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Heather Raithel

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PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION SERVICES AND EXPECTATIONS

FOR TRANSITION-AGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN

A VIRTUAL SCHOOL SETTING

by

Heather Raithel

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Special Education

Approved:

_____	_____
Robert Morgan, Ph.D.	Kathleen Oertle, Ph.D.
Major Professor	Committee Member

_____
Tim Riesen, Ph.D.
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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ABSTRACT

Parent Perspectives on Transition Services and Expectations for Transition-Age Students

with Disabilities in a Virtual School Setting

by

Heather Raithel

Utah State University

Major Professor: Dr. Robert L. Morgan

Department: Special Education and Rehabilitation

Students with disabilities often experience difficulties as they transition from

school to adult life. This project examined the perspectives of parents of transition-age

students with disabilities enrolled in a full-time virtual school setting. The first

dependent variable was parent satisfaction with transition services for students in the

virtual school including relevancy and quality of student and parent trainings and

information on transition, inter-agency collaboration, community-based learning

experiences, staff knowledge and communication, transition specific courses, and

appropriateness of the IEP transition plan. The second dependent variable was parent

expectations for students as they exit school in regards to independent living, post-

secondary education or training, employment, social and leisure activities, and

community involvement. Participants included 43 parents of transition-age students with

disabilities at a public virtual charter school. Parent expectations and satisfaction were

measured utilizing an online survey with questions using a 1-4 rating scale. Procedures involved distributing an online survey with (a) demographic information, (b) rating questions on expectations for post-school outcomes, (c) rating questions on satisfaction with transition services, and (d) open-ended questions including those on recommendations for improving transition services at the virtual school and specific parent transition concerns. Approximately 60% of the parents of students with disabilities at the virtual school surveyed had overall low expectations for post-school outcomes. Specifically, future involvement in the community was especially low with more than half of parents stating that students were "least likely" or "somewhat likely" to participate in community activities at least once per day. Additionally, parents rated transition services at the virtual school as low in regards to community-based instruction opportunities and involvement and information about outside agencies. These results may provide guidance for virtual schools in meeting the transition needs of students with disabilities and further insight into parent expectations and satisfaction in transition services for students with disabilities.

Introduction

Parent and family involvement are critical to successful outcomes for students with disabilities in adulthood (Test et al., 2009).   Successful post-school outcomes include part- or full-time employment, and involvement in postsecondary education (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, community college, 4-year college). Parent and family involvement might include supporting the student in applying for employment, applying for college, and attending planning meetings. For parents and students who choose to be involved in virtual schools for K-12 education, the transition from school to adult post-school outcomes can be challenging.

Parent and family involvement in a youth's transition to adulthood is critical to students attending virtual schools much like typical schools. A virtual school is a state or governing body-approved school that offers courses from a distance, typically via the internet. Barbour and Reeves (2009) described the three primary types of virtual schools by the type of instruction they offer: independent, synchronous, and asynchronous. Russell and Holkner (2000) defined the types of virtual schools based on the requirements for face-to-face attendance. In a *cyberspace* or purely virtual school, students are only required to attend online, and the school may not have a physical space to meet. In the *hybrid* or blended model, students complete much of their work at home or in a center, but are required to attend in person for certain classes and activities. In the *coaching* virtual school, some courses are offered online with the majority of the students' learning taking place in a conventional brick and mortar school.

In the 2013-2014 count of U.S. virtual schools conducted by the National Education Policy Center, there were 447 full-time virtual schools serving 262,000

students and 87 blended schools serving 26,155 students. Charter schools comprised

51.5% of the virtual schools serving 82.6% of the enrollment (Miron and Gulosino,

2016).

        The State of Utah currently has four virtual schools serving 3,207 students. The

largest is the subject of this particular study. It is a full-time virtual charter school

managed by K12 Inc., and the school enrolled 1,917 students in grades K-12 in the 2015-

2016 school year. The school opened in 2008 and it has been open the longest of the four

(Miron & Gulosino, 2016). According to the Utah State Board of Education, 16.3% of

the school's 2015-2016 enrollment were students with disabilities receiving special

education services.

        In this particular school and other virtual venues, an important question relates to

parent and student satisfaction with services. Beck, Maranto, and Lo (2013) examined

student and parent satisfaction for cyber schools and found that special education students

were more satisfied with virtual school education than their general education peers.

They reported that parents of special education and general education students did not

have significantly different satisfaction rates with virtual school compared to other

schools; however, both groups of parents reported low satisfaction with their child's

previous school.

        Lautenslager (2014) used an online survey, open-ended interview online survey to

investigate why parents of students in grades 9-12 enrolled their children in virtual

schools using an online survey and an open-ended interview. Of the parents surveyed,

66.7% rated their student's virtual education as "good" with 11% rating the education

"excellent." Lautenslager found that parents chose virtual courses based on a desire for

flexibility, more course options, and advancement in credits.   Similarly, Burdette and Greer surveyed 119 parents of students going to school in a virtual setting with a range of disabilities. Overall the results were positive, with 62% of parents rating the supports provided as "very good," and 66% reporting that they were fully prepared to make academic decisions in the virtual environment (p.82).

Although parents report numerous reasons for the selection of virtual education for their children, they and their children face some of the same complex issues in the transition to adulthood (i.e., community employment, transition from online education to college, etc.). Although generally satisfied with virtual education, they face new and uncharted challenges as they approach transition. For example, Chambers, Hughes, and Carter (2004) studied parent and sibling perspectives on transition planning for individuals with severe cognitive disabilities. They found that all eight of the parents surveyed reported the post-school outcome of employment to be "very" or "extremely" important (p.84). Additionally, they found that parents were unaware of post-secondary education options, expected their family member with a disability would likely live with them in adulthood, and were concerned about social activities following high school.

While these studies examined parent perceptions in relation to cyber schools in general, including for students with disabilities, no research has been conducted specifically focusing on parent perspectives of transition planning in the virtual school. Additional research is needed to address the transition needs of parents and students in the virtual setting.

