mean something differently for adjudicated youth navigating juvenile detention centers and their home school (i.e., reentry), it also means something different for non-adjudicated youth (i.e., movement, graduation, employment, next steps). The two participants in this dissertation study describe transition planning as very individualized, and simply a set of steps for imagining a better life after the present. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this definition. However, it is hard to transfer student-centered transition hopes and dreams to a legal document that calls for very specific documentation (i.e., employment, training, education, independent living).

Landmark & Zhang (2013) illustrated the complexities of addressing best transition planning practices (i.e., student-centered and strength-based goals, work experience, inter-agency involvement, parental involvement) while also staying compliant with the transition requirements of IDEIA (Landmark & Zhang, 2013). They note that, "IDEIA requires that every transition service be considered on the IEP, even if it is determined that the transition service is not necessary for the student to reach his or her postsecondary goals. Transition services are to

be aligned with the student's postsecondary goals and are to be based on the student's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests" (p. 8). Despite these IDEIA requirements, Landmark & Zhang (2013) examined IEPs (n = 212) and found that less than half of the IEPs met transition timelines, less than half of the IEPs contained measurable post-secondary goals for education/training, employment, and independent living, and few IEPs contained annual measurable goals that connected to the transition plan (Landmark & Zhang, 2013).

In this dissertation study, Kadir's transition plan was complete, and his two transition goals were measurable, and compliant; however, he articulated his post-secondary plans in the interview in a way that cannot be quite captured on the IEP document. The joy Kadir had when reflecting on his current goals of opening up an infused bakery or becoming an actor translated to a bullet pointed transition goal of becoming a chef supported by a very detailed state standard and additional wordy benchmarks that may mean little to laypeople. Likewise, the other transition goal centers on Kadir overcoming his ADHD struggles in relation to his grades, attendance, and productivity at work using vocabulary such as "time on task" and "self-regulation" which may also be confusing to those outside of education. Additionally, while both goals were measurable, it was unclear what steps the IEP team had taken to help Kadir work towards those goals due to the absence of documented progress monitoring. So, while both participants could articulate what transition meant to them while reflecting on IEP meetings and conversations surrounding transition, it is important that students with disabilities understand transition beyond the experiences they have, but also as a legal set of services they are entitled to under IDEIA (IDEIA, 2004).

Alternative School Education

Both participants opted to come to alternative school, seeking a referral from their administrator to make the transition per the guidelines of the regional alternative school (see Table 6). They were not pushed out in the traditional sense; rather, they saw a change in placement as an opportunity to reach their transition goals of, at the time of the study, graduating. They even reflected on the move to alternative school as a transition in itself. This display of student advocacy and student agency from the two participants in this dissertation is interesting given the results from a statewide study of alternative schools in Illinois. Foley & Pang (2006) found referrals from the home school to be the most common pathway to alternative schools, with student choice towards the lower end of modes of enrollment (Foley & Pang, 2006). This can be explained with Carver & Lewis (2010) who found that only 40% of school districts have an alternative school where students are allowed to enroll voluntary through parent or student referral (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Although the alternative school in this dissertation study does not fall into that 40%, both participants were still able to find a route to alternative school through student voice, despite their initial confusion on what exactly "alternative school" was prior to coming.

Their confusion is likely due to the fact that the literature, practitioners, and pop culture paint alternative school as a punishment, a means for pushout, or a place to help transition adjudicated youth back to their home school. Due to the Safe Schools Act of Illinois in 1996, the regional alternative school in this dissertation study also has a program for students who have been adjudicated, incarcerated, expelled, or suspended, but they are intentional in marketing enrollment as a viable option for anyone too (see Table 6). Likewise, qualitative research that centers the voices of those attending alternative school finds alternative school to be a viable

option for youth, both non-adjudicated youth, and adjudicated youth, wanting smaller class sizes, and a better opportunity to engage with peers and teachers that sometimes their traditional school cannot provide (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Owens & Konkol, 2004).

The willingness and student advocacy in wanting to attend alternative school was mirrored in one of the focus groups from Owens & Konkol (2004) who also used the IEP meeting as a means to advocate in not returning to their traditional school. Again, they cited the closeness with school personnel as one of many reasons, including a better chance at graduating as with Farrelly & Daniels (2014), and those reasons are also mirrored in this dissertation study. The alternative school principal does not see his facility as a place where the "bad kids with felonies" come. He too is committed in seeing every student as unique, and he is invested in providing tailored instruction to meet not only their academic needs, but primarily their transition needs too, as evident by the built-in vocational program that helps students recover lost credits. The continual popular misunderstanding of what alternative school can offer for students susceptible to the school-to-prison pipeline highlights a missed opportunity for public education and alternative education to come together and unite the mission of serving kids, all kids, so that there is no fear when students wind up in an alternative school placement, whether it was their choice in the matter or not.

The process of joining a new school is always fraught with anxiety, however, both participants expressed unique fears of not fitting in based on perceptions they had about the students the alternative school served. They described students at the regional alternative school as kids with "felonies," a perception they may have received from peers or adults in their lives. After becoming a student at the alternative school, Prosper, expresses concerns about returning to his home school for the same perception he had once of a typical alterative school student. His

fear that he will be treated harsher by teachers simply because he is returning from the alternative school point to the idea that teachers outside of alternative school may need education on what it is that alternative schools do. Both educational institutions want the same thing. In fact, the alternative school may have helped Kadir in ways that his home district could not. After all, he is able to articulate his personal goals that include post-secondary education, and employment, as exactly documented on the IEP, while acknowledging that he was not ready for those conversations when first asked at his last IEP meeting.

Implications and Limitations

Implications for Research

Currently, research on the student perspectives of the transition planning process is limited. Additionally, a majority of the limited research focuses on youth who are already adjudicated, and in some cases, incarcerated. Only one study in my literature review noted the inclusion of non-adjudicated youth and their perspectives on transition planning, but even so, the researchers did not delineate that participant when reporting the demographics (Owens & Konkol, 2004). They did, however, acknowledge that youth come to alternative school for a variety of reasons including child protective services placing them there, foster care systems placing them there, or simply for credit recovery. We have no way of knowing if the three students with E/BD from Focus Group A (Owens & Konkol, 2004) who stayed at the alternative school have a history of adjudication, but that withheld information could be essential in helping researchers better understand the phenomena of the high prevalence of students with disabilities at alternative schools.

In the studies reviewed, transition planning was focused on rehabilitative “soft” skills that were not culturally responsive, person-centered, or useful for the person who had goals bigger

than immediate work. Likewise, while Prosper and Kadir were happy with their experiences at the alternative school, as they approached graduation, they still communicated confusion or uncertainty on what comes next, despite them assigning the meaning of "what comes next" as synonymous with transition. Researchers need to continue investigating these meanings to better inform juvenile institutions, traditional schools, and alternative schools on transition interventions, strategies, and services that help support students who are pushed out or at risk for being pushed out of their home-school, and, in turn, who could be more susceptible to the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP).

Existing research also paints a sense of urgency to address the disparity of Black males with high-incidence disabilities in or at risk for the STPP, but rarely seeks their perspectives on the phenomena of their susceptibility to the STPP. Further, when examining race, gender, disability, and the intersectionality of those identities in respect to transition planning, the research is even more limited. This study attempted to address the limited literature by investigating the lived experience of two Black males with high-incidence disabilities who were receiving educational services in an alternative school. While some of their experiences may have aligned with the literature surrounding pushout (i.e., differential treatment, school failure theory), their lived experiences were unique, and vastly different from the narrative in the literature that posits these two participants were "at risk" for adjudication.

Quantitative research has long documented the disproportionate discipline of youth based on their gender, disability, or race, providing observations on youth "at-risk" for adjudication and ultimately incarceration. However, qualitative research has the ability to explore the voices of these young people, and should make it a priority to do so. Rather than viewing these young people as "at-risk youth" who need saving, qualitative researchers should continue conducting

research that seeks to uncover their lived experiences, their perspectives, and their understandings of the phenomena of the school-to-prison pipeline. As such, it is important to consider qualitative methods that center bracketing, and frameworks that uplift and empower voices that are not "at risk," but rather "of potential."

Implications for Practice

The confusion surrounding disability identification, knowledge of the Individual Educational Plan/Program (IEP), and awareness of transition plans in general suggest a need for simplification of lingo when referring to the services our students use. Kadir has had meaningful transition planning experiences, despite being unaware that those experiences were due to a student-centered transition plan process. Similarly, while the IEP documentation is unavailable to confirm Prosper's exact role in his transition planning process, he did succinctly recall questions geared toward his college and career goals, but was also unaware he had a transition plan in place. This suggests that transitioning planning, as an action, is more important to students than the actual transition plan within the IEP for a handful of reasons: (1) case managers may not always inform their students that their transition dreams and goals are documented on the IEP, (2) students may not have access to IEP or transition plan, or (3) students may not know how to access the IEP or transition plan. However, it is very important that our students understand the legal terminology for their disability, especially those wrapped up in the legal system. As such, in order for students to fully understand their disability, IEP education must include exposure to the actual IEP documentation before, during, and after the IEP meetings.

Beyond the IEP itself, education on alternative school, and what it can offer has also emerged as a possible preventative measure to adjudication. Both participants expressed worry and shame at the end of their IEP meetings once the decision had been made to attend, a decision

they themselves ultimately made. Their worry was rooted in perceptions of what they viewed a typical alternative school student would be. While their alternative school does serve students who have been adjudicated, they were able to move past those perceptions, coexist, and thrive in a space they had once feared. Further, even though the alternative school has a mission of reuniting students with their home school as soon as possible, both Prosper and Kadir just completed their second year there, having chosen to stay enrolled rather than return to their home school. Given that both participants linked the word "transition" to moving to the alternative school, and simultaneously linked the word to "next steps," "success," and "moving on," they see alternative school as a key component to their goals in life. This suggests that the best placement for some students who are off track, or who perceive themselves as different than what is expected of them (i.e., "bad" or "shy") could be in an alternative school. That said, it is important that practitioners who work with youth reframe what messages they are sending to youth when discussing alternative school, as it may deter kids from opportunities better linked to their transition goals of employment.

Limitations

My dissertation study was designed to meet participants and their families as equals, and to join as partners in this work to empower their voices. As such, the administration of the home districts doing that initial contact to families was problematic given that families may have seen the school as failing their child. Additionally, the idea of meeting or initially discussing the study with families was meant to give that power and voice back to families, as well as clear up any lingering questions. That kind of back and forth exchange was nearly impossible to do via email and mail, which is why phone calls with home visits was what I intentionally planned for. However, District B made that nearly impossible. Not having direct access to families prevented

access to Prosper's IEP documentation, as well as stalled the recruitment process overall. As such, there were vital pieces of the lived experiences of Prosper left uncovered. In addition, there were other stories (i.e., parents and family members/caregivers) that are left unexplored due to the lack of direct access to those families.

