

Kansas Special Educator Needs Assessment

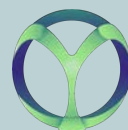
Summary of Initial Findings
(Spring 2023)



KU THE UNIVERSITY OF
KANSAS

KU CENTER ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

KANSAS
STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION



MY TRANSITION
MY CAREER

KS Special Educator Needs Assessment

A Brief Project Summary of Initial Findings

This is a brief project summary of initial findings from a statewide survey on the views of Special Education Teachers in Kansas related to serving transition-age students with disabilities. If you participated in this research, thank you!

In this report, we share a summary of initial findings from this research. Additional analyses are planned, which will be reported with greater detail in future research manuscripts. We hope the findings of this research will be used to improve outcomes for transition-age students with disabilities across Kansas and improve the supports that their educators and service providers receive to serve these students well.

If you have questions about this research, please contact:

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Who participated in this research?

376
Special
Education
Teachers

**69.5% of
Counties
Represented**

Average:

46 years of age
(range 22-76)

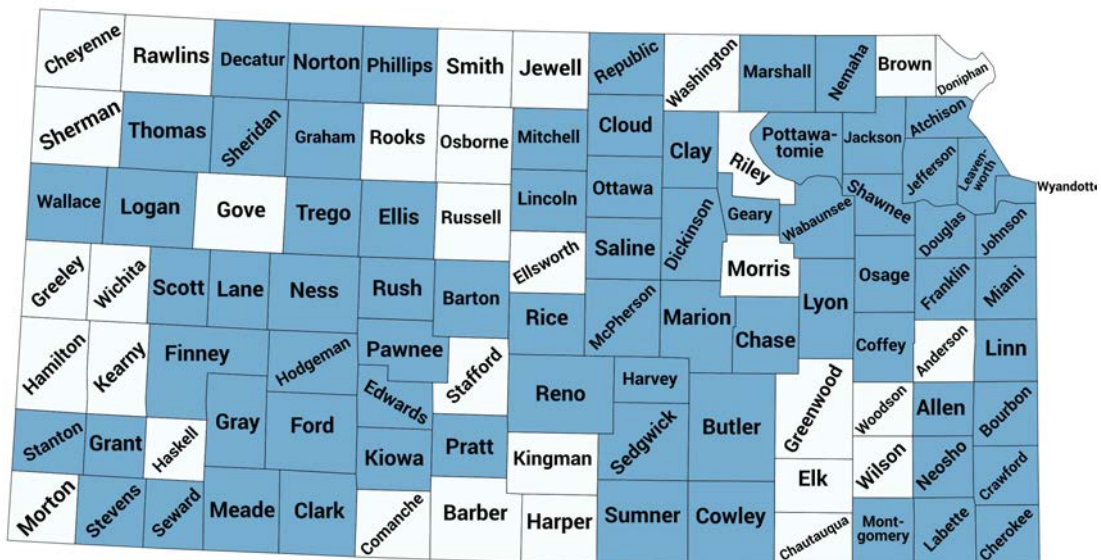
12 years experience
(range 0-42)

**18.4% supporting
students participating
in the alternate state
assessment**

**58.4% reported having
a transition coordinator
in their district**

Representation Across Kansas Counties

The number of respondents from each county ranged from 1-59.



Participant Demographics

Race of Participants

0.5%	American Indian/Alaska Native
0.8%	Asian
0.8%	Black/ African American
93.6%	White
1.9%	Not listed or prefer to self-describe

Ethnicity of Participants

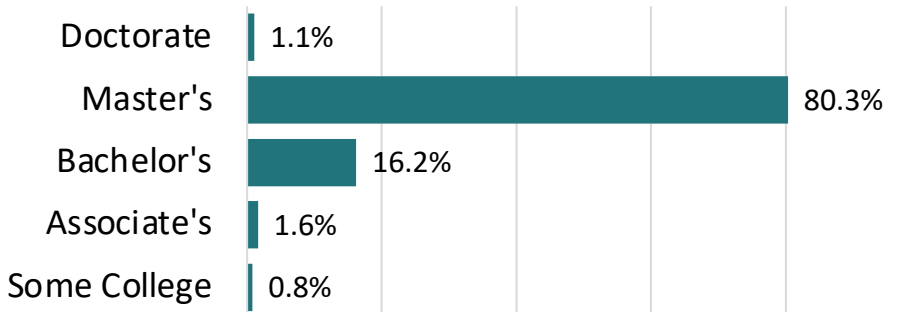
4.0%	Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin
96.0%	Not Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin

Gender of Participants

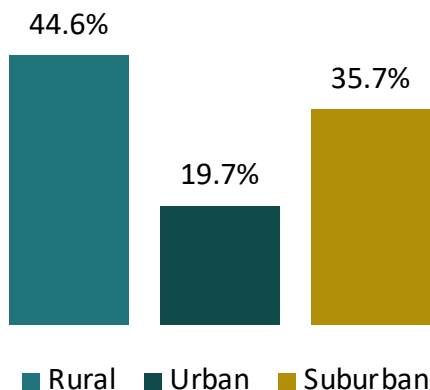


■ Male	18.1%
■ Female	81.1%
■ Non-Binary	0.5%
■ Prefer to self-describe	0.3%

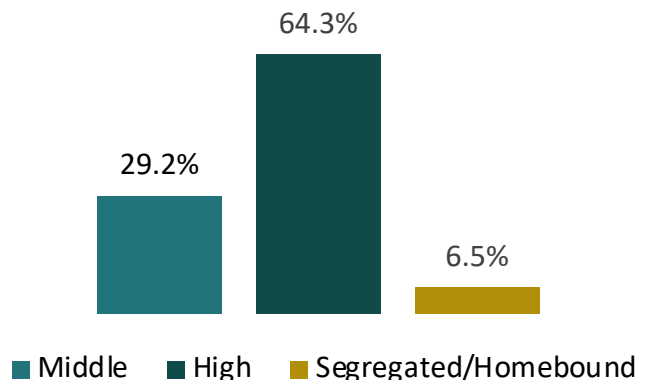
Level of Education



Geographic Locale



School Type



Education, training, and student caseloads

We asked participants whether they had completed formal coursework on transition or had received any professional development (PD) about transition or transition-age students. Of note are the large percentages of special education teachers who had never taken formal coursework or received PD about the transition to adulthood.