Literature Review

In researching parent perspectives of transition services in the virtual setting, I conducted a search of relevant literature using Google Scholar, Eric via EBSCOhost, USU Library, PsychINFO via EBSCOhost, and Academic Search Premier using the following terms in varying orders: *transition; transition to adulthood; parent perspectives, views, or beliefs; disability; transition planning; virtual schools; online education; computer instruction; parent involvement; survey, training, transition planning, cyber school.* Based on these searches, I found 52 articles; however, only 25 were related to parent perspectives. Of those, only three related to online or virtual education and were included in the following literature review. Of the 15 articles discussing parent perceptions of the transition process, only one examined the type of survey questions related to leisure, post-secondary education, employment, and independent living that were most relevant to the current study.

Beck, Maranto, and Lo (2014) investigated parent and student perceptions at a virtual charter school. Participants included students and parents that had been with the virtual school, Sun Tech, for at least 1 year. These families received an email at the beginning of the school year with information about the study. The following week, the survey link, using Qualtrics™, was emailed. School administrators also emailed the families at the school with a promise of a $10 gift card for participation. Non-respondents received emails with reminders and the school used an auto-dialer to call as well. The school mailed a printed copy of the survey to parents without access to email. Overall, 269 students and 232 parents completed the survey for this study, which was a 53.7% response rate. One hundred forty seven surveys contained incomplete information and were discarded.

The dependent variable defined in this study was the "subjective well-being" of the students and parents based on online survey responses in three categories, why the school was chosen; how involved were parents in school; and the level of satisfaction (p. 209). The parent survey included 67 questions including five related to demographics and included a 5-point rating scale. The setting for this study was completely online, as the link was emailed out to families.

Through statistical analysis of the parent survey results, no significant differences were found between races, special education and general education, or in between mothers and fathers. Interestingly, both parents with students in general education and special education had "low levels of satisfaction" at their child's previous school (p. 214). For the student survey, students in special education were more satisfied with the virtual school than their peers in general education, and girls were more satisfied than boys overall. The researchers also noted that Latinos rated their satisfaction more highly than Caucasians. The results suggests that virtual schools may be serving students that find that they do not fit well into traditional brick and mortar schools although this particular study focused on the subjective viewpoints of parents and students and did not include information related to academic progress.

In another study, Lautenslager (2015) examined why parents select virtual schools for their child's education as opposed to the traditional brick and mortar school. The dependent variables of this study were parent reasons for choosing virtual courses, parent expectations for virtual courses, and barriers experienced in virtual schooling. During the initial phase of the study, the researcher sent emails to potential participants from a list of 1,800 parents of 9th-12th grade students from a single school district. In the email, the

study was described and parents were given the opportunity to agree to participate. They were then directed to input specific demographic information of 19 questions, including contact information in an online Survey Monkey™ survey. The researcher randomly selected ten participants for phase two of the study, the interview portion, from the 36 that completed the requested demographic information.

Participants included parents of students who had no virtual classes to five or more. The researcher grouped them in four groups: group A included participants that had taken no virtual courses; group B included participants that had taken one or two virtual courses; group C, included participants that had taken three or four virtual courses; and group D, included participants that had taken five or more. Following feedback from a parent focus group, the researcher finalized the open-ended questions and provided them ahead of time to the 10 parent participants along with a consent form. Interviews took place in a conference room at the high school with the district administrative building serving as a backup location. The interviews were voice-recorded and data from the interviews was compiled in a protected Excel document.

Lautenslager (2015) looked for themes related to parent choice, expectations, and barriers to virtual learning through transcripts and summaries written for each of the ten interviews. She also addressed frequency of similar responses through organizing the data into an Excel spreadsheet. Parents in all four groups reported the number of courses total and the advanced courses offered to be a factor in choosing either virtual or traditional schools for their child. Parents also discussed flexibility, college preparedness, progress toward graduation, and adaption to learning style as reasons to choose virtual courses. Parents in groups C and D mentioned that virtual schools were

helpful in reducing distractions in the classroom or in social interactions, as well as in accommodating time for busy athletic schedules. Parent expectations for virtual learning stressed flexibility, individualized learning, frequent student and teacher communication, student engagement, incorporating both face-to-face and virtual learning, and multi-modal learning opportunities. Parents in all groups reported barriers to virtual courses to be technology issues, stress, issues with assessments, and communication concerns. Groups A and B reported concerns specific to the traditional classroom such as poor writing instruction and lack of rigor, while Group D parents reported large amounts of irrelevant work included in the virtual courses. Interestingly, many parents mentioned student motivation as a key component to success in a virtual course and stressed that "online learning is not for everyone" (p. 123). Information from this study contributes to the literature on parent perspectives on virtual learning and could lead to the development of best practices in the virtual setting to promote student success; however, the author did not address factors related to students with disabilities or the transition to adulthood.

Chambers, Hughes, and Carter (2004) surveyed parents and siblings of individuals with severe cognitive disabilities regarding the transition to adulthood. Participants were eight parents and eight siblings of individuals 14 years or older with a severe cognitive disability enrolled at urban high schools. Siblings and parents were paired from the same family to be eligible for participation in the study. Siblings also had to be aged 14 years and older. After teachers selected 17 eligible families, eight consented to be a part of the study representing three female and five male students with disabilities. Five of the families were African American, two were Caucasian, and one

was Caribbean American. Seven of the parents were mothers and all ranged in age from 25-55 years, while the siblings ranged in age from 14-33 years.

The questionnaire focused on five key areas including social, leisure, employment, education, and adult living and used a 5-point rating scale. They also included demographic information such as level of schooling completed, number of IEPs attended, and marital status. Sibling and parent data was analyzed separately and then combined. Five of the eight parents reported independent living as their biggest concern, while siblings were more concerned about finances and post-secondary education. All parent surveys showed that parents were very concerned about employment and expected the individuals would likely continue to live at home following high school. As far as post-secondary education, none of the parents or siblings knew about possible options for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Most were also concerned about social activities and leisure opportunities following high school. Parents and siblings reported knowing little about post-school options for their family member with a severe cognitive disability, specifically competitive employment and post-secondary education opportunities.

While this study had a small sample size, it has interesting implications for practitioners related to the lack of parent knowledge regarding post-school opportunities and resources. However, the authors did not explore transition expectations and knowledge of parents related to the virtual school environment.