Conclusion

This dissertation study was able to adequately address how two Black male students with high-incidence disabilities describe their transition planning experiences, needs, as well as provide insight on their involvement. Both alternatively placed students were able to describe a need for more support from the IEP team to reach their career goals, even though they were unable to articulate those exact needs. This was likely due to a lack of awareness of the transition plan, IEP documentation, and their disability diagnosis, pointing to a lack of consistent, explicit, and transparent transition planning. Despite this, both participants are able to recall conversations centering on what researchers and practitioners would define as transition planning. In regards to the final question, participants do not assign meaning to how their race or gender impacts their transition planning. They do, however, have a firm grasp on how their disability, or deficits from their disability, may hinder some of their transition goals. This deficit-based approach to thinking suggests, again, a lack of student involvement or student exposure in the IEP process that seeks to empower students by focusing on strengths, rather than summarizing areas for improvement. The implications proposed are an attempt at getting the profession and researchers to center student voice in not only the conversations around transition planning, but also the rhetoric we use, and the way we document the experience.

ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table 4: Recruitment Timeline

Date	Mode	Action
November 8, 2022	Email	I completed and submitted official forms per the research protocols for two local districts (i.e., District A, District B). I included the principal of the regional alternative school on this email.
November 9, 2022	Phone	I contacted the superintendent of the local juvenile justice center (JJC) to explain my dissertation study. I left a voicemail.
November 11, 2022	Phone	The superintendent sent me a voicemail and requested a follow-up phone call.
November 14, 2022	Phone	The JJC superintendent explained that they only had one Black male juvenile in custody, and that due to a delay in records, identifying the disability would not match my timeline. The dissertation chair and I agreed to focus on the regional alternative school as the setting for participants.
November 18, 2022	Email	School district A responded and asked that I seek IEP meeting observation and IEP documentation directly from the parent/student. I resubmitted the revised permission and consent forms.
November 21, 2022	Email	School District B responded with the same concerns regarding observing IEP meetings and reviewing the IEP. Additionally, they were uncomfortable with providing contact information for my IRB approved recruitment protocol of initial outreach. I resubmitted the revised permission and consent forms.
November 22, 2022	Email	I received permission to conduct research in school District A.
November 23, 2022	Email/Phone	Received parent contact information for a participant from school District A. I then initiated the recruitment process.
November 27, 2022	Email	I received permission to conduct research in school District B.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

November 30, 2022	Phone	A voicemail was left with the parent from school District A per the eligible students' case manager's suggestion.
December 6, 2022	Email	The principal of the regional alternative school reached out to schedule a building tour.
December 8, 2022	Email	District B personnel reached out to me to share that they had not received any permission forms. I responded and asked for other allowable forms of contact led by myself.
December 15, 2022	In-Person	A building tour of the regional alternative school was conducted by a teacher and the principal of the regional alternative school. During this time, we solidified where and when interviews would be conducted once I received parent permission forms.
December 19, 2022	Email/Phone	An additional attempt was made to get into contact with the parent from District A.
January 12, 2023	Email	A follow-up email was sent to District B personnel. Follow-up contact was conducted for the parent from District A.
January 17, 2023	Email	District B personnel responded to my email dated on January 12, 2022 with the contact information of case managers encouraging me to have them help with the initial parent contact.
January 21, 2023	Email	I contacted three case managers asking for their assistance with parent contact. The following documents were included in the email: official proof of approval for research, parent permission form, background on the dissertation study, and IRB approval.
January 23, 2023	Email	The principal from the regional alternative school contacted me to share that they would have to drop my eligible participant from District A due to truancy.
January 26, 2023	Email	After not hearing back from the case managers from District B, I contacted District B personnel for additional ideas on approved communication strategies. They responded giving me permission to have the principal of the regional alternative school do the initial outreach.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

February 2, 2023	Email	A formal request was sent to the principal of the regional alternative school.
February 3, 2023	Email	The principal of the regional alternative school shared that all communication had been sent home.
February 7, 2023	Email	The principal of the regional alternative school shared that there were five possible participants as of February 3rd, but now there are three participants given that one has refused to participate and another one had withdrawn.
February 9, 2023	Email	I received a parent permission form for Prosper. I responded seeking an in-person meet up with the participant for the following week. The building principal suggested waiting for additional forms.
February 13, 2023	Email	I sent a follow-up email requesting dates (i.e., initial meeting, informed consent meeting, interview meeting) on the calendar.
February 20, 2023	Email	I sent a follow-up email requesting dates.
February 21, 2023	Email	A visit with Prosper was set for March 1, 2023.
February 27, 2023	Email	I received a parent permission form for Kadir. A visit was set for March 6, 2023
March 1, 2023	In-Person	I met with Prosper and the principal of the regional alternative school. At this meeting, with the principal present, I explained the purpose of the study in simpler terms, and asked if the participant had questions. I then explained the consent letter, and explained the procedure for returning the letter should the participant want to be interviewed. The participant opted into signing the form at this time, and doing the interview right away.
March 6, 2023	In-Person	The initial meeting for Kadir was rescheduled for March 15, 2023 due to student illness.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

March 15, 2023	In-Person	I met with Kadir and the principal of the regional alternative school. At this meeting, with the principal present, I explained the purpose of the study in simpler terms, and asked if the participant had questions. I then explained the consent letter, and explained the procedure for returning the letter should the participant want to be interviewed. The participant took the form, but stated that they would likely not be continuing with the study.
March 16, 2023	Email	The principal of the regional alternative school reported that Kadir had submitted the consent form, and attached it to the email. An interview was set for Monday, March 22, 2023.

Table 5: Literature Table

Study / Design *****Dissertation	Purpose	Participants (age) Gender Race/Ethnicity Disability	Relevant Findings
1. (Abrams, 2006)/Qualitative; interviews	Investigated youth's perceptions on various transition challenges when reentering schools and the community	*n* = 10 (15 – 17) 10 M 5 Black 3 White 2 Native American	While work and school are protectors to recidivism, participants in this study stressed concerns over housing stability and making new friends. Of the other challenges the youth anticipated (i.e., confronting peer groups and gangs, cycle of negative influence, reincarceration), nearly all were identical to what they experienced. Family was the strongest connection. Adjudicated youth were not fond of formal supports (i.e., social workers, therapists, rehab), yet used those resources to aide in reentry.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

2. (Abrams, 2012)/Qualitative; interviews	Investigated youth's perceptions and preparedness within three weeks of transition/reentry	*n* = 20 (15 – 17) 20 M 9 Black 5 White 1 Hispanic/Latinx 1 Native American 2 Asian American/PI 2 "other" race/ethnicity	There were vast differences with expressed desires to lead a "noncriminal lifestyle. Although they (*n* = 5) feared getting caught or going back to jail as a possible motivator to not recommit a crime, they also felt returning to a criminal lifestyle was a more realistic option. All felt like change was up to them, rather than outside forces. Logistical outcomes outweighed conceptual outcomes when examining motivation for the ambivalent group (i.e., getting out and employed was more important than conceptualizing who they will become), while others utilized self-talk and set goals on schooling and employment.
3. (Abrams et al., 2008)/Mixed Methods	Investigated the benefits and limitations of a six week transition program called the transitional living program (TLP)	*n* = 46 ($\tilde{x}$ =16) 46 M 25 Black 11 White 7 Native American 2 Asian American/PI 1 Native Hawaiian	For the TLP, case managers work very closely building person-centered schedules and plans for release. Participants felt like the six weeks was too long, while staff felt like it was not long enough. Both agreed that it was hard to form meaningful relationships. One participant felt like he was cut off from the support once released.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

4. (Annamma, 2014)/Qualitative; interviews and observations	Examined the education of adjudicated Black juvenile females	*n* = 10 (14 – 20) 10 F 6 Black 3 Latinx/Hispanic 1 Native American 10 E/BD NOTE: Interview information focusing on other stakeholders within the larger study was not included.	Prior to adjudication, change of labels in IEPs convinced participants that they no longer had that disability, rather than the fact that the disability no longer impacted their education. One participant attributed IEP accommodations to helping her graduate. Two participants noted the support they received from their case managers, helping them feel "connected."
5. (Bullis et al., 2004) /Qualitative; longitudinal; interviews	Examined the transition process of formerly incarcerated youth	*n* = 531 ($\tilde{x}$ =16) 442 M 85 F 417 W 103 "other" race/ethnicity 305 with a disability	Regarding transition planning, formerly incarcerated youth with disabilities who were employed (30% on average) had a lower chance of recommitting and were more likely to remain employed after a year or enrolled in school (25%) after a year.
6. Caldwell, 2017)*/ Qualitative; interviews	Examined the lived educational experiences of Black adjudicated males placed in an alternative school	*n* = 2 (14 – 16) 2 M 2 Black	Family were important factors as well as relationships to school personnel. Participants perceived that they were "othered" and were able to link their treatment throughout the judiciary process to other high-profile cases in the news.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

7. (Fader, 2009)*/ Qualitative; interviews	Examined feelings Black and Hispanic/Latinx men have towards incarceration and community reentry including how they navigate entering both adulthood and the community	*n* = 15	Many young men felt like the arrest was an attack on their culture. In turn, they rejected the notion that the system was interested or effective in rehabilitating them. Only one participant committed to change and still felt like he was conforming to the working man/good father myth and his identity was being stripped. They found that making money legally was too hard due to systemically racist hiring practices that work against racially coded jobs that young Black men perceive as a way to earn both respect and money, even if "off the books."
8. (Gardner, 2010)	Analyzed how incarcerated juvenile males view democracy	*n* = 25 (15 – 21) 25 M 12 Hispanic/Latinx 7 Black, 3 "other" race/ethnicity 2 Asian American/PI 1 White	Participants cited being forced to grow up faster than peers, but did not claim to be victims of their surroundings, rather they had chosen the "street life." They feel they made reasonable choices with the limiting circumstances they were given.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

9. (Hagner et al., 2008)/Qualitative interviews	Examined outcomes of a transition intervention program called RENEW or Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work	*n* = 33 (14 – 17) 6 F 27 M 17 White 9 Black 7 Latinx/Hispanic 21 E/BD 10 LD 2 OHI	Four participants reentered the community and recommitted; three remained incarcerated, twenty-seven successfully reentered the community. Positive, affirmative, and goal-oriented "person-centered planning" was successful within transition planning vs. participants focusing on the avoidance of negative outcomes. Many (*n* = 17) participants returned to high school and thrived due to structured support and assistance in obtaining credits.
10. (Hosp et al., 2001)/Qualitative; interviews	Investigated incarcerated youths' knowledge of their transition plans	*n* = 29 (14 – 19) 5 F 24 M 6 White 1 Black 5 Latinx/Hispanic 8 LD 2 E/BD 1 ID 1 OHI	Participants report learning transition skills while incarcerated rather than prior to incarceration. Students with the most knowledge noted taking a class on transition skills.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