Never

31.6% of SPED teachers have never taken formal transition coursework, and **27.7%** have never had PD related to transition.

Prior to the last 10 years

18.6% of SPED teachers have taken formal transition coursework, and **1.6%** have had PD related to transition.

Within the last 3-10 years

22.1% of SPED teachers have taken formal transition coursework, and **10.1%** have had PD related to transition.

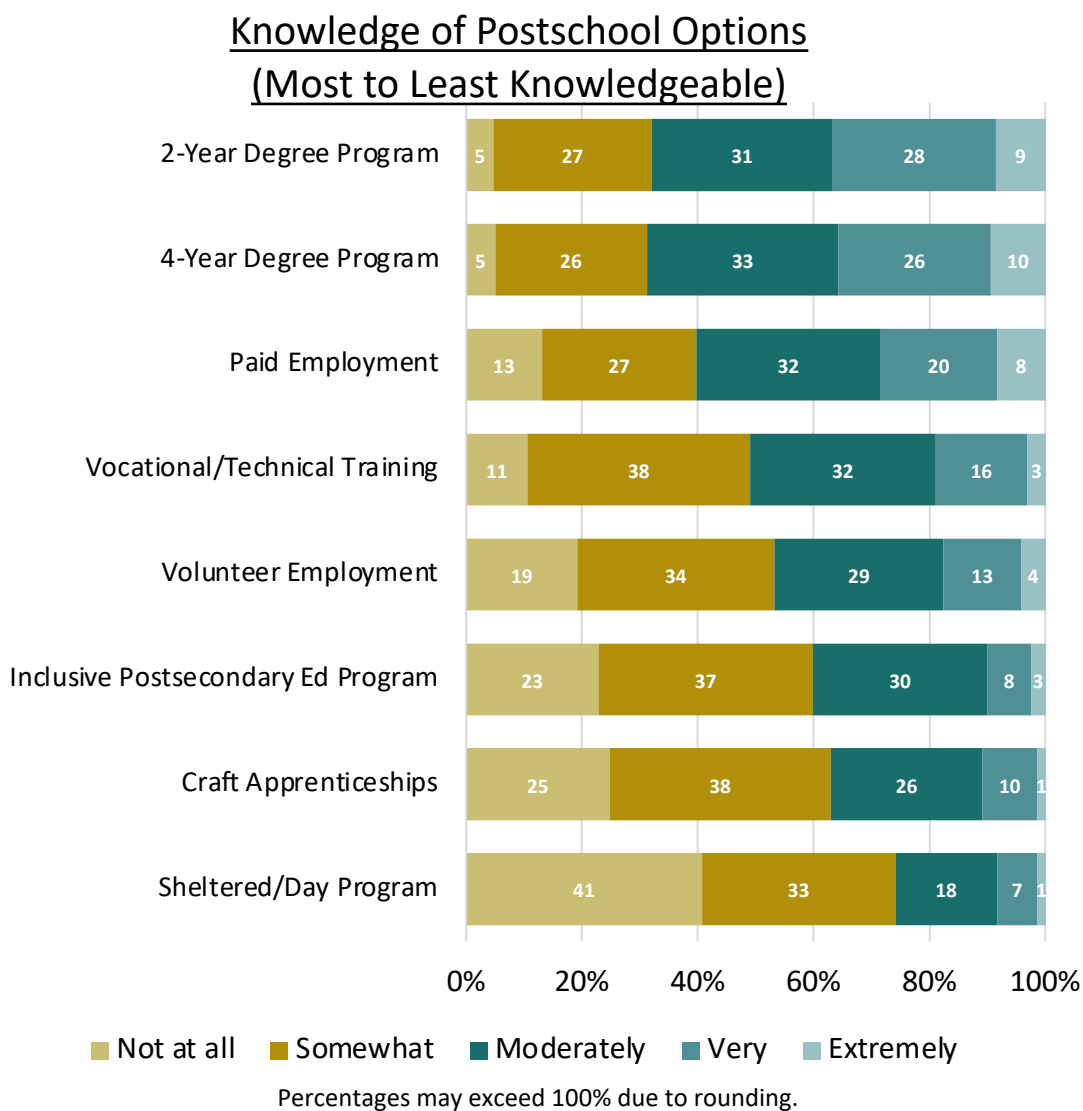
Within the last 3 years

27.7% of SPED teachers have taken formal transition coursework, and **60.6%** have had PD related to transition.

The average transition caseload size was 9 students for special educators primarily supporting students on the alternate assessment and 16 students for special educators primarily supporting students on the standard state assessment.

How knowledgeable are special educators about postschool options?