Burdette and Greer (2014) explored perspectives of parents with students with disabilities in the virtual school setting. The survey considered parent perspectives related to "parental roles, instruction and assessment, communication, and support from the school" (p. 67). Researchers contacted special educators in all 50 states that worked

with students with disabilities in a virtual environment. Referred parents were sent an online Qualtrics survey link and the study included 119 complete parent surveys for students in grades K-12. The researchers employed a 4-point rating scale. The survey was finalized after two focus group meetings including parents of children with disabilities.

Student with disabilities represented were specific learning disability (9%), autism spectrum disorder (13%), other health impairment (3%), speech or language impairment (9%), multiple disabilities (8%), intellectual disability (8%), and emotional disturbance (7%). Visual impairment, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairments, and traumatic brain injury were each under 1% of the sample, and 8% of parents were unaware of their child's disability.

In considering the actual instruction and assessment of skills in the virtual school, 71% of parents reported that their child had a highly qualified special education teacher, while 18% said that their student was not assigned a special educator and 10% did not know whether or not this was the case. Parents saw their roles in their child's education as helping them organize the school day, assisting them in mastering the content, and teaching behavioral skills with 27% of the parents spending more than three hours daily in educating their child. In communication, parents of a student with a disability were pleased with the level of support they received; however, 33% of parents of K-8 students and 41% of parents of 9-12 parents communicated with teachers only two or three times per month. This study of parent perceptions for students with disabilities in a virtual school could be used for improving communication, training, and instruction for the benefit of students, parents, and schools.

No research was found on parent perspectives of transition planning in the virtual school setting. This information would be valuable as a way of gauging parent knowledge and expectations, developing parent training programs, and supporting youth who move from virtual education to community environments as adults. Based on the previous studies and lack of research on parent perspectives of transition planning in the virtual school setting, I conducted a study of parent satisfaction for transition services and expectations for post-school outcomes through a survey of parents of transition age students with disabilities at a virtual school. In this study, I addressed the following research questions:

1. Given a survey of 43 parents of transition-age students with disabilities in a virtual school, to what extent will parents report satisfaction in transition services provided by the virtual school as measured by percent of positive parent responses?

2. Given a survey of 43 parents of transition-age students with disabilities in a virtual school, to what extent will parents report expectations for positive post-school outcomes (one year following the exit from high school) as measured by percent of positive parent responses?

Method

Participants and Setting

In this study, 43 parents or guardians of students with disabilities participated based on the following eligibility criterion: (a) students must have a disability as outlined by IDEA and be served in special education; (b) students' ages must range from 14-22

years; and (c) students must be enrolled full-time at the virtual school at the time of the survey. Four of the 47 attempted respondents were redirected to the exit page as they stated that they were not the parent or guardian of a student. This school has both a full-time and part-time program; however, participants only included full-time student parents as part-time students typically receive transition services at the brick and mortar school in which they are enrolled. The 43 participants were respondents from a population estimated at 244 parents/guardians of approximately 176 transition age youth participating in this particular virtual school. I based population estimates on parent/guardian information supplied to the school during the enrollment process. I based the 70% response rate prediction on the reviewed parent survey literature as Burdette and Greer (2014) had an 80% response rate and Beck, Maranto, and Lo (2014) had 48.7% response rate. At the beginning of the study, the virtual school had about a 70% response rate on parent surveys within the transition program. The response rate in this study was lower than expected at 17.6%. I attribute the lower than expected rate to possible survey fatigue by parents at this particular school during the spring semester. At a virtual school, surveys are a common way for the school and parents to communicate, so parents may have been less likely to respond to a survey during the spring as opposed to the fall semester when school staff showed higher parent survey response rates. The official nature of the initial email and reminders may have also served as a barrier to parent response (see Appendices A and B). The setting was in the online environment, as all surveys were completed independently by parents in a place of their choosing.

Survey Instrument

The survey (see Appendix C for survey in full) included basic demographic information of the participants including: age, race, gender, educational attainment, number of people in household, and household income. Student demographic information was also collected including: age, race, gender, grade level, student disability classification, years of enrollment at the school, high school completion plan (certificate of completion or diploma), work experience, community involvement, virtual social involvement, and social skills. I only requested a gender identification of male or female as one student is known to be transgender, and I did not want to isolate that one student in data collection.

When analyzing data related to ethnicity, I only categorized ethnicity as Caucasian or "Other" as according the Utah State Board of Education, this school had only 9% of students from ethnic minorities during the 2015-2016 school year. I did not want to isolate participants from races with a small population of participants. Also, I collected basic information on the distance of residence from the virtual school office, whether or not caseload manager is known, level of communication with school staff, reasons for choosing the virtual school, and overall satisfaction with the virtual school. I collected transition information including: outside agency involvement, number of transition trainings attended by parent and/or student, transition courses taken, parent knowledge of transition resources, parent and student knowledge of credits and graduation requirements, and whether or not the student attended their most recent IEP meeting.

Also, I included rating scale questions related to transition services satisfaction to assess parent perceptions of transition services at the virtual school and rating scale

questions to assess parent expectations for their student one year from exiting school including the likelihood of the student to perform a series of post-school activities. I included open-ended questions that asked for parent recommendations for improving transition services in the virtual school setting and specific concerns parents had for their student's transition to adulthood.

I used Qualtrics® to create the fully online survey that was compatible with computers, smart phones, and tablets. As the virtual school communicates with parents through email on a daily basis and access to the internet is a requirement for all students at the school, all participants should have been able to access the survey online. Prior to distributing the survey, a group of four faculty members at Utah State University assisted in providing feedback on clarity and appropriateness of content of the survey. This feedback was used to finalize the survey before sending out to participants. Respondents were not forced by the survey format to answer any given question, so some questions were not answered by all 43 respondents.