11. (Kim et al., 2021)/Qualitative interviews	Examined risk and role factors play on recidivism	*n* = 4,317 (NR) 1,015 F 3,302 M 2,611 White 1,014 Black 319 Hawaiian Native/PI 246 Latinx/Hispanic 142 Asian American/PI 138 Native American/Alaskan 17 "other" race/ethnicity 1,708 with LD, E/BD, ID, or ADHD	Youth on probation with special education needs were significantly more likely to recidivate, and be expelled, specifically youth with mental health problems, youth with lower, self-regulation skills, and Black males. Noted barriers to transition planning included missing school records, missing credits, and school changes.
12. (Mathur et al., 2020)/Qualitative; interview	Examined needs of youth when transitioning from juvenile detention centers	*n* = 6 (NR) 4 M 2 F 4 E/BD 2 LD	Poor academic success, exposure to friends/family that could lead to bad behaviors, or exposure to gangs and/or drugs emerged as self-reported barriers. There was a mixed sense of hopefulness and hopelessness among participants. Self-determination was suggested as a protective factor.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

13. (Owens & Konkol, 2004)/Qualitative; interview, focus groups	Examined the perspectives of youth who have been in both alternative and traditional schools	*n* = 6 2 F 4 M 6 E/BD 4 White 2 Black	There were two focus groups. Group A consisted of students ready to transition back to traditional schools but who had opted to stay in the traditional school. Group B consisted of students who had transitioned back to traditional school, but were not successful and returned to the alternative school within a semester.
14. (Schroeder et al., 2004)/Qualitative; case study	Investigated the lived experiences of three Black males on death row.	*n* = 3 3 M 3 Black Burton (9 – 23) Freddy (10 – 20) Jack (15 – 20)	Three theories of the STPP were illustrated in how schools, society, and practitioners can sometimes mishandle youth of color with disabilities in getting the support they need (e.g., school failure theory, susceptibility theory, differential treatment). A continuum of care throughout the juvenile justice system is needed.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

15. (Unruh & Bullis, 2005)/Qualitative; logistic regression	Examined differences in barriers among participants using a transition intervention, Project *SUPPORT*.	*n* = 348 (NR) 276 M 72 females 103 LD 57 E/BD 75 ADHD 113 NR	Four barriers to Project *SUPPORT* were identified for females including a history of running away/being placed in a residential program, history of suicide risk, prior abuse/neglect, and parenting responsibilities; males included having LD, ADHD, retention in school, and difficulty with maintaining employment. Comprehensive JDC to community transition services specific to gender needs are suggested. Wraparound mental health services are also recommended.
16. (Unruh et al., 2021)	Investigated challenges and facilitators to support young offenders' reengagement in school and successful return to their community	*n* = 9 (14 – 21) 9 M 4 Hispanic/Latinx 3 White 2 Black	The challenge of dropping old friends emerged. Other challenges included academic deficits, stigma, and lack of parental involvement.

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

17. (Zabel & Nigro, 1999)/Qualitative interview	Investigated risk factors	*n* = 266 (12 – 18) 81 M 14 F 57 White 24 Black 10 Latinx/Hispanic 4 other race/ethnicity 171 ND 36 LD 42 E/BD 13 LD with E/BD, 4 unreported	There were similar risk factors (e.g., poverty, drug use, family delinquency, age at first referral, suspensions from school) between both groups of juvenile offenders. Those in special education were more likely to be male, to be identified as having ADHD, be medicated for emotional problems, were younger at first referral, and more likely to have assaulted school officials citing a need for wraparound services (i.e., mental health and social work agencies) are suggested.

Note. NR = not reported. Participant demographics column: M = males; F = females; Disabilities; ND – No Disability; ASD = Autism Spectrum Disorder; ID = intellectual disability; MD = multiple disabilities; OHI = other health impairments; DD = developmental disability; ADHD = attention deficit disorder; E/BD = emotional/behavioral disorder; MD = multiple disabilities; PI = Pacific Islander.

Table 6: School Context

Background	Programs
This educational institution has two campuses that serve three counties, and is operated by the regional office of education. Since 1989, their vision has been that all students are capable of change, and it is championed by a mission to provide students with high quality, innovative, and relevant education, in a safe and positive learning environment that allows all students to identify their goals to achieve personal success. They place a heavy emphasis on partnerships with families and the community to provide academic, vocational and technical opportunities.	They offer a variety of in-person and hybrid programs to meet the needs of their learners. Their learners can enroll by being referred by an administrator. Any student is welcome to come to the school for a variety of reasons, but due to the Safe Schools Law enacted by the State of Illinois in 1996, they have a program specially designed for students who have met at least one of the following criteria*: • The student has been suspended at least twice for a period of 3-10 days for gross misconduct. • The student has been arrested by police and/or remanded to juvenile or criminal courts for acts related to school activities. • The student has been involved in repetitive incidents of misconduct considered to be of a serious nature. • The student has been expelled from their Home School District for the violation of a school policy.

*NOTE: Neither Prosper or Kadir were enrolled in the latter program. Prosper participated in the in-person program navigating traditional classes, while Kadir attended in-person to receive assistance on online credit recovery courses, and credit towards graduation by having a job.

Table 7: Research Question 1 Matrix

Question 1: How do high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities who are currently in alternative placements describe their transition planning and/or needs?

Relevant Themes	Findings
Involvement, recollections, and perceptions from IEP meetings	Both Prosper and Kadir recall advocating for the change of placement at their last IEP meeting.
Alternative school experiences and perceptions	Both Prosper and Kadir described their transition to alternative school with uncertainty at first, but have since thrived in this placement.
Transition planning	Both Prosper and Kadir are able to articulate the value of a career and community college. Prosper is wanting support in seeking immediate employment in construction, and would also like more information on community college as a route to construction as well. Kadir is currently employed at Casey's, but has career goals in nursing or business. They both describe transition planning as the process of thinking about what comes next, and what can better their lives.
IEP and/or disability identification and understanding	Both Prosper and Kadir are unaware that they have a transition plan on their IEP. The legal definition of the term "transition plan" has similarities to their own definition, but their grasp on their IEP, including their disability identification, suggests a need for more education. Prosper recalls seeing a speech therapist, and identifies as having a learning disability, but IEP documentation was not granted to confirm. Kadir can state his secondary diagnosis with confidence, but did not mention his other health impairment (ADHD) diagnosis.

Table 8: Research Question 2 Matrix

Question 2: To what extent are high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities who are currently in alternative placements participating or centered in the development and implementation of their transition planning?

Relevant Themes	Findings
Involvement, recollections, and perceptions from IEP meetings	Kadir recalls leading a meeting and answering questions he did not understand, because his dad was not present. A guardian was present, alongside representatives from a state work program, and a job coach. However, it appears that he left the meeting with more questions than answers, as the focus was on a change of placement. Prosper has also expressed wanting to ask questions at meetings, but not being able to form the right questions. Now that he nears graduation, he remarks how he wishes he would have been on the ball more back then.
Transition planning	Both Prosper and Kadir recall conversations about life after high school. Prosper felt like he was too young for those conversations when they first started, and has a lot of questions now that he is nearing graduation. Kadir has a good idea of his future, but wants to focus on the present dilemma of obtaining enough credits to graduate. It is evident that efforts have been made to engage them in the transition planning process at one point, but those efforts don't seem to be ongoing, consistent, or specific to their career goals.

Table 9: Research Question 3 Matrix

Question 3: How do lived experiences shape the transition process for high school Black males with high-incidence disabilities currently at alternative placements?

Relevant Themes	Findings
Identity, gender, race, disability	Prosper is able to reflect on his speech needs, suggesting that consistent meetings with his speech therapist has helped cement a possible speech/language disorder as a part of his identity. He loosely references that he has a learning disability, but he is unable to really articulate where he is struggling. Kadir is able to state that he struggles with reading multiple times, and even mentions how hesitant he is to pursue nursing and community college because of his perceived math deficits. I say perceived because the IEP only reflects ADHD with a learning disability in basic reading skills and reading fluency. Prosper does mention his race and gender, referencing a possible awareness of the Black male in the news or media. However, when it comes to his disability, IEP, transition planning, or alternative placement, he does not view his race or male as a factor. Likewise, Kadir does not believe his race plays a role either. He remarks that value of an opportunity, and views his placement here as one to have a better life. It seems that the opposite of better life may be rooted in race, but we were unable to uncover that in this interview. It is clear though that they no longer have an attachment to their home school. Instead, they operate as advocates of coming to the alternative school in a way, merging their placement here as a part of their identity, something they were weary of doing when first coming.

REFERENCES

Abrams, L. S. (2006). From corrections to community: Youth offenders' perceptions of the challenges of transition. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *44*(2/3), 31–53. https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v44n02_02

Abrams, L. S. (2012). Envisioning life "on the outs": Exit narratives of incarcerated male youth. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *56*(6), 877–896. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X11415042

Abrams, L. S., Shannon, S. K. S., & Sangalang, C. (2008). Transition services for incarcerated youth: A mixed methods evaluation study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *30*(5), 522–535. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.11.003

Ajjawi, R., & Higgs, J. (2007). Using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate how experienced practitioners learn to communicate clinical reasoning. *The Qualitative Report*, *12*(4), 612–638. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol12/iss4/6.