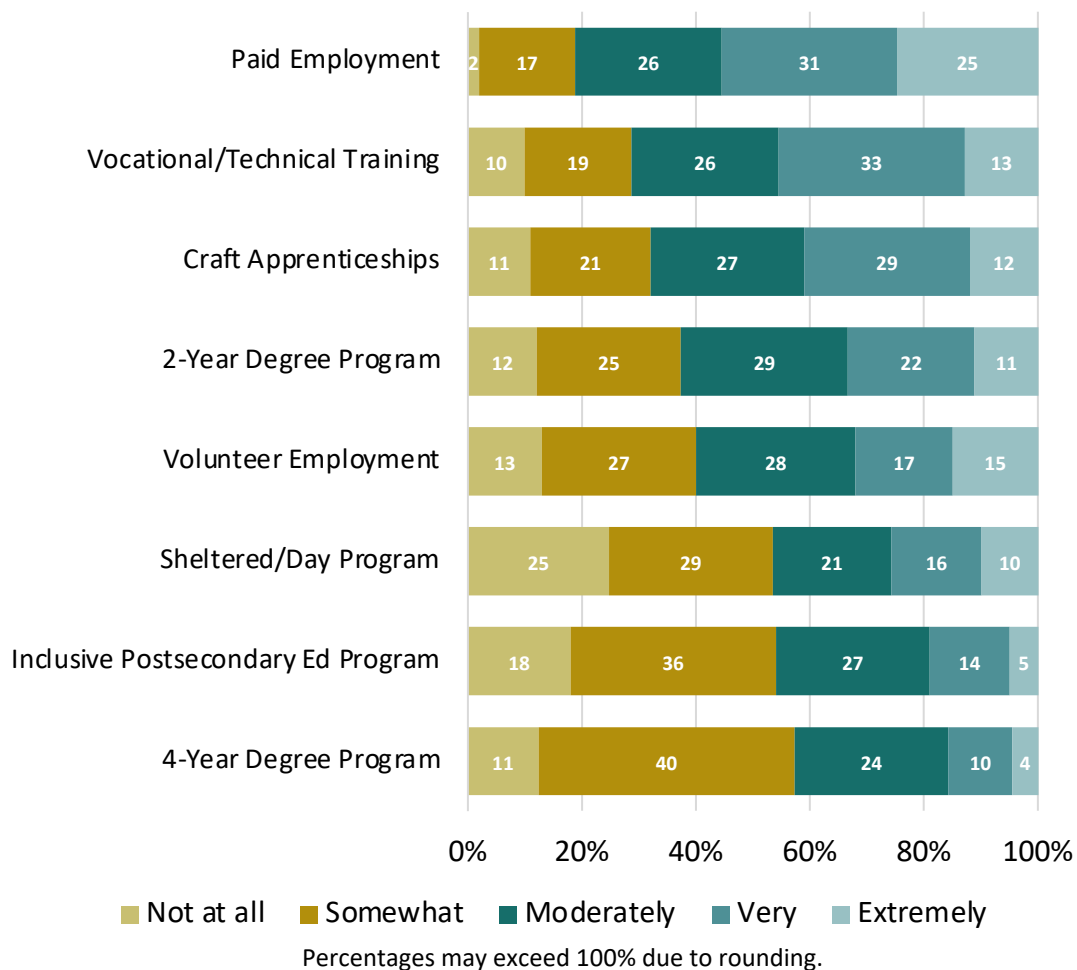
The knowledge special educators have about the postschool options of their students likely determine the services, supports, and experience students access during the transition to adulthood. We asked participants to rate their knowledge related to eight different postschool outcomes using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all knowledgeable* to 5 = *Extremely knowledgeable*. Below are the percentages of participants who selected each rating.



What do special educators expect for their students with disabilities?

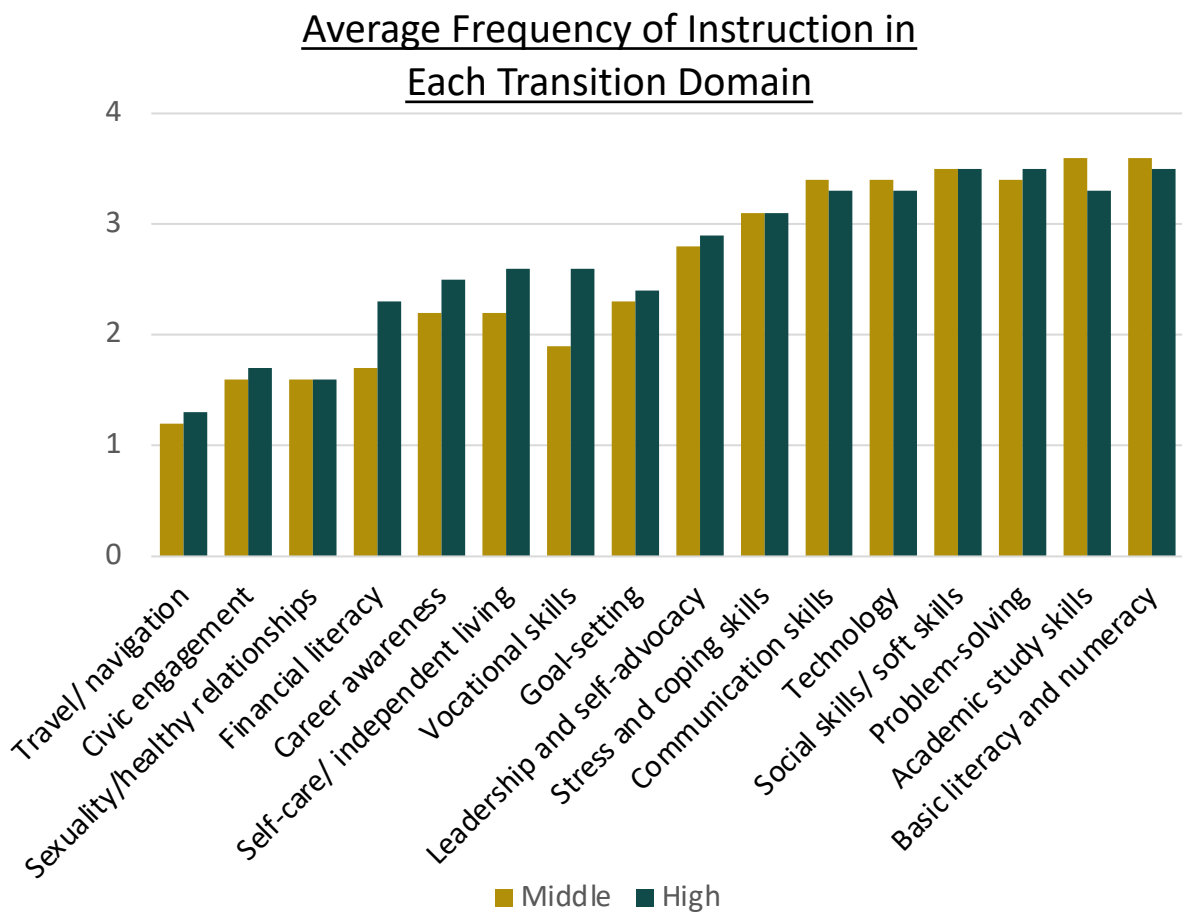
The expectations special educators hold about the postschool outcomes of their students matter. Prior research has found that teachers' expectations are a strong predictor of postschool outcomes in employment and higher education. Using this prior research as a guide, we asked participants to rate their expectations related to eight postschool outcomes using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all likely* to 5 = *Extremely likely*. Below are the percentages of participants who selected each rating.