Dependent Variables and Response Measurement

The first dependent variable was parent satisfaction with transition planning in virtual education defined as the extent to which participants respond to a series of questions (rating scales with 1=least satisfied, 4=very satisfied) regarding the relevancy of parent and student transition services; quality of parent and student transition services; community based learning; information and involvement with outside agencies; appropriateness of transition plan; effective and timely communication from school staff; knowledge of school staff; relevance and quality of transition courses; and communication about graduation credits and requirements. The second dependent variable

was parent expectations for post-secondary outcomes defined as the extent to which participants respond to a series of questions (rating scales with 1=not likely, 4=very likely) about expectations for their student following the exit of school regarding independent living, competitive employment, online post-secondary education, post-secondary education, virtual employment, social and leisure activities, community involvement, other training or education, transportation, assistance from outside agencies, and accommodations needed. I assessed rating scale scores using percentages across participants for each response. I compiled demographic information across participants using Qualtrics™ to examine relationships between demographic information and ratings of satisfaction and expectations. I evaluated open-ended questions qualitatively to detect potential patterns in responses by categorizing them in an Excel document.

Experimental Design and Procedures

The experimental design was an online survey (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Using the email information available to all school staff in the private Totalview™ system, the school special education coordinator (not the researcher) sent out an initial email (see Appendix A) to all parents of eligible students (*n*=244 parents of 176 students) describing the study. The email was sent out 1 week prior to launching the survey. Then, an email invitation was sent out by the special education coordinator including the survey link along with a consent form for participation. Participants were not asked to submit any identifying information, such as name, address, or phone number for themselves or their student in the survey to ensure anonymity. As the survey was an anonymous link, no IP addresses were collected.

Subsequent reminders (see Appendix B) were sent out over the following seven weeks to all possible participants.

Data Analysis

I collected data in the Qualtrics™ system over an eight-week period. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the demographics section. I isolated variables for relationships with expectations and satisfaction. I obtained percentages across participants for each rating response as well. For open-ended questions, I categorized answers to examine for themes, repeated statements, and so forth.

Results

Demographics

Table 1 displays the demographic information for both the parent participants and their students. Of the 43 parent respondents, 81.4% identified as female and 18.6% as male and 95.35% were white. The majority (79.7%) reported at least some college education. For the 39 parents who reported annual income and household size, 20.51% were below the federal poverty line. For students, 74.42% were reported to identify as male with 25.58% female. Of the eight students over 18 years, only three parents had legal guardianship of their student. For students, 83.72% were white. Eighth grade students comprised 11.63% of the reported population with 16.28% in ninth, 20.93% in tenth, 16.28% in eleventh, 25.58% in twelfth, and 9.30% in post high. Students represented six disability categories with 32.56% specific learning disability, 11.63% other health impairment, 30.23% autism spectrum disorder, 6.98% intellectual disability, 9.30% multiple disabilities, and 2.33% speech and language impairment. Three parents

(6.98%) did not know their child's disability classification. Disability category results were similar to those reported by Burdette and Greer (2014). Respondents reported that 64.29% of students had been with the school 4 years or less.

Satisfaction

Table 2 displays full results related to parent satisfaction with the virtual school's transition program. Given a survey of 43 parent respondents of transition-age students with disabilities in a virtual school, parents reported overall satisfaction with transition services with a percentage 13.68% "least satisfied," 40.52% "somewhat satisfied," 29.27% "satisfied," and 16.52% "very satisfied." Male respondents were less satisfied than female respondents overall with 42.05% of males and 46.72% of females stating they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with transition services at the virtual school. Parent ratings of community-based activities at the virtual school were at a percentage of 22.5% "least satisfied", 47.5% "somewhat satisfied", 20% "satisfied", and 10% "very satisfied." It is possible that 70% of respondents were "least" or "somewhat satisfied" as the geography of a state-wide school presents unique challenges for community based learning. Parents of students aged 17 or older had higher satisfaction with transition services at the virtual school with 58.78% rating satisfaction at "very satisfied" or "satisfied" while only 35.36% of parents of students aged 14-16 were "very satisfied" or "satisfied." This may be due in part to the increased level of transition services as students age. For parents that had attended at least one transition training, satisfaction rated as "very satisfied" and "satisfied" was 55.85%, while parents that had not attended any transition trainings rated satisfaction 35.05% "very satisfied" and "satisfied."

Expectations

Parents reported expectations for positive post-school outcomes 1 year following the student's exit were 39.92% (likely and very likely) (see Table 3). Nearly 70% of parents (all disability categories) rated that their student would reside outside of the home as "least likely" or "somewhat likely." These results were similar to Chambers, Hughes, and Carter (2004) where 6 out of 8 parents expected their child with a significant cognitive disability to continue to reside at home. Male respondents had lower expectations for positive post-school outcomes than female respondents overall with 27.28% of males and 42.83% of females answering "very likely" or "likely". Positive expectations in the area of community involvement were less than half at 44.19% (likely and very likely). This may be attributed to students at the virtual school choosing the virtual setting due to a lack of comfort in the community. Parents of students who were working toward a certificate of completion reported lower levels of positive expectations overall with only 22.08% choosing "very likely" or likely" compared with 44.84% of parents of students working towards a diploma.

When looking at families living under and above the poverty line, a few significant differences in expectations were evident. While parents who reported above poverty-level wages expected their student would be employed at least twenty hours a week at or above minimum wage (very likely and likely) at a rate of 55.17%, parents who reported poverty-level wages only reported this as an expectation (very likely and likely) at rate of 37.5%. Seventy-five percent of parents with poverty-level wages reported that it was "least likely" that their student would reside outside the home when compared to 48.28% of parents with above poverty-level wages. Both parents above and below the poverty line reported similar expectations for students enrolling in a post-secondary

institution (around 37%).   These data are based on limited numbers of parents (n=8 out of 39 participants) and should be interpreted cautiously.

Open Ended Responses

Of the 20 responses to the open-ended question regarding suggestions for improvements to the school's transition program, five parents wanted more student and/or parent training related to transition, two wanted more individualized and specialized help with transition, five did not have suggestions or were happy with services, three were unsure what transition services at the school are, and five answers were unrelated to transition programming at the school.

Of the 26 parents that responded to the open-ended question regarding particular transition concerns for their student, four cited self-determination and self-advocacy, four cited independent living skills, six cited social and emotional concerns, two cited concerns about accommodations in college, three cited getting a suitable job, one was concerned about accessing adult supports, one was concerned about societal expectations for independent living, four cited no concerns, and one was unsure what the question was asking.