Alsaigh, R., & Coyne, I. (2021). Doing a hermeneutic phenomenology research underpinned by Gadamer's philosophy: A framework to facilitate data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *20*, 16094069211047820. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820

Annamma, S. A. (2014). Disabling juvenile justice: Engaging the stories of incarcerated young women of color with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *35*(5), 313–324. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932514526785

Bell, C. (2016). Special needs under siege: From classrooms to incarceration. *Sociology Compass*, *10*(8), 698–705. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12392

Belsky, J., Zhang, X., & Sayler, K. (2022). Differential susceptibility 2.0: Are the same children affected by different experiences and exposures? *Development and Psychopathology*, *34*(3), 1025–1033. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579420002205

Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., & Richardson, V. (2005). Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children*, *71*(2), 195–207. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290507100205

Bullis, M., Yovanoff, P., & Havel, E. (2004). The importance of getting started right: Further examination of the facility-to-community transition of formerly incarcerated youth. *The Journal of Special Education*, *38*(2), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669040380020201

Caldwell, J. R. (2017). *"I use to pray and ask god to give me another chance": A phenomenological analysis of black males' journey attending an alternative school* [Ph.D., University of South Florida]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1992768531/abstract/28A54173AA06485FPQ/1

Carver, P.R., & Lewis, L. (2010). *Alternative schools and programs for public school students at risk of educational failure*: 2007-08 (NCES 2010-026). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Castillo, J. (2013). Tolerance in schools for Latino students: Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, *26*, 43–58. https://hjhp.hkspublications.org/2015/05/01/tolerance-in-schools-for-latino-students-dismantling-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/

Chamberlain, K., & Hodgetts, D. (2022). Challenges in designing qualitative research when working with and for hard-to-reach groups. In U. Flick The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design (Vol. 2, pp. 1000-1014). SAGE Publications Ltd, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n61

Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2005). Breaking the school to prison pipeline: Identifying school risk and protective factors for youth delinquency. *Exceptionality*, *13*(2), 69–88. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302_2

Clark, H. G., & Unruh, D. (2010). Transition practices for adjudicated youth with e/bds and related disabilities. *Behavioral Disorders*, *36*(1), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/019874291003600105

Cohen, M. Z., Kahn, D. L., & Steeves, R. H. (2000). Hermeneutic phenomenological research: A practical guide for nurse researchers. SAGE Publications Ltd

Coker, T. R., Elliott, M. N., Toomey, S. L., Schwebel, D. C., Cuccaro, P., Emery, S. T., Davies, S. L., Visser, S. N., & Schuster, M. A. (2016). Racial and ethnic disparities in ADHD diagnosis and treatment. *Pediatrics*, *138*(3), https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-0407

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 1 – 19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dressman, M., Wilder, P., & Connor, J. J. (2005). Theories of failure and the failure of theories: A cognitive/sociocultural/macrostructural study of eight struggling students. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *40*, 8–61.

Fader, J. J. (2009). *Inside and out: Community reentry, continuity and change among formerly-incarcerated urban youth* (2009-99050-362; Issues 9-A). ProQuest Information & Learning.

Farrelly, S. G., & Daniels, E. (2014). Understanding alternative education: A mixed methods examination of student experiences. *Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research, 1*(1), 106–121.

Fleming, V., Gaidys, U., & Robb, Y. (2003). Hermeneutic research in nursing: Developing a Gadamerian-based research method. *Nursing Inquiry, 10*(2), 113–120. https://doi.org/10.1046/j. 1440-1800.2003.00163.x

Flick, U. (2022). Diversity, ethics and transparency as continuing challenges in designing qualitative research. In U. Flick The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design (Vol. 2, pp. 1233-1242). SAGE Publications Ltd, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n75

Foley, R. M., & Pang, L. C. (2006). Alternative education programs: Program and student characteristics. *The High School Journal, 89*(3), 10-21.

Freasier, A. W. (1986). Involving juvenile offenders in the IEP planning process. *Journal of Correctional Education, 37*(4), 134–139. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23291725

Gadamer, H. G., Weinsheimer, J., & Marshall, D. G. (2004). EPZ truth and method. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Gardner, J. (2010). Democracy's orphans: Rights, responsibility, and the role of the state in the lives of incarcerated youth. *Youth & Society, 42*(1), 81–103. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X09336268

Gonsoulin, S., Zablocki, M., & Leone, P. E. (2012). Safe schools, staff development, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 35*(4), 309-319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406412453470

Green, A. L., Cohen, D. R., & Stormont, M. (2019). Addressing and preventing disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices for students of color with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *54*(4), 241–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218782437

Hagner, D., Malloy, J. M., Mazzone, M. W., & Cormier, G. M. (2008). Youth with disabilities in the criminal justice system: Considerations for transition and rehabilitation planning. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *16*(4), 240–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426608316019

Harper, K. (2017). The school-to-prison pipeline: The intersections of students of color with disabilities. *Child Trends.* https://www.childtrends.org/publications/school-prison-pipeline-intersections-students-color-disabilities

Harrison, J. R., State, T. M., Wills, H. P., Custer, B. A., & Miller, E. (2017). Transition goals for youth with social, emotional, and behavioral problems: Parent and student knowledge. *Preventing School Failure*, *61*(3), 248–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2016.1266596

Hermosura, L. M. N. (2016). *School-to-prison pipeline is a direct policy descendant of Nixon's war on drugs*. UT News. https://news.utexas.edu/2016/04/25/school-to-prison-pipeline-caused-by-war-on-drugs-policy/

Hermosura, L. M. N. (2019). *Love, guidance, and parental relationships: Protective factors and barriers identified by youth living the school-to-prison pipeline* [Thesis]. https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/42218

Hosp, M. K., Griller-Clark, H., & Rutherford, R. B. (2001). Incarcerated youth with disabilities: Their knowledge of transition plans. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *52*(3), 126–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302_4

Husserl, E. (1970). Logical investigations (J. N. Findlay, Trans.). New York: Humanities Press.

Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies*, *8*(3), 279–303. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00142995

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108–446, (2004).

Keeley, J. H. (2006). Will adjudicated youth return to school after residential placement? The results of a predictive variable study. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *57*(1), 65–85. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282688

Kim, B.-K. E., Johnson, J., Rhinehart, L., Logan-Greene, P., Lomeli, J., & Nurius, P. S. (2021). The school-to-prison pipeline for probation youth with special education needs. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *91*(3), 375. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000538

Kincaid, A. P., & Sullivan, A. L. (2020). Parity or disparity? Outcomes of court-involved youth with and without disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *41*(6), 368–377. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932519887502

Krezmien, M. P., Mulcahy, C. A., & Leone, P. E. (2008). Detained and committed youth: Examining differences in achievement, mental health needs, and special education status: part of the special issue, severe behavior disorders of children and youth. *Education & Treatment of Children (ETC)*, *31*(4), 445–464. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.0.0029

Landmark, L. J., & Zhang, D. (2013). Compliance and practices in transition planning: A review of individualized education program documents. *Remedial and Special Education, 34*(2), 113–125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932511431831

Mallett, C. A. (2014a). The "learning disabilities to juvenile detention" pipeline: A case study. *Children & Schools, 36*(3), 147–154. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdu010

Mallett, C. A. (2014b). Youthful offending and delinquency: The comorbid impact of maltreatment, mental health problems, and learning disabilities. *The Journal of Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 31*, 369-392. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-013-0323-3

Mallett, C. A. (2017). The school-to-prison pipeline: Disproportionate impact on vulnerable children and adolescents. *Education and Urban Society, 49*(6), 563–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516644053

Mathur, S. R., Griller Clark, H., Hartzell, R. I., LaCroix, L., & McTier, T. S. (2020). What youth with special needs in juvenile justice say about reentry: Listening to their voice. *Youth & Society, 52*(8), 1501–1522. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X19826423

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mendoza, M., Blake, J. J., Marchbanks, M. P., & Ragan, K. (2020). Race, gender, and disability and the risk for juvenile justice contact. *The Journal of Special Education*, *53*(4), 226–235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466919845113

Mikytuck, A., Woolard, J. L., & Umpierre, M. (2019). Improving engagement, empowerment, and support in juvenile corrections through research. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, *5*(2), 182–192. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000190

Miller, A.A., Therrien, W.J., & Romig, J.E. (2019). Reducing recidivism: Transition and reentry practices for detained and adjudicated youth with disabilities. *Education and Treatment of Children 42*(3), 409-438. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2019.0019

Minor, K. I., Wells, J. B., & Angel, E. (2008). Recidivism among juvenile offenders following release from residential placements: Multivariate predictors and gender differences. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 46*(3), 171–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509670802143474

Monroe, C. R. (2005). Why are "bad boys" always Black?: Causes of disproportionality in school discipline and recommendations for change. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 79*(1), 45–50. https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.79.1.45-50

Moody, M. (2016). From under-diagnoses to over-representation: Black children, ADHD, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of African American Studies, 20*(2), 152–163. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-016-9325-5

Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., Wang, Y., Mandel, Z., DeJarnett, C., & Maczuga, S. (2019). Are students with disabilities suspended more frequently than otherwise similar students without disabilities? *Journal of School Psychology, 72*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2018.11.001

Mortari, L. (2015). Reflectivity in research practice: An overview of different perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 14*(5), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618045

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Students with disabilities. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities

Ochoa, T. A., Datchi, C. C., Weller, N. M., Northcutt Bohmert, M., & Grubbs, D. (2021). Education and transition for students with disabilities in American juvenile correctional facilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 56*(5), 293–300. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451220963089

Owens, L., & Konkol, L. (2004). Transitioning from alternative to traditional school settings: A student perspective. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength-Based Interventions, 13*(3), 173-F.

Pesta, R. (2018). Labeling and the differential impact of school discipline on negative life outcomes: Assessing ethno-racial variation in the school-to-prison pipeline. *Crime & Delinquency, 64*(11), 1489–1512. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128717749223

Piquero, A. R. (2008). Disproportionate minority contact. *The Future of Children, 18*(2), 59–79.

Quinn, M. M., Rutherford, R. B., Leone, P. E., Osher, D. M., & Poirier, J. M. (2005). Youth with disabilities in juvenile corrections: A national survey. *Exceptional Children, 71*(3), 339–345. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290507100308

Rossetti, Z., Burke, M. M., Hughes, O., Schraml-Block, K., Rivera, J. I., Rios, K., Aleman Tovar, J., & Lee, J. D. (2021). Parent perceptions of the advocacy expectation in special education. *Exceptional Children, 87*(4), 438–457. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402921994095

Roulston, K., & Halpin, S. (2022). Designing qualitative research using interview data. In U. Flick The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design (Vol. 2, pp. 667-683). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n41

Rutherford, R. B., Jr., & Nelson, C. M. (2005). Disability and involvement with the juvenile delinquency system: Knowing versus doing. *Exceptionality, 13*(2), 65–67. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302_1

Sanderson, K. A., Goldman, S. E., & Rojas, A. (2022). A review and analysis of single-case research examining adolescent participation in iep meetings. *The Journal of Special Education*, *56*(2), 97–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669211047232

Schroeder, J., Guin, C. C., Chaisson, R., & Houchins, D. (2004). Pathways to death row for America's disabled youth: Three case studies driving reform. *Journal of Youth Studies, 7*(4), 451–472. https://doi.org/10.1080/1367626042000315220

Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review, 34*(4), 317–342. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021320817372

Smedley, M., Levinson, E. M., Barker, W. F., & DeAngelis, D. L. (2003). Differences in career maturity among adjudicated and non-adjudicated male students with and without disabilities. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 40*(3), 108–122. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2003.tb00861.x

Tarozzi, M. (2022). Designing qualitative research for studies in education. In U. Flick The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design (Vol. 2, pp. 1077-1096). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n66

The IRIS Center. (2017). Youth with disabilities in juvenile corrections (part 2): Transition and reentry to school and community. https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/jj2/

Trainor, A. A. (2010b). Reexamining the promise of parent participation in special education: An analysis of cultural and social capital. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 41(3), 245–263. https://doi. org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2010.01086.x