Likelihood of Postschool Options (Most to Least Likely)



How often are students receiving instruction in important transition domains?

Educator knowledge and expectations impact the breadth and depth of the topics they address in their classrooms as well as how often they address specific transition domains. We asked special educators how often the students they serve received instruction in key transition domains. They rated frequency of instruction on a 5-point scale of 0 = *Never*, 1 = *A few times per year*, 2 = *Monthly*, 3 = *Weekly*, and 4 = *Daily*. Below we compare frequency of instruction across middle and high school special educators. Note: this question did not address if the educators themselves provided instruction, but, rather, how often the transition-age students on their caseload received instruction from any school professional.

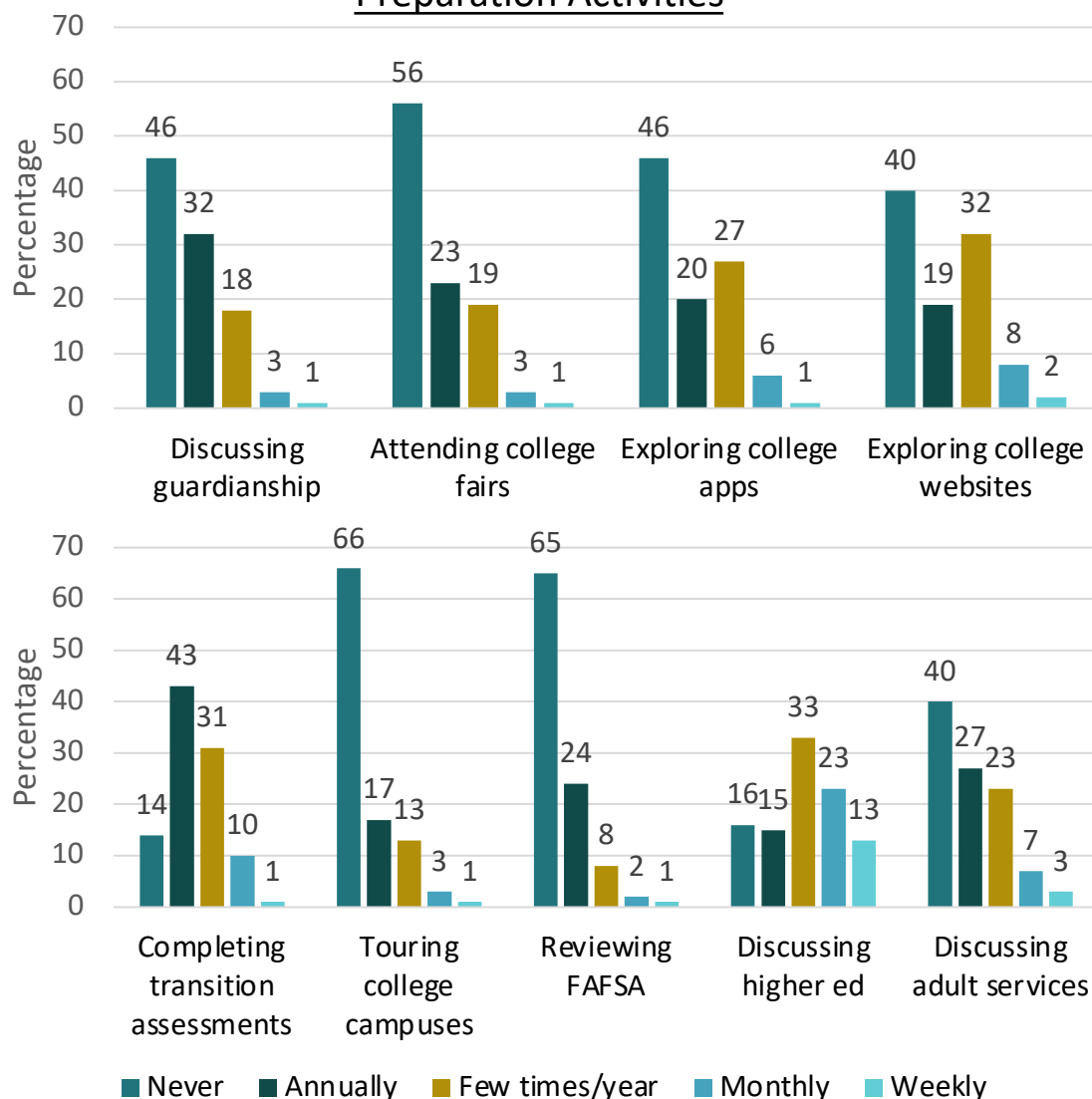


Domains in which a considerable percentage of participants reported students never receiving instruction included travel and navigation (27.0% of respondents), sexuality and healthy relationships (13.8% of respondents), self-care/independent living (12.1% of respondents), civic engagement (9.2% of respondents), and financial literacy (8.9% of respondents).

How often are special educators completing college preparation activities with their students with disabilities?