Other Relevant Findings

Table 4 displays results related to other factors that may influence transition satisfaction and expectations. Interestingly, only 29 of the 43 (67.44%) respondents knew the identity of their child's caseload manager. Also of note, 95.35% of respondents reported that their student had attended their most recent IEP meeting and 83.72% of parents were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their child's education at the virtual school. Of 43 respondents, 72.09% reported that their student had not had any paid work

experience. Parents reported that 72.09% of students were working towards a diploma.

Almost 70% of students live within 60 miles of the school office. Parents reported that

34.88% of students engaged in community activities "never or rarely," and only 34.89%

rated their student's social skills as "excellent" or "good." Parents cited "dissatisfaction

with previous school" at a rate of 65.12% as one of the reasons they chose to enroll their

student at the virtual school with 53.49% reporting that they did so in part because of

"social or bullying concerns." Beck, Maranto, and Lo (2014) reported similarly high

levels of dissatisfaction with the previous school as a reason for both special education

and general education parents to enroll their child in the virtual school. Only 20.93% of

parents reported being "very knowledgeable" or "knowledgeable" about transition

resources. However, 65.12% of parents rated themselves as "very knowledgeable" or

"knowledgeable" regarding graduation requirements and credits earned. Parents reported

that their student was "very knowledgeable" or "knowledgeable" about their own

progress toward graduation at a rate of 44.19%. Only 18.60% of parents reported that it

is "very likely" that their student will continue in virtual education following high school

with 9.52% of parents reporting that it is "very likely" that their student will be employed

virtually. Respondents reported communicating with school staff only once per block or

rarely at a rate of 30.23%. Burdette and Greer (2014) reported that 33% of parents of K-

8 students and 41% of parents of 9-12 students communicated with teachers only two or

three times per month.

Twenty percent of students were not working with any outside transition agencies

and 28.57% had not taken any transition related courses.

Discussion

Given the results, this study extends the literature base for parent expectations and satisfaction with transition services for students with disabilities at a virtual school, parent satisfaction in virtual school services for students with disabilities, and provides preliminary understanding of parent perspectives on satisfaction and expectations for the transition to adulthood for students enrolled in a virtual school. Data collected and analyzed related to transition and demographic factors such as family income, gender, age, etc. further adds to the research base on transition expectations and satisfaction for youth with disabilities. The implications of this study also provide guidance for virtual schools in developing transition services that meet the needs of students with disabilities in a virtual school environment.

Community-Based Instruction

The findings from this study related to the low levels of parent satisfaction regarding community-based instruction opportunities may be of particular use to virtual schools. Many virtual schools, like the one in this study, enroll students over a large geographic area such as an entire state. Many employ teachers that work from home in locations across the state. While these logistics may not be a significant issue in virtual classes, it could be a major barrier to community-based instruction. A transition teacher may need to travel often throughout the state in order to meet the needs of all students, especially those with more significant disabilities that are best suited for customized employment. These students may need consistent and on-going teacher support within the communities in which they live. One possible solution to this issue may be providing virtual job shadow experiences and informational interviews with employers, while

coordinating with outside agencies such as vocational rehabilitation and independent living centers for assistance with job shadows and experiences and life skills training. Virtual schools may benefit from hiring a trained job coach and/or para educators to provide in person community based instruction as well. Another possible solution would be to supplement in person social outings for all students with more opportunities centered around college and career readiness.

Community Involvement

Parents at this virtual school also reported low expectation rates for their students in the area of future community involvement following high school. This may be explained in part by some parents choosing the virtual school due to social and bullying concerns. While social outings are offered in all regions of the state monthly for all students at this particular school, students are not required to attend. The outings provided are typically recreational in nature. For high school students, gearing these events more towards exploring jobs and post-secondary education opportunities might better serve the needs of students approaching adult life. Another solution might be to require a defined number of community activities for students through school-based or other service provider outings each month and to begin a program offering high school credit for internships and job experiences.

Continued Virtual Education and Employment

While parents did not report high expectations for community involvement or satisfaction with community based learning, they also had low expectations overall for their students continuing their education or being employed virtually following

graduation. If parents do not expect their children to access post-secondary and employment opportunities from home, then it stands to reason that students need to be prepared for adult life in their communities. Virtual schools such as the one in this study will need to find ways to address barriers to community based learning. As mentioned above, virtual schools may benefit from hiring job coaches or para educators to meet the needs of students needing more extensive supports to access the community, providing required outings related to college and career readiness, and allowing students to receive credit toward graduation for jobs and internships.

Evidence that parents report higher satisfaction in the transition program based on their attendance in virtual or face-to- face parents trainings, as well as the open-ended comments regarding a desire for more parent trainings may be pertinent information for this and other virtual schools. Also of interest to this school may be data on high numbers of IEP participation by students, high overall satisfaction for their child's education at the school, and some parents reporting that they did not know who their child's caseload manager is or what their student's disability category was.

Conclusion

Given the results of this study, it is important for transition professionals in virtual schools to understand and address the possible barriers present in providing transition services to students with disabilities in the virtual setting. While parents are reporting low levels of present and future community involvement for their students, they are also expressing low satisfaction with community instruction, which is a vital component of any transition program. Given these concerns, virtual school educators will need to seek creative ways to assist students in interacting with and learning within their communities.

As parents are not planning at high rates for their students to continue learning, working, and socializing within the virtual environment, students must begin participating in community activities prior to the transition to adulthood. Community based learning and participation will need to be an integrated and required component of the students' education at the virtual school in order to ensure that students with disabilities at virtual schools leave high school prepared for adult life in their communities.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is limited by only surveying a small number of parents (n=4) with students at one virtual school in one state. It is also limited as it only focuses on parent perspectives and does not include those of students and teachers. Many of the questions for this survey were geared towards this particular school. Studies should be conducted extending this research to larger samples across states and should include other stakeholders and their perspectives. Comparison studies between parent perspectives at traditional brick and mortar schools with those at virtual schools could also further the research in this area.