Unruh, D., & Bullis, M. (2005). Female and male juvenile offenders with disabilities: Differences in the barriers to their transition to the community. *Behavioral Disorders, 30*(2), 105–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290503000207

Unruh, D., Gau, J., & Waintrup, M. (2009). An exploration of factors reducing recidivism rates of formerly incarcerated youth with disabilities participating in a re-entry intervention. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 18*(3), 284–293. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-008-9228-8

Unruh, D., Waintrup, M., Alverson, C., Erickson, M., & MaGee, C. (2021). Stakeholders' perspectives of reentry to school and community for young offenders with disabilities: An ecological approach. *Behavioral Disorders, 46*(3), 175–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/0198742919891414

Valandra, V. (2012). Reflexivity and professional use of self in research: A doctoral student's journey. Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 6(4), 204–220

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Waintrup, M. G., & Unruh, D. K. (2008). Career development programming strategies for transitioning incarcerated adolescents to the world of work. *Journal of Correctional Education, 59*(2), 127–144. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282793

Walker, S. C., S. Bishop, A., D. Pullmann, M., & Bauer, G. (2015). A research framework for understanding the practical impact of family involvement in the juvenile justice system: The juvenile justice family involvement model. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *56*(3), 408–421. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-015-9755-6

Wojnar, D. M & Swanson, K. M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, *25*(3), 172–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/0898010106295172

Yuan, J., Li, M., & Lu, Z. K. (2021). Racial/ethnic disparities in the prevalence and trends of autism spectrum disorder in US children and adolescents. *JAMA Network Open*, *4*(3), e210771. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0771

Zabel, R. H., & Nigro, F. A. (1999). Juvenile offenders with behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, and no disabilities: Self-reports of personal, family, and school characteristics. *Behavioral Disorders*, *25*(1), 22–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/019874299902500109

Zhang, D., Barrett, D.E., Katsiyannis, A., & Yoon, M. (2011a). Juvenile offenders with and without disabilities: Risks and patterns of recidivism. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *21*(1), 12–18b. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2010.09.006

Zhang, D., Hsu, H.-Y., Katsiyannis, A., Barrett, D. E., & Ju, S. (2011b). Adolescents with disabilities in the juvenile justice system: Patterns of recidivism. *Exceptional Children*, *77*(3), 283–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291107700302

APPENDIX A: COGNITIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before beginning the study, I investigated the cognitive load of the interview questions with a participant of similar eligibility requirements. The participant was an adjudicated nineteen-year-old Black male with a learning disability detained in county jail.

The interview guide was administered from start to end (see Appendix C).

Since the participant was incarcerated, all communication had to be done through the app, GettingOut®. The following metacognition strategy and follow-up prompts were used to evaluate how the participant interpreted questions to better inform the research team on revisions. No revisions were deemed necessary.

Metacognition Strategy

After I read each question, I would like you to pause and respond with what you are thinking about when thinking about your answer. Be as detailed in your response as possible, even if you think it is unrelated. Also, it doesn't necessarily have to relate to the answer. For example, if I were asked, "What is your favorite song?" I would probably text, "I think you are asking me for my favorite song. You probably want my current favorite song, or maybe you want my all-time favorite song. I am wondering if I can give you more than one, because I have favorite songs across all sorts of genres of music."

Follow-up Prompts

How would you rephrase this question?

What part of this question was unclear?

What do you think I meant when I said [part of question]?

Are you able to answer this question? Why or why not?

How do you feel as you answer these questions?

Okay, we're about a quarter through the questions. How do you feel now?

Okay, we're about halfway through the questions. How do you feel now?

We're almost done with the questions. How do you feel?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT LETTERS

Recruitment Letter (for Parents)

Why am I receiving this letter?

- Did you know that Black males under the age of 18 are being arrested and detained in juvenile detention centers or alternative educational placements at large rates.
- Many have an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for Learning Disability (LD) or Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (E/BD).
- You are the parent of a student who falls into one of the above descriptors.
- Clearly, our educational and legal institutions have much to learn from your child's experiences in order to empower and support them as they get closer to graduation.

Why do people care about this issue?

- There are laws, tools, and supports like transition planning, a legally required process, designed to support students with IEPs as they move from school to post-school activities, including more school, more training, getting a job, and entering the military.
- Student voice is often left out of the transition plan process. So, I am interested in exploring your child's experiences and understanding of the transition plan process.

So, what now?

- Ultimately, the goal is to provide educators the tools they need to better support your child as well as empower others in their situation to use their voice to impact change.
- At most, I am requesting 120 minutes of your child's time over two to three meetings, including informational meetings and interviews.
- I will be voice recording your child's responses so that I can write accurate transcripts of their experiences, but all of the data will be untraceable back to you or your child.
- **If you think this would be of interest to your child, please complete and return the attached consent form to your child's school or via email.**
- This letter and the consent form have also been emailed to you if you'd like to return it that way.

Sincerely,

Mr. Brandon Thornton
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Special Education
Illinois State University
bgthorn@ilstu.edu

Dr. Kate Peeples
Assistant Professor
Department of Special Education
Illinois State University
knpeepl@ilstu.edu

IEP Review Permission Form (for Parents)

You are being asked to give permission for another portion of a research study conducted by Dr. Kate Peeples (Principal Investigator) from the Department of Special Education at Illinois State University and Mr. Brandon Thornton (Co-Principal Investigator), a special education doctoral student from Illinois State University.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to gather feedback on your child's experiences as a Black male with a learning disability and/or emotional/behavioral disorder who is currently placed in an alternative school outside of their general public school.

Why are you being contacted again?
You are being contacted again because your child has participated in this study through an interview where they shared their experiences as a Black male in an alternative school. We would like to compare their experiences to what is documented on their IEP. However, we need your consent to review the IEP. Your child's participation in this portion of the study is optional and voluntary.

What will your child do?
I will review your child's IEP comparing their interview transcript to what is documented on the IEP. I will then share those comparisons with your child for their feedback.

Will your child's information be protected?
Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will be permanently deleted. Mr. Thornton will only be reviewing the transition plan portion of the IEP. Once reviewed, the IEP will be returned to the Regional Alternative School and/or shredded.

Could my responses be used for other research?
We will not use any identifiable information from you or your child in future research.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?
If you have any questions about the research, contact Dr. Kate Peeples at knpeepl@ilstu.edu or (309) 438-8980.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent
Sign your name below if you assent to participate in this study.

By entering your name and today's date, you agree to the following:

- I voluntarily agree to let Mr. Thornton review my child's IEP.

Signature _____ Date _____

Informed Consent (for Participants)

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Kate Peeples (Principal Investigator) from the Department of Special Education at Illinois State University and Mr. Brandon Thornton (Co-Principal Investigator), a special education doctoral student from Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to gather feedback on your experiences as a Black male with a learning disability and/or emotional/behavioral disorder who is currently placed in an alternative school outside of your general public school.

Why are you being asked to participate?
You have been asked to participate because you identify as a Black high school aged male who is currently receiving educational services through your Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) at an alternative school. Your participation in this study has been granted by your parent/guardian, but is voluntary, and will not have any influence on your parole or probation, if either situation applies to you. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

What will you do?
If you choose to participate in this study, I will review your IEP and observe your IEP meeting, if possible. You will participate in a voice recorded interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. Prior to, and following the interview, you may meet me in order to ask questions and provide feedback on your responses. It is possible that multiple interviews may be needed to fulfil the necessary time needed. In total, your involvement in this study will no more than 120 minutes.

Are any risks expected?
There are a few minimal risks associated with this research study. A potential risk could include feelings of anxiety due to being voice recorded or observed at an IEP meeting. To reduce this risk, all data collected will be de-identified and stored separately from any identifying codes. If you do not wish to be voice recorded at any point during the interview, you may discontinue participation. Allowing your data to be used for this study is voluntary, and at any time you may opt to discontinue participation in this study.

Will your information be protected?
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. All responses will be stored in a locked, secure location that only the researchers have access to. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to identification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team. Data will be coded with an alpha-numeric personal identification numbers and pseudonyms to keep names confidential. Records of your participation including, but not limited to, consent forms and de-identified voice recordings will be maintained for at least six years after the study. We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will be permanently deleted.

Could my responses be used for other research?
We will not use any identifiable information from you in future research, but your deidentified information could be used for future research.

Who will benefit from this study?
We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research and choosing to have your data included. You may have the added benefit of increased satisfaction in helping teacher preparation programs, K-12 institutions, and juvenile justice systems better understand the needs and wants of Black males with learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorder.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?
If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Kate Peeples at knpeepl@ilstu.edu or (309) 438-8980.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent
Sign your name below if you assent to participate in this study.

By entering your name and today's date, you agree to the following:

- I voluntarily agree to take part in the interview.
- I voluntarily agree for my responses to be voice recorded.
- I voluntarily agree for my IEP meeting to be observed, if possible.

Signature _____ Date _____

This form will be printed and returned to you for your records.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about your educational experiences. My name is Brandon Thornton, a doctoral student at Illinois State University, and a special education teacher at Bloomington HS. I will be conducting this research under Dr. Kate Peeples, also from Illinois State University. You were invited because your demographic is the most adjudicated and incarcerated among juveniles. So, researchers like myself are interested in listening to your story to find ways we can address this issue. There are no wrong answers. Please feel free to share your point of view, and please keep in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. You've probably noticed this recording device. When returning the informed consent form, you agreed to be audio recorded during this interview, and this is so important so that I can best capture your responses and experiences the way you've described them. Please know that we will use pseudonyms throughout this entire process including the interview; so, you may be assured of complete confidentiality. You will also receive a copy of the transcripts to check for accuracy. Do you have any questions? Alright then, let us begin. I will now turn on the audio recorder.

Background

I am here today to collect some information about your perceptions of transition planning. I am looking to determine what you like, what you don't like, and how transition planning might be improved. Ultimately though, I am here to hear your experiences as a juvenile Black male with a high-incidence disability, such as Learning Disability or Emotional/Behavioral Disorder currently at alternative school.

1. Are you able to identify what you receive IEP services for?
2. Think about your last IEP meeting. Describe that meeting in as much detail as possible.
3. Think about when you first heard that you would be placed here. Describe that moment using as much detail as possible.
4. Were you provided with any information upon entering this facility? If yes, what kind of information were you given?

Transition Plan (Meanings, Perceptions, and Feelings)

5. When hearing the words "transition plan," earlier what did they make you think about or feel?
6. A transition plan is a set of goals and procedures designed to help you enter society after your K-12 education has been completed or after your time here has been completed. Are you aware that you have a transition plan?
    a. If yes, can you share some things about your transition plan?
    b. If not, can you share some things you think should be included in your transition plan?