In the last 10 years, college supports and programs for students with disabilities have emerged across the country. However, some students may not have access to college preparation activities or opportunities to explore college options in their state. We asked special educators how often THEY completed common college preparation activities with their transition-age students. Below are the percentage of respondents reporting each frequency across activities. The proportions of our sample did not allow for comparisons between students with and without extensive support needs.

Frequency of Special Educators Completing College Preparation Activities



Percentages may exceed 100% due to rounding.

Who do Special Education Teachers Collaborate With?

A primary focus of our survey was to learn about the social networks of special educators. A social network is a group of people with ties or links between them. We did this by providing a list of potential collaborative partners (below) and asking survey participants if they collaborated with a person in this role, **specifically about transition in the last 2 years**. If participants indicated they did collaborate with a person in this role, we asked them follow-up questions about the person in this role that they communicated with the most. These follow-up questions included things like how often they communicate, the supports they exchanged, and their level of trust.

Social network researchers often use different ways of visualizing network data, particularly because social networks can be difficult to understand without such visualizations. In this report, we model composite egocentric social networks of special education teachers. Specifically, we address: (a) the percentage of school personnel in each role who reported collaborating with each potential collaborative partner, (b) the frequency of communication (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, a few times per year) that was reported most often, and (c) the extent to which the partner was someone they could rely on and trust.

A Key to Collaborative Partners



School-Based Partners

- Special education supervisor
- School administrator
- Other special educator
- General educator
- Guidance counselor/school psych
- Career and technical education teacher (CTE)
- School social worker
- Physical or occupational therapist (PT/OT)
- Speech language pathologist (SLP)
- Orientation and mobility specialist (OMS)
- Paraprofessional (Para)
- Interpreter (e.g., ASL, Spanish)



Disability Service System Partners

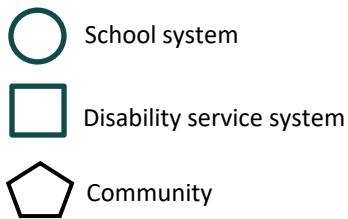
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Pre-Employment Transition Services (VR Pre-ETS)
- Center for Independent Living (CIL)
- Supported employment providers
- Group homes or supported living providers
- Mental and behavioral health providers
- Adult day programs and sheltered workshops
- Recreational services and supports for youth with disabilities
- Disability advocacy groups
- Support group and training providers for family members of people with disabilities (Family support)
- Higher education programs for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (College for students with IDD)



Community Partners

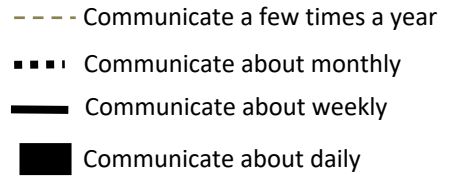
- U.S. Armed Forces
- Local employers
- Child protective services or foster care services (CPS)
- 2-year colleges
- 4-year colleges
- Recreational or social organizations
- Local transportation providers
- American Job Centers or Job Corps (AJC)
- Faith communities
- Leadership and advocacy groups
- Vocational training programs and craft apprenticeships (e.g., plumbing, carpentry)

Collaborative Networks of Teachers



Percentages represent the percentage of respondents who reported collaborating with each partner about transition in the last 2 years

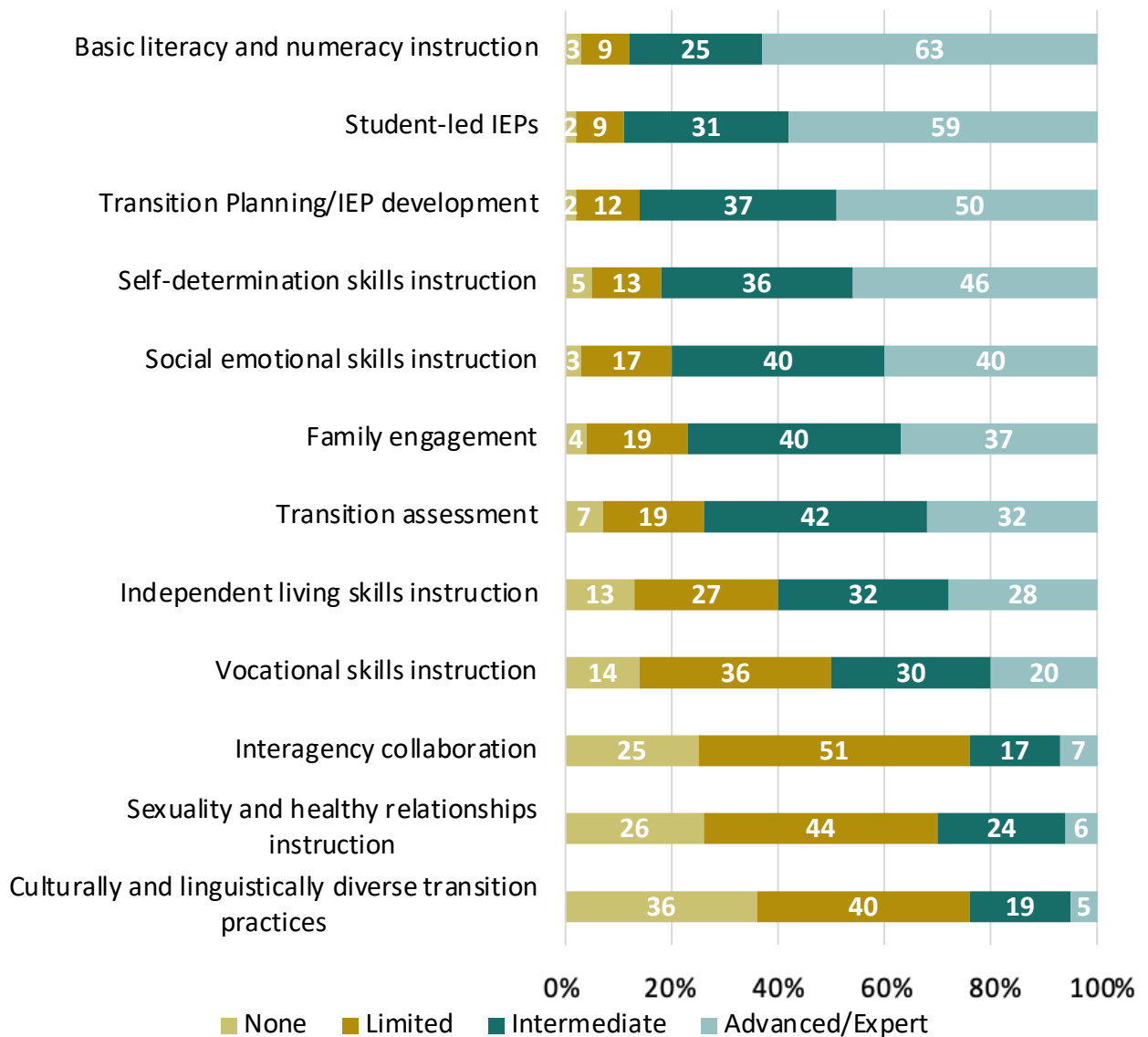
Darker shading represents deeper levels of reliance and trust.