Table 1

Demographics of Respondents and Students (N=43, unless noted)

Demographic	N	% of total
Parent or guardian of full-time student with disability at this school		
Yes	43	91.49
No	4	8.51
Parent gender identification		
Male	8	18.6
Female	35	81.4
Parent age		
20-29	0	0
30-39	8	18.6
40-49	23	53.49
50-59	11	25.58
60+	1	2.33
Parent race or ethnicity		
White	41	95.35
Other	2	4.66
Parent education level		
Middle School	0	0
Some High School	2	4.65
High School Diploma/GED	7	16.28
Some College	15	34.88
Vocational or Trade Certification	4	9.30
Associate's Degree	7	16.28
Bachelor's Degree	4	9.30
Master's Degree	3	6.98
Professional Degree	0	0
Doctorate Degree	1	2.33
Family income level*		
In poverty	8	20.51
Above poverty	31	79.49
Student gender identification		
Male	32	74.42
Female	11	25.58
Student age		
14	6	13.95
15	8	18.6
16	10	23.26
17	11	25.58

18	1	2.33
19	3	6.98
20	4	9.30
21	0	0.00
22	0	0.00
Legal guardianship over student (18 or over)*		
Yes	3	37.50
No	5	62.50
Student race or ethnicity		
White	36	83.72
Other	7	16.28
Student grade level		
8th	5	11.63
9th	7	16.28
10th	9	20.93
11th	7	16.28
12th	11	25.58
Post High ("Super Senior")	4	9.30
Student disability category		
Specific Learning Disability	14	32.56
Other Health Impairment	5	11.63
Autism Spectrum Disorder	13	30.23
Visual Impairment	0	0.00
Hearing Impairment	0	0.00
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.00
Emotional Disturbance	0	0.00
Intellectual Disability	3	6.98
Multiple Disabilities	4	9.30
Deaf-Blindness	0	0.00
Speech or Language Impairment	1	2.33
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0.00
Don't Know/Unsure	3	6.98
Years of full-time enrollment at this virtual school*		
1 year	9	21.43
2 years	9	21.43
3 years	7	16.67
4 years	2	4.76
5 years	6	14.29
6 years	7	16.67
7 years	1	2.38
8 years	0	0.00
9 years	1	2.38

Notes. * = N≠43

Table 2

Parent Satisfaction *(N=41, unless noted)*

Question	% of total least satisfied	% of total somewhat satisfied	% of total satisfied	% of total very satisfied
Relevancy of parent training	12.20%	41.46%	31.71%	14.63%
Quality of parent training	12.20%	36.59%	39.02%	12.20%
Relevancy of student training	14.63%	34.15%	36.59%	14.63%
Quality of student training*	10.00%	45.00%	30.00%	15.00%
Community based learning*	22.50%	47.50%	20.00%	10.00%
Involvement with outside agencies*	20.00%	52.50%	15.00%	12.50%
Appropriateness of IEP transition plan	7.32%	41.46%	24.39%	26.83%
Communication from school staff	12.20%	36.59%	26.83%	24.39%
Knowledge of school staff in transition topics	9.76%	39.02%	34.15%	17.07%
Relevance and quality of transition courses*	17.50%	30.00%	37.50%	15.00%
Communication of graduation credits and requirements	12.20%	41.46%	26.83%	19.51%

Notes. * = N≠41

Table 3

Expectations for Transition of Student following High School (N=43, unless noted)

Question	% of total least likely	% of total somewhat likely	% of total likely	% of total very likely
Reside outside of parents' home	51.16	18.60	6.98	23.26
Be employed above minimum wage for 20 or more hours	27.91	23.26	20.93	27.91
Continue in virtual education for post-secondary education	34.88	37.21	9.30	18.60
Enroll in a post-secondary education institution	48.84	25.58	11.63	13.95
Be employed virtually following high school*	57.14	28.57	4.76	9.52
Engage in social and leisure once per week or more*	7.14	23.81	30.95	38.10
Engage in community activities once per day or more	25.48	30.23	32.56	11.63
Involved in some type of post-secondary education or training	9.30	27.91	39.53	23.26
Able to transport himself/herself	25.58	25.58	18.60	30.23

around community independently				
Require assistance from an outside agency	39.53	27.91	13.95	18.60
Request accommodations under Americans with Disabilities	30.23	34.88	16.28	18.60

Notes. * = N≠43

Table 4

Transition Topic Responses of Respondents and Students (N=43, unless noted)

Transition topic	n	% of total
Student graduation plan		
Diploma	31	72.09
Certificate of completion	7	16.28
Don't know/unsure	5	11.63
Student previous or current paid work experience		
Yes	12	27.91
No	31	72.09
Frequency of community activity engagement		
Daily	3	6.98
Once per week	20	46.51
Twice monthly	4	9.30
Once per month	1	2.33
Never or rarely	15	34.88
Frequency of virtual social activity engagement (not including classes)		
Daily	12	27.91
Once per week	5	11.63
Twice monthly	0	0
Once per month	3	6.98
Never or rarely	23	53.49
Overall social skills		
Excellent	3	6.98
Good	12	27.91
Adequate	16	37.21
Inadequate	12	27.91
Distance of residence to school office		
0-20 miles	12	27.91
20-60 miles	18	41.86
60-90 miles	5	11.63
90-120 miles	1	2.33
120-150 miles	3	6.98
150-200 miles	0	0.00
Greater than 200 miles	4	9.30
Parent knowledge of identity of caseload manager		
Yes	29	67.44
No	14	32.56
Frequency of parent communication with school staff about student		
Daily	2	4.65

Weekly	17	39.53
Monthly	11	25.58
Once per block (quarter)	8	18.60
Never or rarely	5	11.63

Overall satisfaction with child's education at this virtual school

Very Satisfied	24	55.81
Satisfied	12	27.91
Somewhat Satisfied	6	13.95
Dissatisfied	1	2.33

Number of parent transition trainings attended

0	22	1.16
1-2	16	37.21
3-4	0	0.00
5-6	3	6.98
7-8	1	2.33
9-10	0	0.00
11 or more	1	2.33

Number of student transition trainings attended*

0	21	50.00
1-2	12	28.57
3-4	0	0.00
5-6	7	16.67
7-8	2	4.76
9-10	0	0.00
11 or more	0	0.00

Parent knowledge of transition resources

Very knowledgeable	4	9.30
Knowledgeable	5	11.63
Somewhat knowledgeable	20	46.51
Not at all knowledgeable	14	32.56