IEP/Transition Plan Involvement (Implementation & Development)

7. Did you have a role or input in designing your transition plan? If so, what did you contribute?
    a. If you did not have a role in designing your transition plan, would you like one? Why or why not?
8. Think about meetings, activities, and conversations you have had recently regarding your transition plan. Describe these using as much detail as possible. How do you know these were related to your IEP and/or transition plan?

Transition Perceptions (continued)

9. We have talked a lot about transition plans. When you now hear the words, "transition plan," what do they make you think about or feel?
10. Do you feel like your gender, race, disability, or any other part of your identity played a role in your transition planning? If so, please explain how.

Conclusion

11. Before we finish our time together today, is there anything you'd like to share with me today?

Probes (as needed):

Elaboration probes.

- You mentioned _____, tell me more about that.
- What happened then? Tell me more about…?
- Tell me more about your thinking when you said _____?

Clarification probes.

- What did you mean when you said…?
- Can you please explain what _____ is?
- Can you describe what that felt like?

Completion probes.

- It sounds like you were about to say something really important. Please continue.
- Interesting. Tell me a little more about what happened after that.

Redirection probe.

- I'd like you to focus on the part of the question that said…when you answer.

Thank you for your time today. I will need a little bit of time to summarize what you have shared today, but once I am finished, I would like to contact you again with a transcript of this interview, my interpretations, and other observations that capture your experiences. I would like you to review these moments and make any corrections, additions, or feedback as you see fit. Do you have any final questions for me before we conclude? Again, thank you for your time and attention today! I will now stop the recording.

APPENDIX D: MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL

Subject Heading: Interview Feedback Requested

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thank you for your time on [date] for our interview. We value the descriptions and reflections you shared involving your experiences with transition planning. In order to ensure that we have accurately documented and interpreted your responses, we have attached a summary of interpretations and transcript excerpts for your review.

Since you are receiving this file printed out, please write your comments directly onto the document. You or the principal can reach out to me via email, and I will come by the school to pick up your feedback.

I have also included a complete copy of your interview transcript. Please feel free to leave comments there as well if you have anything you would like to add.

Again, thank you for your time, and please reach out to me if you need any assistance.

Sincerely,

Mr. Brandon Thornton
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Special Education
Illinois State University
bgthorn@ilstu.edu

Dr. Kate Peeples
Assistant Professor
Department of Special Education
Illinois State University
knpeepl@ilstu.edu

APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPTION PROTOCOL

File Name

Save the document using the same file name as the audio file (e.g., “001 Interview).

Assignment of Numeric Codes

Do not transcribe names for people or school sites, instead enter [Code]. For example, “Snoopy loves to pretend to fly.” should be transcribed as “[001] loves to pretend to fly.”

Assignment of Pseudonyms

At the conclusion of the study, numeric codes will be replaced with pseudonyms that best capture the lived experiences of the participants (e.g., Prosper and Kadir).

Verbatim Transcription

To best capture nuances and meaning, all audio must be transcribed as intended by the speaker (e.g., colloquialisms, slang, etc.).

Do not omit any audio in the transcription, but describe them in parentheses (i.e., clearing throat, sighs, yawns, sneezes, etc.)

- Pauses—transcribe pauses by indicating duration of pause in parenthesis. For example, (2.0).
- Loud speech—indicate/emphasize louder words in CAPS. For example, “NO WAY”
- Inaudible audio—if the recording is inaudible for any duration, specify as follows (inaudible, 3.0).
- Sound interference—if there is a sound interference transcribe using a description of the sound and indicate duration as follows (school bell ringing, 5.0)

Identifying the Speaker

Use “R” to abbreviate “researcher” and the numeric code for the participant

APPENDIX F: IEP REVIEW

IEP Review for Kadir

IEP Review			
Date of Review:	4/29/2023	**Home District Code:**	B
Date of Last IEP Meeting/Date of Next IEP Meeting:	10/5/2022	**Name:**	Kadir
Grade Level:	12th	**Age:**	17
Ethnicity:	Not Hispanic or Latino	**Race:**	Black or African-American
Primary Eligibility:	Other Health Impairment (OHI: ADHD)	**Secondary Eligibility:**	Specific Learning Disability (LD: Basic Reading Skills & Reading Fluency)
Behavior Intervention Plan? (Y/N)	N	**Related Services:**	Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP)

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

Transition Plan	
Employment Goal:	After graduation, Kadir will work part-time while attending community college to pursue a career of his choice.
Training Goal:	None
Education Goal:	After graduation, Kadir will attend community college to pursue a career of his choice. He is interested in acting, nursing, and cooking.
Independent Living Goal:	After graduation, Kadir will independently manage his time in order to meet employment and post-secondary education goals.
Evidence of Student Participation and other Notes:	The additional notes page states that: "During the meeting, Kadir expressed interest in attending (redacted) to finish his high school career. He is about a year short in credits. The positives of attending (redacted) is that he could possibly earn credit a little faster than at (redacted) to graduate in December 2023, and he could continue to work at his job." On the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance page, it states that: "Kadir completed a transition survey. After he graduates from high school, Kadir is not sure yet which career he would like to pursue. He is interested in becoming either an actor, nurse, or restaurant owner. He is not sure at this time if he wants to continue going to school after graduation. He is also not sure at this time where he will be living. Kadir's parents all completed the transition survey for parents. They would like to see him attend a two-year college. They see him pursuing a career as either a nurse or a chef. Some skills they feel he needs to work on in order to meet his goals include being on time, being patient, and completing tasks. Kadir is also encouraged to research the careers he is interested in to determine a good path to take."

(Table Continues)

(Table Continued)

	The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) was present at the meeting and offered insight on services they can offer on job coaching. Job coaching is also listed on the transition plan as well as a vocational class. The transition plan also includes district level support for transition known as the Vocational Transition Assistance Program (VTAP) made possible due to his related services. According to the notes, "Kadir was in VTAP last year and again this school year. He recently became employed at Casey's on (redacted) in (redacted). He does food prep and takes food orders. The manager says that he is a good worker and stays busy, always looking for the next task to complete. He had an issue with knowing his schedule, but that has been resolved. The work program has an attendance policy and students are only allowed to miss 10 days before deciding if continuing in the program is appropriate. Kadir has missed 10 days already this school year. He currently has a C in his vocations class and has a D for VTAP. The notification of conference page notes that VTAP and DRS were in attendance, while a community college representative was invited, but did not attend.

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Participant 001: Prosper

R: Okay, are you ready? All right. I'm here today to collect information on your perceptions of transition planning. I'm looking to determine what you like, what you don't like and how transition planning might be improved. Ultimately, though, I'm here to hear your experiences as a black male with a disability, such as learning disability or emotional behavior disorder currently at alternative school. Are you ready?

001: Mhm.

R: Okay, question one. Are you able to identify what you receive IEP services for?

001: Alright. (laughs). Like, what that mean?

R: What your disability is…

001: So yeah, I don't know.

R: Do you know what your disability is?

001: Ain't it like, for the learning (2.0) like. I don't know. I ain't never really know. Learning. I get speech.

R: Okay, so you get speech services. It sounds like you're saying learning disability?

001: Yeah, learning with speech.

R: Okay. Do you recall hearing feedback about what exactly you struggle with when it comes to learning?

001: (2.0)

R: For example, did they talk about how you were doing in math or your English classes?

001: I don't know. I'm not really sure.

R: Okay. Let's think about your last IEP meeting. Describe that meeting in as much detail as possible. What do you remember about it?

001: We was talking about my graduation and stuff, my graduation (2.0) and you know, how I'm doing like, you know, like doing better with my (1.0) my attitude, from like, my old school and stuff. That's what she was talking about.

R: Okay, so when they said attitude, were the questions more about you, or what the school could do to support you?

001: Yeah, what the school could do to support me.

R: Okay. Did they mention anything after graduation?

001: Yeah, like what I should be doing, but I don't know yet.

R: So you don't know what you want to do yet? Okay.

001: (nods)

R: Do you know..did they write anything down in your IEP about what they thought you would want to do? Did they ask you questions about that?

001: Yeah they asked me questions about what I wanna do, but (1.0) I don't know yet (slouches in seat)

R: Hey! That's totally okay. Think about when you first heard that you would be placed here. Describe that moment using as much detail as possible.

001: (Smiles, soft chuckle, sits up in seat) (Sighs) I was mad. I was mad, cuz I really thought alternative was like different. I really thought it was like you go, and then it be like (2.0) you know it was bad. I thought it was like a different type of school, but it's not that bad. So (sighs), I don't really care about that anymore.

R: Yeah.

001: It's like, I'm here.

R: When you said it's not that bad, what did you mean?

001: Like it's not bad. Like, I thought, I thought it was gonna be bad you know. The students were gonna be bad, the teachers, but it's a good school.

R: Okay. Tell me more about your first day here. What did that feel like?

001: It felt like the first day of school all over again. Uhm. They welcomed me like, people in front (2.0). It wasn't that bad.

R: Okay. So you're a senior, correct. Is it your first time at alternative school?

001: I came here two years ago.

R: Okay. Do you remember how you felt during that meeting or what that meeting was like?

001: Like when I was transitioning here?

R: Absolutely, yes.

001: I don't know. First of all, I thought I was going back to [home school] but, the first meeting was like a uhm (2.0), like a, if you doing good, you know, you'll probably transfer back, but I'm doing good here, you know, getting my credits and stuff.

R: At that first meeting, when you were a sophomore, did they ask about what you wanted to do after high school at that meeting?

001: Mhm.

R: But you didn't know at that time, correct?

001: Mhm (laughs).

R: (Laughs) Alright. So, when hearing the words "transition plan" earlier, what did you think about when I said those words?

001: Transition plan?

R: Yeah.

001: I don't know. I don't know. I just thought about transitioning.

R: What's the word transition mean to you?

001: Moving right. Yeah, you know, like moving to the next thing. Transition (shifts in seat).

R: Okay, cool. You answered the question fine. I just wanted to add that a transition plan is a set of goals and procedures designed to help you enter society after your K through 12 education. So in your case, next year when you graduate. Are you aware that you have a transition plan?

001: (3.5) Uh uh. (shakes head no)

R: No? Okay. What do you think should be included in your transition plan based on how I just described what a transition plan is? What would you need?

001: I need to find out what imma do after I graduate. Stuff like that? Like a plan when I get done from high school.

R: You said a plan. So what type of support?

001: Like a good job.

R: Okay, good job. Okay.

001: Like a good paying job. I was thinking about going to a community college but (3.0), but that's what I've been telling them, a community college. Because I've been trying to get a job. You know, I was thinking construction, but I don't think I need to go to college for that.

R: Sure. Those are the sorts of things that your transition plan could include. Are you aware of anyone ever coming to your IEP meetings who are outside of the school?