Confidence or Mastery Across Transition Domains

Teacher mastery of transition domains carries strong implications for teacher preparation and professional development from districts and state agencies. We asked special educators to rate their level of mastery across 12 transition domains on a 4-point scale of 0 = *No mastery*, 1 = *Limited mastery*, 2 = *Intermediate level of mastery*, and 3 = *Advanced or expert mastery*. Below are the percentages of participants who selected each rating.

Mastery of Transition Domains (Most to Least Mastery)

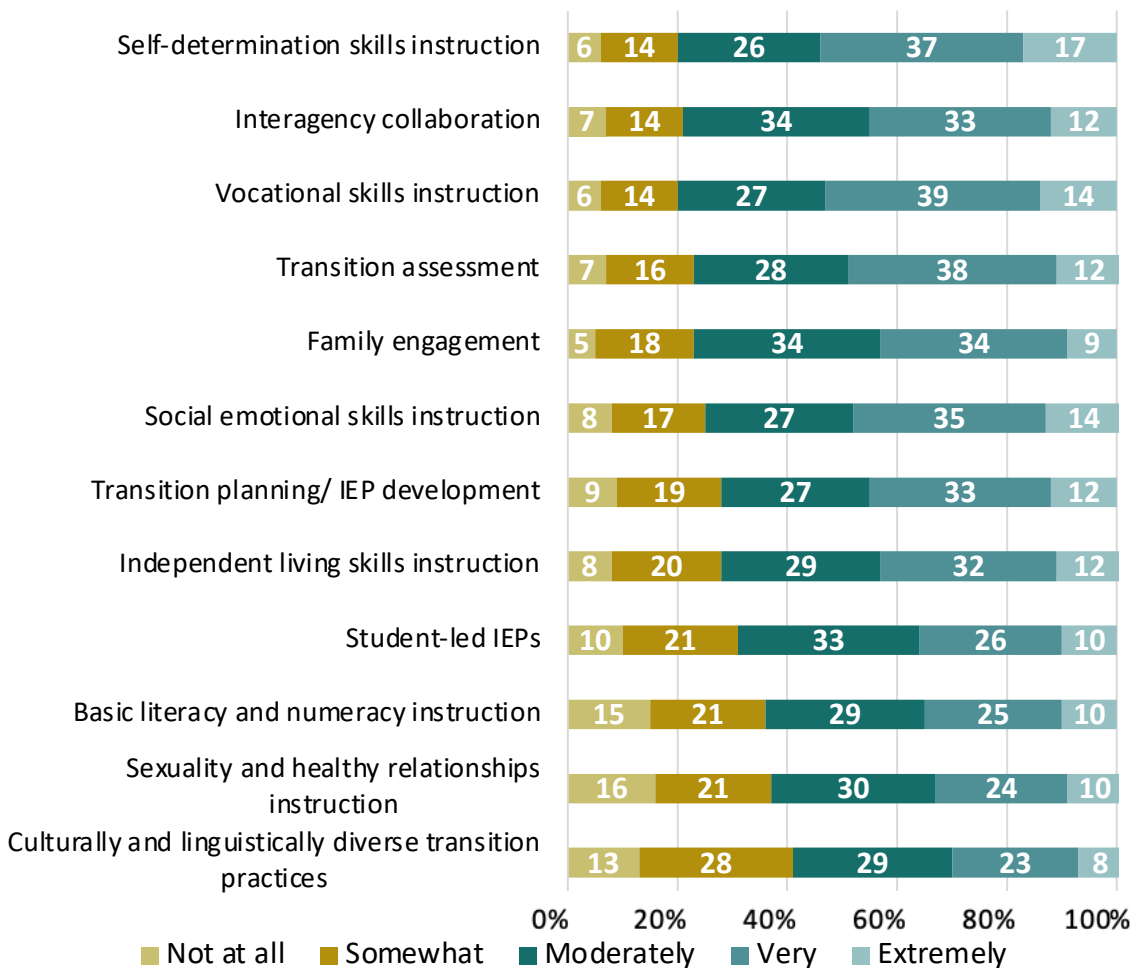


Percentages may exceed 100% due to rounding.

What transition domains are special educators most interested in learning more about?

When exploring what areas to target for professional development and teacher preparation courses, it is important to consider educator preferences and the topics they consider most pressing based on their experiences in the field. We asked special educators to rate their level of interest in learning about 12 transition domains on a 5-point scale of 0 = *Not at all interested* to 5 = *Extremely interested*. Below are the percentages of participants who selected each rating.