Student knowledge of transition resources

Very knowledgeable	3	6.98
Knowledgeable	16	37.21
Somewhat knowledgeable	14	32.56
Not at all knowledgeable	10	23.26

Parent knowledge of graduation requirements and credits earned

Very knowledgeable	12	27.91
Knowledgeable	16	37.21
Somewhat knowledgeable	9	20.93
Not at all knowledgeable	6	13.95

Student knowledge of graduation requirements and credits earned

Very knowledgeable	3	6.98
Knowledgeable	16	37.21
Somewhat knowledgeable	14	32.56
Not at all knowledgeable	10	23.26

Student attended most recent IEP meeting

Yes	41	95.35
No	2	4.65

Notes. * = N≠43

Table 5

Transition Topic Responses of Respondents and Students with Multiple Allowed Responses

Transition topic	n	% of total
Reason for choosing this school		
Course offerings	7	16.28
Dissatisfaction with previous school	28	65.12
Social or bullying concerns at brick and mortar school	23	53.49
Flexibility of scheduling	22	51.16
Ability to graduate early	3	6.98
Credit recovery	2	4.65
Recommendation of friend, family, acquaintance, etc.	6	13.95
Other	13	30.23
Outside agencies student is working with		
Vocational Rehabilitation	7	16.28
Division of Services for People with Disabilities	6	13.95
Social Security Disability	10	23.26
Medicaid/CHIP	14	32.56
Department of Workforce Services	7	0.00
Independent Living Center	0	0.00
Utah State Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired	0	0.00
Utah State Division of Services for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing	0	0.00
Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health	1	2.33
Utah Assistive Technology Program	0	0.00
Utah Center for Assistive Technology	1	2.33
Work Ability Utah	0	0.00
Utah Parent Center	1	2.33
None	20	46.51
Other	8	18.60
Transition courses student has taken at this school		
Career Readiness	9	21.43
Career Explorations	10	23.81
Determining Your Future	13	30.95
Paths to Employment	6	14.29
Reaching Your Academic Potential	13	30.95
Achieving Your College and Career Goals	2	4.76
Life Skills	16	38.10
CTE course	9	21.43
None	12	28.57

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Appendix A

Recruitment Pitch Email:

In one week, you will be invited through email to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Robert Morgan, a Professor in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to gather information from parents of students with disabilities at a virtual school about their expectations for their students one year after leaving high school and their satisfaction with transition to adulthood services at the virtual school.

Time Commitment:

Your participation will involve taking an online survey answering questions about yourself and your student, which will take about 10 minutes of your time.

Participation Requirements:

For you to participate, your student must meet the following requirements:

1. students must have a disability as outlined by IDEA and be served in special education;
2. students' ages must range from 14-22; and
3. students must be enrolled full-time at the virtual school at the time of the survey.

Multiple parents/guardians of a student will be invited separately to participate, but are asked to participate independently without discussing answers while completing the survey. Your responses will be anonymous as you will only be identified by IP address. This is only a survey of parents and guardians; students will not be asked to participate.

Benefits:

Participation in this study will provide no direct benefit to you. However, it may provide information to school staff for improving transition services at the school. Information from the survey will be shared with the school staff, but your identity will remain anonymous.

Please check your email, as you will receive the survey link from Qualtrics™ through your email in one week.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Robert Morgan at 435-797-3251 or bob.morgan@usu.edu.

Protocol #8097

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix B

Reminder Email

Dear Parent, If you have not already done so, please complete the survey at the link below to participate in this research study designed to identify your views on the transition from school to adulthood of your student with disabilities in This school. Also, the research study will ask questions about your satisfaction with transition services offered at our school. If you have already, participated, please disregard this email. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Robert Morgan at 435-797-3251 or bob.morgan@usu.edu. Protocol #8097 Thank you for your participation in this research!

Appendix C

Survey - Parent Perspectives on Transition Services and Expectations

Consent and Eligibility

Please fully review the Informed Consent form before deciding whether to proceed with this survey.

I am a parent or guardian of a full-time student with a disability at This school.

❍ Yes

❍ No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Transition Information

With which agencies is your student currently working and actively receiving services or support? Check all that apply.

❑ Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

❑ Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD)

❑ Social Security Disability (SSI/SSDI)

❑ Medicaid/CHIP

❑ Department of Workforce Services (DWS)

❑ Independent Living Center (ILC)

❑ Utah Sate Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DSBVI)

❑ Utah State Division of Services for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DSDHH)

❑ Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH) - including Community Mental Health Centers

❑ Utah Assistive Technology Program (UATP)

❑ Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT)

❑ Work Ability Utah

❑ Utah Parent Center (UPC)

❑ None

❑ Other _____

How many parent transition trainings have you attended through This school (including home visits, and face to face and virtual trainings with staff or outside agencies)?

○ 0

○ 1-2

○ 5-6

○ 7-8

○ 9-10

○ 11 or more

How many student transition learning opportunities has your student attended through This school (including face to face or virtual trainings/informational interviews/job shadows/transition outings)?

○ 0

○ 1-2

○ 5-6

○ 7-8

○ 9-10

○ 11 or more

Which of the following transition related courses has your student completed at This school? Check all that apply.

❑ Career Readiness

❑ Career Explorations

❑ Determining Your Future

❑ Paths to Employment

❑ Reaching Your Academic Potential

❑ Achieving Your College and Career Goals

❑ Life Skills

❑ CTE (Career Technology Education) course _____

❑ None

How would you rate your knowledge level of transition resources and supports for youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood?

❍ Very knowledgeable

❍ Knowledgeable

❍ Somewhat knowledgeable

❍ Not at all knowledgeable

How would you rate your knowledge level of graduation requirements and credits earned and needed for your student?

❍ Very knowledgeable

❍ Knowledgeable

❍ Somewhat knowledgeable

❍ Not at all knowledgeable

How would you rate your student's knowledge level of graduation requirements and credits earned and needed for graduation?

❍ Very knowledgeable

❍ Knowledgeable

❍ Somewhat knowledgeable

❍ Not at all knowledgeable

Did your student attend his/her most recent IEP meeting?