001: (nods)

R: Yeah. Who were they?

001: (names a person) she's someone, like my case, that comes and make sure I'm going alright, and then it's this one teacher, another teacher that comes for speech or something like that.

R: Okay, were they any people coming to talk about jobs or college?

001: No.

R: Okay, okay.

001: It'd be (2.0) it'll be for my IEP, but sometimes they'll be having little meetings about it.

R: Oh, you mean here at alternative school?

001: Yeah.

R: Have you had any meetings while you've been here at alternative school, any IEP meetings?

001: Yeah, one, but I don't think it was like that. It was when I got here. We have little meetings about stuff like that, like when I got in trouble.

R: You said you got in trouble, what happened when you got in trouble?

001: (sighs) A lot. Cuz I had (0.5) had incidents with a teacher, because I came too late, and then (1.0) you can't like -- around in here -- you can't walk around. And I went to the other side, and then, that's what happened, and then we had to have a meeting about what happened, about me being mad, and going to the other side.

R: Okay, during your time with your old school, were there similar incidents.

001: Yeah.

R: Confrontations with other teachers?

001: Yeah.

R: Okay. What do you wish would have happened differently at your old school?

001: (1.0) (exhales) A lot. I wish I would have taken it serious (2.0). Like, you know, take it serious.

R: But you said you're doing well here, right?

001: Yeah, but you know I'd still like to go to a regular high school, just for the experience (1.5) I be in one little room, one little room (laughs). But yeah, that's how I feel. I would've taken it serious.

R: Okay, sure. Uhm, were you ever asked in any IEP meeting about activities for after high school?

001: Like, what do you mean activities?

R: For example, a question like, "Do you want to go to a community college?"

001: Yes (nods).

R: You were? Okay.

001: Yes.

R: Did you feel like you had enough information at the end of that conversation?

001: No, it wasn't like more questions. But I just be hearing it, but I don't actually move on it. But I just let it be. If that makes sense. Like I don't be asking the questions that I need.

R: What do you feel at a typical IEP meeting holds you back from asking questions?

001: What do you mean? Like holding me back from talking?

R: Yeah. You said you wanted to ask questions, but…

001: I just wanted to. I don't know how to explain it. I can probably think of a question, I just (2.0) I don't know (laughs).

R: Okay. Gotcha, gotcha. Okay. If you could design your own transition plan, and you mentioned a little bit of this earlier with construction, what would you put on there? Thinking about May, this May when you're graduating? What would you put on your transition plan? So, that would include people you need to talk to? Questions you have. Guest speakers are going to come in and talk about their services, anything like that.

001: I guess…

R: Time to go visit a job, any of those things. What would you include in yours?

001: I would want to talk to someone from community college. Try to get into that. Because I need a good job, and I know community college gon do it. Scholarships. So yeah. Somebody to talk to about community college, a construction site or something. That's what I would want on there.

R: Do you feel like if you would have had those sorts of conversations, freshman and sophomore year, you'd still be at your home school?

001: No, it's two different things because like, I was being bad, not being bad, but just, you know, if something messed with me, I would catch an attitude. I don't think it has to do with learning like you know, or about college.

R: What has changed now about your, quote "attitude?"

001: I don't really get in trouble that much no more. I guess that's what changed.

R: Was freshman you thinking about life after high school compared to a senior you now?

001: Uh uh.

R: No?

001: No (laughs).

R: (laughs) Okay, we've talked a lot about the transition plan today. When you hear the word transition plan now, what do you think about? What do you feel?

001: When I hear that now, I'm thinking about, I guess life after after high school, what I'm doing after high school. So transition into be grown, I guess.

R: Do you feel like there are any obstacles in your way from now on? For transition planning?

001: Naw. not really. I don't think. I just gotta do them classes.

R: Earlier you mentioned that you wanted a normal school. Do you feel like if you had the chance to go back, would you stay here?

001: I ain't gonna lie, imma stay here. Because I heard a lot, like a lot of people go back, and it'd be the same thing over and over. Because they be on you more, because you came back from alternative school. So, I might as well stay here because I'm getting my classes done quicker.

R: Okay. When you say, “they be on you,” are you talking about your teachers?

001: Yeah. Teachers, principals (points).

R: You pointed to that room just now. Tell me more about that.

001: This room? (points to the office where all meetings are held)

R: Yeah.

001: Oh, yeah, I mean, I be into it with them, but really, I just be bored (laughs)

R: (laughs) Okay. Did you have a case manager, someone who led that IEP meeting? When you were first sent here?

001: I remember a case manager. Yeah.

R: Were they supportive?

001: I mean, yeah. They was on me (laughs). With them little papers.

001 & R: (laughs)

R: Okay. Whew. Do you feel like your gender, race, disability, or any other part of your identity played a role in your placement here, or your transition planning?

001: Like being a black male?

R: Yeah.

001: I don’t know. I be saying that but at the same time, I don’t think so, because everybody, there’s a lot here, but I don’t think so. I don’t think that’s ever been a problem. There’s a lot of Blacks here, but I can’t really pinpoint that, because there’s other Black kids who have it worse, but you know, no, I don’t think it’s that.

R: Before we finish our time together today, is there anything you'd like to share with me on anything we've talked about, that you feel like you left out? Specifically with what you just mentioned about being a Black male here?

001: I don’t think so.

R: Okay, I don't have anything else. I got what I needed. I will need to circle back to your mom, and see if I can get a copy of your ID to see what's on your transition plan, and then I'll compare that to what you said, because you did mention community college. You also mentioned construction, and so I want to see if those things are actually on your transition plan. I’ll also send you this transcript when I’m all finished.

001: Yeah, cool.

R: Cool. All right. Thank you so much for your time. It was nice to meet you.

Participant 002: Kadir

R: Okay, so good morning. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about your educational experiences. My name is Brandon Thornton. I'm a doctoral student at Illinois State University, and a special education teacher at (school name). You're invited because researchers, like myself are interested in listening to your story. To find out how we can address the issue of placement for black males. There are no wrong answers. Please feel free to share your point of view. And keep in mind that I am just as interested in your negative comments as your positive comments. You've probably noticed on my phone, when sending the consent form, you agree to audio recording only no video during this interview. And this is important so I can capture your responses. Please know that I will use pseudonyms throughout the entire process, including the interview, and you have your complete confidentiality. You're also going to receive a copy of the transcripts for accuracy. Do you have any questions?

002: (nods no).

R: Okay. Okay, so I'm here today to collect some information about your perceptions of transition planning. I'm looking to determine what you like, what you don't like and how transition planning might be improved. Ultimately, though, I'm here to hear your experiences as a black male with a disability such as learning disability or emotional behavior disorder, currently at our alternative school. Question one, are you able to identify what you receive your IEP services for?

002: Like, specific learning disorder. Like, for reading or whatever. I can't comprehend what I read that well.

R: Think about your last IEP meeting. Can you describe that in as much detail as possible?

002: So, my last IEP meeting, it was alright. There was just a lot of silence. And well, my dad wasn't there. So I had to answer most of it. And didn't really know what I was talking about. Just knew it was about me and how I was doing in class. And I guess I was doing all right. But I thought I could do better somewhere else.

R: So this meeting was about you moving to alternative school, correct?

002: Yes.

R: So this is your idea to move to an alternative school?

002: Yes, so I could get caught up and graduate on time.

R: Are you a senior now?

002: Yeah.

R: Okay, well think about when you first heard that you would be coming here. Describe that moment using as much detail as possible. How did you feel?

002: I felt, well, I was excited. But I was also really nervous at the same time, because I didn't know how people were going to perceive me. I know. I knew that I wasn't gonna fit in as well. And that made me scared (2.0) people here (1.0) you don't know like alternative schools are known for bad people. But I'm not like that. I don't have felonies and stuff. So just made me a little bit nervous.

R: When you said "how people," did you mean the people here or the people outside of alternative school?

002: So, I felt like the people here were gonna judge and because I'm not like (1.0), I'm a quiet kid. I stick to myself, and I don't like to get into trouble like that so…

R: Okay, did that end up happening, or was it different than what you thought?

002: It was a lot different than what I thought. They actually, they're really nice, uhm (2.0), I met a lot of new people. And I would say we're friends. But you know, you can't really trust people like that. So, yeah.

R: Okay. Were you provided with any information when you got here?

002: I was told that they don't have as much teaching help, as (says his school) does. That I might lack in certain things. But that's about it.

R: Do you feel like that was true? Or do you feel like you're getting a good education?

002: I feel like I'm getting a good education, because the teachers, they'll like, put time aside to help a certain student or like if you ask them to help you, but like at (says his school) I had two teachers, I got the help I needed but they were focusing on other kids as well. And here, with a smaller classroom as well. Less people to see, more help.

R: Are there some other things about alternative school that's working well for your education besides a smaller class?

002: So like, I can get paid, like, not paid, I get credits for having a job. And that helps me as well. Because I don't like being at school. So if I can get away from school, and get a job and I actually like that.

R: Cool. Okay, this is great stuff by the way. There's no wrong or right answer, but I'm happy that you're elaborating. Okay, earlier, when I said the word transition plan, without a definition, what did you think about or feel?

002: Transition plan. Like when I think about a transition plan, I think about the next steps, like moving on up to a better me I believe, and like on to different points in your life.

R: Okay, so how the federal government defines it is: a transition plan is a set of goals and procedures designed to help you enter society, after your K through 12 education has been completed, or after your time here has been completed. So are you aware that you have a transition plan?

002: (Nods no)

R: Okay. Your Transition Plan is actually like a document attached to your IEP. So at one point, a case manager at your old school would have asked you like when you went to high school, you would have told them some things and then they…

002: Oh, yeah, I told them multiple things.

R: Yeah, and it changes every year, right? Because I have kids freshman year who, they want to go to college, but by senior year, they just want a job, so it updates every year. So can you share some things that you think you should be on that transition plan?

002: So, like what do I want to do?

R: Yeah, what do you think should be documented in your transition plan? Things that can help you do what you want to do?

002: So like, I want to go to culinary school, and I want to start my own business, I want to start my own bakery. It's going to be an infused bakery. But I want to get started with that. And then after that, like, work my way into the acting industry. Just go from there.

R: Do you feel like you're getting enough supports currently to reach those dreams of culinary school and starting a business and being an actor?

002: Oh, yeah. I believe yeah, it starts when I'm here. So like, I would focus on here because I don't think about things and I try to move on to the future too fast. And so what my parents have been giving me, and getting me through school is helping me. I haven't thought about now too much. If that makes sense.

R: That makes sense. Yeah. Earlier you said you told them a lot of things about your transition. Right? Can you (1.0) do you remember the things that you told them? Your Case Manager at your former school? When they asked you about where you want to be in a couple of years? Do you remember the things you said?