Level of Interest in Learning About Specific Transition Domains (Most to Least Interested)

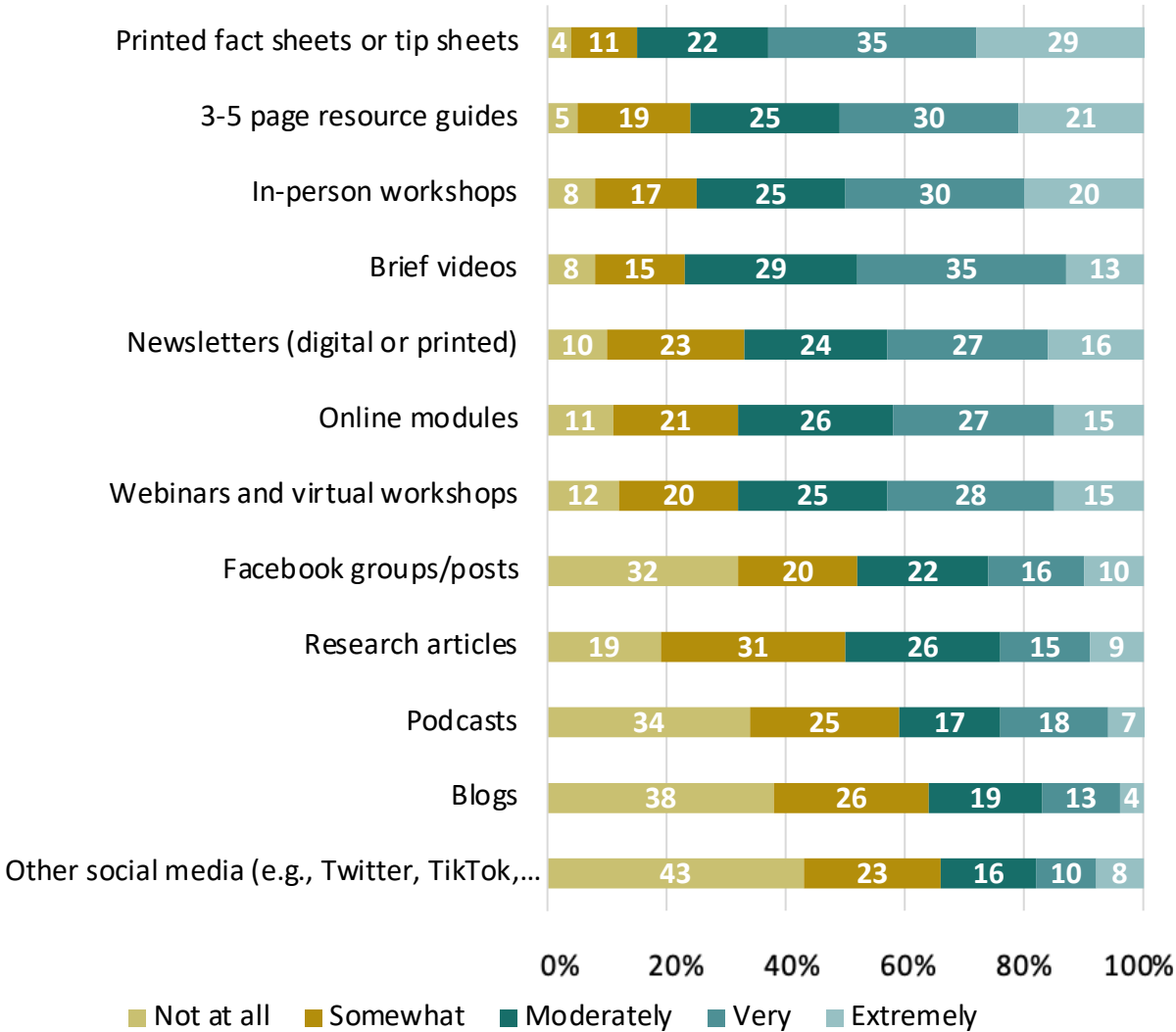


Percentages may exceed 100% due to rounding.

In what formats are special educators most likely to access transition information?

Understanding educator preferences for how they choose to access ongoing training and information related to transition domains is critical to effective dissemination efforts. We asked special educators to rate the likelihood they might access transition content across 12 common formats on a 5-point scale of 0 = *Not at all likely* to 5 = *Extremely likely*. Below are the percentages of participants who selected each rating.

Likelihood of Special Educators to Access Different Learning Formats (Most to Least Likely)



Percentages may exceed 100% due to rounding.

Implications for Practice



Preparation



Collaboration



Instruction



Expectations and Preparation

The perspectives, knowledge, and expertise of special educators completing this survey varied widely. It is also important to note that the sample lacked racial and ethnic diversity, so the views of *Kansas special educators hold high expectations for their students*. The majority of respondents reported paid employment and vocational training as the most likely postschool outcomes for the students. Yet, some hesitations still persist surrounding higher education. The least likely outcomes respondents had for their students were inclusive postsecondary education programs and 4-year degree programs. While the limited number of higher education programs for students with intellectual disability—Connect at Johnson County Community College and KU's Transition to Postsecondary Education (a fully inclusive 2-year program offering federal financial aid as an approved comprehensive transition program)—may explain these lower expectations, we found that about 77% of special educators were at least somewhat knowledgeable about college options for their students with intellectual disability. Ongoing professional development through state agencies and school districts should focus on the full range of student postschool options to ensure special educators are equipped with the knowledge they need to support students and their families in achieving their vision for the future. We should also focus on highlighting more success stories across the state so that families, educators, policymakers, and service providers might *envision higher education as a realistic and meaningful option for young people with disabilities*.

When asked about levels of mastery across transition domains, special educators consistently rated high mastery in areas of transition planning and IEP development, student-led IEPs, and basic literacy and numeracy instruction and low mastery in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) transition and sexuality and healthy relationships instruction. Yet, these domains of lowest mastery were the domains teachers were least interested in learning more about. It will be important for school districts and state agencies to work to find alignment between training needs and teacher preferences (e.g., pairing a high-interest area such as self-determination instruction with a high-need topic such as CLD transition), and design professional development plans based on new needs that might emerge throughout the school year.