❍ Yes

❍ No

Your Satisfaction with Transition Services

Please rate the following areas for your satisfaction in the This school transition program and services for your student with a disability. Use ratings 1-4 (1 being least satisfied and 4 being most satisfied).

	1 - least satisfied	2 - somewhat satisfied	3 - satisfied	4 -very satisfied
Relevancy of parent training and information on transition to my student's needs	❍	❍	❍	❍
Quality of parent training and information on transition	❍	❍	❍	❍
Relevancy of student training, supports, services, and information on transition to my student's needs	❍	❍	❍	❍
Quality of student training, supports, services, and information on transition	❍	❍	❍	❍
Community based student learning opportunities	❍	❍	❍	❍

Information and involvement with outside agencies	○	○	○	○
Appropriateness of transition plan in IEP to my student	○	○	○	○
Effective and timely communication from school staff regarding transition	○	○	○	○
Knowledge of school staff in transition topics	○	○	○	○
Relevance and quality of transition courses to my student's transition needs	○	○	○	○
Communication from school counselors and other staff regarding graduation credits and requirements	○	○	○	○

What suggestions do you have for improving transition services at This school to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

Your Expectations for Your Student

Please rate the following statements regarding your expectations for your student with a disability one year after exiting high school.   Use ratings 1-4 (1 being least likely and 4 being most likely).

	1 - least likely	2 - somewhat likely	3 - likely	4 - very likely
Student will reside outside of his/her of parents' home.	○	○	○	○
Student will be employed in work for 20 hours a week or more at minimum wage or above.	○	○	○	○
Student will continue in online or virtual education for post-secondary school.	○	○	○	○
Student will be enrolled in a post-secondary institution (four-year college, university, technical college, or community college).	○	○	○	○
Student will be employed virtually while working from home or telecommuting.	○	○	○	○

Student will participate in social and leisure activities at least once per week.	❍	❍	❍	❍
Student will engage in community activities at least once per day.	❍	❍	❍	❍
Student will receive some education or training beyond high school (including on the job training, apprenticeship, internship, humanitarian mission, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍
Student will be able to transport him or herself around the community independently (driving a car, bus, train, bicycle, walking).	❍	❍	❍	❍
Student will require assistance from an outside adult agency for financial support, employment assistance,	❍	❍	❍	❍

independent living, etc.				
Student will request accommodations for his or her disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (work, school, etc.)	○	○	○	○

What specific concerns do you have for your student with a disability's transition from school to adult life?

Your Personal Information

What is your gender identification?

○ Male

○ Female

What is your age?

○ 20-29 years

○ 30-39 years

○ 40-49 years

○ 50-59 years

○ 60+

What is your race or ethnicity?

○ White

○ Hispanic or Latino

❍ Black or African American

❍ American Indian or Alaska Native

❍ Asian

❍ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

❍ Other

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

❍ Middle School

❍ Some High School

❍ High School Diploma/GED

❍ Some College

❍ Vocational or Trade Certification

❍ Associate's Degree

❍ Bachelor's Degree

❍ Master's Degree

❍ Professional Degree

❍ Doctorate Degree

How many people currently live in your household?

What is your yearly household income before taxes (gross)?

Basic Information

How close do you live to the This school office (Murray, UT)?

❍ 0- 20 miles

❍ 20-60 miles

❍ 60-90 miles

❍ 90-120 miles

❍ 120-150 miles

❍ 150-200 miles

❍ greater than 200 miles

Do you know who your student's special education case load manager is?

❍ Yes

❍ No

How often do you communicate with school staff about your student?

❍ Daily

❍ Weekly

❍ Monthly

❍ Once per block (quarter)

❍ Never or rarely

What led you to choose to enroll your child at This school? Check all that apply.

❑ Course offerings

❑ Dissatisfaction with previous school

❑ Social or bullying concerns at brick and mortar school

❑ Flexibility of scheduling

❑ Ability to graduate early

- ❑ Credit Recovery

- ❑ Recommendation of friend, family, acquaintance, etc.

- ❑ Other _____

How satisfied are you overall with your child's education at This school?

- ○ Very satisfied

- ○ Satisfied

- ○ Somewhat satisfied

- ○ Dissatisfied

Your Student's Personal Information

What is your student's gender identification?

- ○ Male

- ○ Female

What is your student's age?

- ○ 14

- ○ 15

- ○ 16

- ○ 17

- ○ 18

- ○ 19

- ○ 20

- ○ 21

- ○ 22

Skip Logic – Skip next question if under 18

If your student is 18 or older, do you have court-ordered legal guardianship of your student?

○ Yes

○ No

What is your student's race or ethnicity?

○ White

○ Hispanic or Latino

○ Black or African American

○ American Indian or Alaska Native

○ Asian

○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

○ Other _____

In which grade level is your student currently enrolled?

○ 8th grade

○ 9th grade

○ 10th grade

○ 11th grade

○ 12th grade

○ Post-high school or "Super Senior" (taking more than one 12th grade year)

What is your student's disability classification (on IEP)?

○ Specific Learning Disability

○ Other Health Impairment

○ Autism Spectrum Disorder

○ Visual Impairment

○ Hearing Impairment

○ Traumatic Brain Injury

❍ Emotional Disturbance

❍ Intellectual Disability

❍ Multiple Disabilities

❍ Deaf-Blindness

❍ Speech or Language Impairment

❍ Orthopedic Impairment

❍ I don't know/unsure

How many years has your student been enrolled full-time at this school?

❍ 1 year

❍ 2 years

❍ 3 years

❍ 4 years

❍ 5 years

❍ 6 years

❍ 7 years

❍ 8 years

❍ 9 years

What is your student's plan for graduation?

❍ Diploma

❍ Certificate of Completion

❍ I don't know/unsure

Does your student have any previous or current paid work experience?

❍ Yes

❍ No

How often does your student engage in community activities?

○ Daily

○ Once per week

○ Twice monthly

○ Once a month

○ Never or rarely

How often does your student engage in virtual social activities with others (not including this school's classes)?

○ Daily

○ Once per week

○ Twice Monthly

○ Once a month

○ Never or rarely

How would you rate your student's overall social skills?

○ Excellent

○ Good

○ Adequate

○ Inadequate