002: So I told (1.0), so the first time I told them I wanted to be a counselor because I love it. I love helping people. I love talking to people sometimes. But sometimes it can get out off hand. I've also told them I wanted to start my own business. I also told them I wanted to be a nurse. That’s about it.

R: Do you feel like you had a lot of input, saying what you wanted to do?

002: Mhm. Like every time that I met with him, it was always like, what did you want to do? Or how did you want to go about this? And I was like, this and that. I don't know.

***therapy dog opens the door and comes in and exits ***

R: Okay, think about your meetings, and activities and conversations you've had about your transition plan. Can you describe those things in a little bit more detail? And how do you know they were related to your IEP? Or if you didn't know, did they just feel like conversations?

002: (no response)

R: So, when they were asking you about what you wanted to do, did you feel like that was connected to your IEP? Or did you just think it was like a conversation with an adult?

002: I think it was connected to my IEP, because they've been trying to help me find out what I think it's best for me as well. Because I'll give them ideas about what I want to do. And I can't really understand what I read like that. So like, nursing and stuff like that, you got to understand measurements of milliliters and stuff like that. And I'm not good at that stuff. So I was like, let's just take that off.

R: Okay. So that sounds like you were involved with your transition planning. It sounds like you were actually invited in to get feedback.

002: Yeah, thank Ms. (name) for that. She was one of the people who always asked me things, and if it wasn't what I wanted to do…So, yeah.

R: Okay, so we've talked a lot about transition plans. When you now hear the word transition plan, what do you think about or what do you feel when you hear those words?

002: I think about my future, and how I can better myself and get to where I want to be in life, and not be like (2.0) some people.

R: When you say, "some people," what do you mean?

002: Like some people. They're not too far off. And like they like to sit and struggle. And I don't like that. And people try to help them, but they're comfortable with where they're at.

R: So do you feel like having a solid transition plan that you're involved in can help you?

002: Yeah.

R: Okay, do you feel like your gender, race, disability or any other part of your identity played a role in your placement here, or your transition planning?

002: (shakes head, no)

R: And why do you think that is?

002: Because I feel like they gave everybody an equal opportunity because I've had multiple friends talk about how they had the opportunity to come here and stuff like that to get caught up. But they didn't take the chance, because what they perceive about alternative school is bad, but it's not like that.

R: It looks like alternative school has been a positive experience for you.

002: Yes.
R: Okay, last question. Before we finish our time together today, is there anything you'd like to share with me that I didn't ask you?

002: No. Sorry.

R: Well, that's it. You did it. Thank you.

APPENDIX H: CODEBOOK

Themes by Code	Occurrences
1 IEPs	29
1.1 IEP and/or disability identification and understanding	11
1.2 Involvement, recollections, and perceptions from IEP meetings	18
2 Lived experiences	74
2.1 Identity, gender, race, disability	22
2.2 Alternative school experiences and perceptions	19
2.3 Transition planning	33

1.1 IEPs >> IEP and/or disability identification and understanding

This code captures any discussion of the participant's disability, including what specific disabilities they have and what services they receive.

1.2 IEPs >> Involvement, recollections, and perceptions from IEP meetings

This code captures any discussion of the participant's Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, including what was discussed, who was present, and how the participant felt about the meetings.

2.1 Lived experiences >> Identity, gender, race, disability

This code captures any mention of the participants experience prior to coming to alternative school, and any past, current or future understandings of their experience as a Black male with a high-incidence disability currently placed in an alternative school.

2.2 Lived experiences >> Alternative school experiences and perceptions

This code captures any discussion of the participant's experience attending an alternative school, including what their expectations were, what the school is like, and how they feel about attending.

2.3 Lived experiences >> Transition planning

This code captures any discussion of the participant's plans after high school, including what they want to do and what type of support they need to achieve their goals.

APPENDIX I: REFLEXIVE DIARY (VALANDRA, 2012)

Prior to Data Collection

How do my life experiences shape the implementation of this study?

Before starting this study, I have watched my school recommend seven Black males for expulsion. While I have no way of determining their disability, it is not lost on me that kids who look like me are disciplined and assigned exclusionary measures at a disproportionate rate. As a Black male educator, it is disheartening and exhausting to witness this disproportionality firsthand, disproportionality that I ignored growing up in schools that pushed out Black males higher than their White peers. Per our Board of Education protocol, once you are recommended for expulsion, you have three options (1) willingly withdraw and enroll in a regional alternative school, (2) willingly withdraw and homeschool, or (3) go in front of a vote for expulsion which would be reflected in the Board minutes. In each of the seven cases previously mentioned, the parents were convinced to quietly opt for the regional alternative school, but I know that many never make it there, as was the case for one of my participants who ultimately was dropped from the regional alternative school. On my tour today, I kept wondering where those students are now, past and present. I kept wondering if parents really understood what they were agreeing to. I also kept wondering why there are so many obstacles preventing me from talking directly to families. Is this the actual protocol, or is this their preference due to the nature of my study (i.e., interviewing students who have been removed from their schools). My literature review pointed to a lack of trust and misunderstandings between parents and school personnel, but now I am starting to wonder if that lack of trust is on both tends. That said, these ponderings (and frustrations) drive me to complete this work and center the voices of those who far too often don't have one. Further, the principal at the regional alternative school seems to be actively working with me to remove these obstacles. He feels like a partner in recruitment, rather than a barrier. I really did appreciate the tour, the history, and the background on what this school offers not only our kids, but our community. My perceptions about the school were incorrect.

What motivates the participant to talk to me?

I know that I responded well to my Black male teachers. While our lived experiences were different, we were united in the sense that we shared that commonality of being Black. I am hoping that I can provide the same level of comfort to the participants. During the height of the Black Lives Matters protests sparked by the tragic murder of George Floyd, the renewed calls for a diverse teacher workforce united all of the teachers of color in my county. It is here where I discovered that I am but one of four Black male educators, two of which are special educators. That said, it is likely that I will be the first Black male teacher my participant will see.

In what ways can what I disclose about myself potentially influence what study participants share or not share about themselves?

While being a doctoral candidate is important to me, and wrapped tightly in how I define Black excellence, it means little to my students. Many assume I am going into medicine, or make remarks that put distance between us (i.e., "You think you're better than us?"). I am on the fence

of explicitly disclosing this to the participants since it's written on the permission and consent forms. Instead, perhaps I should lean into my identity as a Black male educator? Will including this create distance between me and the parents or will it position me as a source of hope? Is it right of me to even assume that these families are in a position of needing hope?

During Data Collection

What am I noticing about study participants' communication patterns?

Prosper: This feels so fresh. I feel like I am talking to one of my own students. He seems very eager to get started despite me sharing that I would be more than happy to come back. I really love that I do not have to code-switch here. Both of us are speaking how we want to speak, abandoning conventions that we have been forced to navigate for our entire lives. He slouches comfortably in his seat. His answers are really short. With elaboration, I am able to get more out of him, but there is an overall sense of confusion regarding what he receives services for. Me using "services" was confusing for the participant. He struggled to answer, "What do you receive IEP services for?" but with elaboration attempted to answer, "What is your disability?" Still, he could not name his disability, but could reflect on his academic struggles and noted seeing a speech/language pathologist. This same confusion is evident when asking questions about the transition plan. I am frustrated that we do not have it in front of us to look through. However, I think the added description was useful. I wonder if the lingo we use at IEP meetings is also confusing.

Kadir: This is interesting. The student seemed very nervous at our first meeting, so I was surprised to hear that he opted into the interview. He still seems visibly nervous. I would describe his answers as concise rather than short. I am wondering if he is being concise because he wants this to be over, or if there is some confusion on transition planning and/or disability identification as there was with Prosper. The student perked up as soon as the therapy dog literally pushed through the door. Despite his nervousness, he is providing a lot of detail of his experiences here, as well as his plans for the future.

What kind of information do study participants share about themselves without solicitation from me?

I am kind of surprised that neither participant linked current events with their lived experiences of not only Black males, but whether race played a role in their current placement, as the literature suggests. These students would have been removed from their home school at height of the pandemic which was also when protests on racial justice reached a fever pitch. Were they ever able to see themselves on the issues that activists were speaking on? I suppose questions like this are fitted for a different study. That said, they both did share that they voluntarily came to the regional alternative school. I am wondering why they felt the need to share this. Am I framing the regional alternative school as a bad thing? I am trying to remain neutral, as I have been very impressed with what the school has to offer after touring the building. The administration seems to have the best interests of their students in mind, and are invested in my work as well. Both participants also viewed their placement as a bad thing at first. They both expressed feelings of fear and worry of co-existing alongside "those kids." However, since arriving, they seem to be thoroughly enjoying their time here. Perhaps my opening statement about the pushing out of Black males of schools has put them in defense mode. In their minds, they were not pushed out. They see their exit from their home school as an opportunity.

During Data Analysis

Whose stories are represented? Whose voices are missing? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

The stories of now and the future are most represented. Both participants are enjoying their time away from their home school, but have little recollection of their time at their home schools including the IEP meetings that determined their placement here. They do remember agreeing to attend the regional alternative school at those meetings though. Prosper is able to reflect broadly on his classroom experiences with teachers prior to coming to the regional alternative school, but he believes those interactions to be the result of his immaturity at the time. He still feels that he has some growing up to do, and links this with his uncertainty on post-secondary goals. Conversely, Kadir is very clear on where he sees himself in the future. He has outlined multiple paths in nursing and business while reflecting on the role of community college in both of those paths. Both participants definitely appreciate the ability to work now, and acknowledge this as a big motivating factor in liking their time at the regional alternative school. Overall, both participants do not have any resentment for their old schools, and they have not linked their identity as a Black male nor their identity as person with a high-incidence disability with their placement here or their transition planning.

In what ways did my presence influence the participants' responses?

For Kadir, I constantly reassured the participant that his responses were valuable and worthy. By the end, he seemed much more comfortable in responding to questions. Using semi-structured interviews helped me lean into the language conventions in front of me, as well as modify my approach and line of questioning to match how the participants were relieving their experiences being placed her, and dreaming of experiences after graduating.

In what ways am I invested in the study's findings?

Can one be too invested in findings? I kept finding myself surprised throughout this process. I am surprised that the participants do not have deeper reflections of their experiences as Black males. I am surprised that the participants are unsure of their disability diagnosis, but can concisely describe deficit areas. I am surprised that the participants are unsure of what is on their transition plan, but can talk about their dreams for half an hour. However, more than anything, I am surprised (and thrilled) that this regional alternative school is emerging as a possible way to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

How did participants' responses after the formal interview influence my interpretations of their stories?

Neither participant shared any additional comments on the transcripts, preliminary findings, or final findings. I worry that my preliminary findings should have been communicated in-person, but my timeline did not allow for this sort of engagement. I will address this in the limitations.