When asked about learning formats, special educators were most likely to access transition information through more traditional routes including printed fact sheets, 3-5 page resource guides, and in-person workshops. This trend seems to run counter to recent initiatives to develop content through social media, podcasts, and blogs. It may be helpful for school districts and state agencies to conduct smaller surveys at the local level to see what works best for special educators in their area.



Building and utilizing collaborative networks

Other important findings from this survey project relate to the collaborative social networks of special educators. Social network analysis, which was used in this study, is a practical approach to measuring relationships and connections between individuals, and operates under the primary assumption that an individual's actions and beliefs are influenced by the perspectives of others with whom they collaborate, how often they collaborate, and the types of resources they receive from these collaborative networks. Our preliminary analyses of these collaborative social networks specific to transition collaboration vary widely. The average network size was 12 partners, and some respondents reported no partners outside the school system (15.4%). On average, communication occurred rarely across partners (about 1-2 times per year). The percentage of special educators who reported network members as trusted partners (i.e., rating of agree or strongly agree when asked if the partner was someone they could depend on and trust) varied across partners, but percentages were highest among the school partners (range 64.5% to 92.3%) and lowest among the disability service providers (range 32.6% to 56.9%). Administrators should develop opportunities for educators to learn about, meet, and deepen relationships with providers and community partners. Coordination across school systems, service systems, and communities is essential to effective transition planning and postschool success for students with disabilities.



Instruction

These research findings also speak to the instruction special educators provide to their students and the frequency with which they complete college preparation activities. Although we might expect instruction and levels of college preparation to differ across students with and without extensive support needs, the proportions of our sample did not allow for these comparisons. However, we found that instruction frequency across transition domains was pretty similar for middle and high school special educators, with the most frequent instruction related to academic study skills, literacy, and numeracy. The largest differences were between financial literacy skills instruction and vocational skills instruction, which were more likely to happen at the high school level. Domains we expected to see addressed more frequently were travel/ navigation and healthy relationships. One way to address this issue is leveraging stage agencies and service providers to build capacity in these areas special educators may not have the time or resources to address within the school day.

With college programming and opportunities on the rise, we expected that more students would have access to college preparation activities to ensure they were aware of and well-equipped for higher education. Some of these activities would likely only happen once or twice per year like reviewing the FAFSA and touring college campuses. At the same time, almost half of respondents reported they had never discussed guardianship, explored college websites, or discussed adult service providers with their students. These conversations and exploration activities should be a regular part of transition planning and occur at multiple times throughout the school year. Further, without opportunities to learn about higher education and visit college campuses, many students with disabilities across Kansas are missing out on this primary pathway to personal growth and a meaningful career in the community. The development of additional inclusive postsecondary education programs is critical to making college an option for all Kansans with disabilities. School districts and state agencies should also ensure their transition trainings address the full spectrum of postschool options and the services and supports that can help students attain competitive employment, higher education, and a full life in the community.

Notable findings from this statewide survey

- About a third of special educators had never completed coursework or professional development related to transition.
- Special educators were most knowledgeable about 2- and 4-year college degree programs, and least knowledgeable about sheltered workshops and day programs.
- Special educators identified paid employment and vocational training as the most likely postschool outcomes for their students with disabilities, and 4-year college programs as the least likely postschool outcome.
- The most frequent transition instruction students received was related to academic study skills and basic literacy and numeracy. The least frequent area of instruction is travel and community navigation.
- The most frequent college preparation activities students engaged in were exploring college websites and discussing higher education with their special education teachers.
- Special educators most commonly collaborated with other school professionals with few partners in the service system and community.
- Special educators reported the most mastery related to basic literacy and numeracy instruction and student-led IEPs and least mastery related to culturally and linguistically diverse transition practices.
- Special educators identified self-determination skills instruction and interagency collaboration as areas they were most interested in learning more about.
- Special educators were most likely to access transition information through printed fact sheets and 3-5 page resource guides and least likely to access transition information through blogs, podcasts, and social media.

Next Steps

This is just the beginning. Here is what we plan to do next with data from the survey:



1. Further Explore the Collaborative Networks of Paraprofessionals and Transition Coordinators

We are currently analyzing data related to details about the collaborative networks of paraprofessional and transition coordinators including the extent to which collaborators are viewed as trusted partners, and the supports exchanged across these collaborative networks.



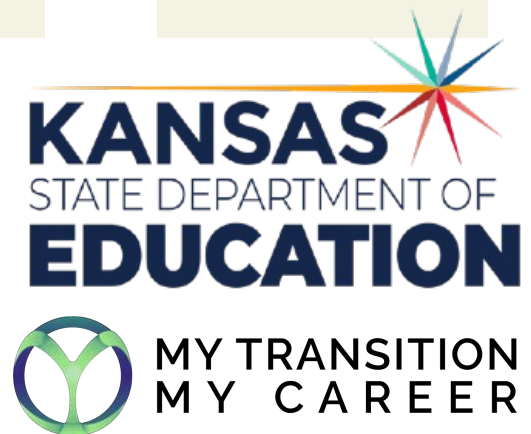
2. Investigate How Collaborative Networks Relate to Mastery and Instructional Practices

We plan to identify the characteristics of special education teachers and paraprofessionals that are associated with stronger collaborative networks related to serving transition-age students. We also plan to determine whether larger collaborative networks are associated with educator mastery and instructional practices.



3. Conduct Focus Groups to Gain Greater Depth of Understanding about Factors Impacting Transition Practices

We plan to use focus groups to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of views on challenges and facilitators to effective transition and on factors impacting how special educators, paraprofessionals, and transition coordinators support students in accessing employment, higher education, and community inclusion after graduation.



For questions about this research or this report, please contact Evan Dean (evan.dean@ku.edu) or Baylee Kilburn (baylee.kilburn@ku.edu).