An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students
Diagnosed with Emotional Disorders

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by
Shelley L. Brown
Dr. Barbara N. Martin Dissertation Supervisor
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled

AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO ASSIST STUDENTS
DIAGNOSED WITH EMOTIONAL PROGRAMS

Presented by Shelley L. Brown, a candidate for the degree of doctor of education
moreover, hereby certify that, in their opinion, is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Barbara N. Martin

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson

Dr. Jason Morton

Dr. E. Hayet Woods

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	vii
INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION	1
Introduction to the Background of the Study	2
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Theoretical Frameworks	6
Behavioral Theory	6
Emotional Regulation Theory	7
Social Cognitive Theory	8
Design of the Study	9
Study Setting	11
Participants	13
Data Collection and Interview Protocol	15
Data Analysis	17
Design Controls	18
Definition of Key Terms	20
Significance of the Study	21
Summary	21
PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY	23
Introduction	24
History of the Organization	24

Organizational Analysis.....	28
Leadership Analysis.....	31
Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting	32
Summary	33
SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY	34
Introduction.....	35
Historical Aspects	36
Theoretical Frameworks	40
Behavioral Theory	41
Emotional Regulation Theory.....	42
Social Cognitive Theory	43
Extant Literature	45
Counseling Support for the Emotional Needs of ED Students	46
The School Environment	48
Modeling/Inclusion.....	48
Career Preparation	50
Teacher Preparation	52
Important Components and Measurement of Success of Programs for Students with ED	56
Conclusion	57
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE	59
Introduction.....	60
Research Questions	61
Connection to the Conceptual Framework	62
Social Cognitive Theory	62

Design of the Study.....	64
Study Setting.....	64
Participants.....	66
Presentation of Data.....	67
Research Questions.....	68
Discussion of Findings through Themes.....	79
Strategies Provided for ED Students.....	79
Desired Changes for Further Support of Students with ED.....	85
Supplemental Programs to Assist Students.....	89
Training for Staff	92
Data to Determine Success	99
Community Involvement	100
Conclusions.....	101
Implications.....	104
Recommendations.....	105
Suggestions for Further Research	107
Executive Summary	109
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP.....	114
Target Journal and Rationale	115
Submission Ready Article for Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals.....	116
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP.....	152
References.....	156
APPENDIX A: IRB Acceptance Letter.....	169
APPENDIX B: Gatekeeper Permission Form	171

APPENDIX C: Consent to Participate.....	173
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol.....	178
APPENDIX E: SBE Research Protocol.....	178
VITA.....	186

Abstract

Graduation rates, employment sustainability, and lack of ability to live independently are often outcomes for students with emotional disorders. For these students the connection to incarceration, unemployment, and homelessness to mental illness is high and with the current societal challenges, the numbers of students with emotional disorders are anticipated to increase. The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of programs to assist students identified with emotional disorders in 9-12 high schools and identify challenges facing those programs as they assist the students towards graduation to prepare them to be college and career-ready post-high school. The results of this study were organized to answer six research questions that examined these programs with resultant themes. The themes were: strategies provided for ED students, desired changes to further support students with ED, supplementary programs to assist students, professional training for staff, data to evaluate progress, and community involvement.

The data gained in this study contributed information to the field of study in the area of designing programs that assist high school students diagnosed with ED towards success. The results indicated that schools are moving towards providing environments, training, and support to students with social/emotional/behavioral struggles, however, the trend of this educational shift needs to continue to evolve. Similarly found were several barriers to the success of the programs. The implications for both administrators and teachers are important.

SECTION ONE
INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

Introduction

In education, different reforms are seemingly relevant due to the need at that time in history. The 1950s brought reform of civil rights with *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 1954) demanding that separate educational facilities were unequal. In the 1960s, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) was passed in a “War on Poverty” to provide additional funds to schools with low-income students (Paul, 2016). This trend has continued throughout history, providing reform to meet the needs for students. Currently, educational trends are tailored to “Mindfulness” to help assist students with the “overwhelming levels of anxiety” they are seeing in schools and “Restorative Justice” which allows for students to learn how to develop stronger social-emotional regulation (MDRInsights, 2018, para. 7-8), and wellness programs.

The National Institute of Mental Health (2019) reported 49.5% of adolescents between the ages of 13-18 live with a mental disorder, which could include mood disorders, conduct or behavioral disorders, and anxiety disorder. While the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2017) noted 1 in 5 adolescents has a severe disorder and that less than half are receiving any kind of treatment. With these high numbers of youth not receiving care, the repercussions could be devastating.

As early as 2012, The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2012) reported the average unemployment rate of the mentally ill was 80%, with most states reporting in the mid to upper 80's and this was only for individuals receiving mental health services and could have been higher. Insel (2009) estimated serious mental illness costs the country approximately 194 billion in lost earnings per year, similarly the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (2015) estimated 46% of homeless are living with mental illness. The National

Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice highlighted 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have at least one mental health condition. Furthermore, the cost to incarcerate one student for a year is approximately \$112,000 (Holodny, 2016). All of these statistics are staggering and impactful on educational systems and should be considered when designing programs for students.

As a result, students with mental illness can receive support under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2001) through special education services in the school system. While the classification of Emotional Disturbance (ED) and mental illness are not the same, a majority of students are classified ED under IDEA (Garland, Hough, McCabe, Yeh, Wood, & Aarons, 2001) have a mental illness. Unfortunately, even with support, the graduation rates of students documented as ED is often below 50% (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Chen-Gaddini, 2014) and 42% of all dropouts in 2016 were either unemployed or not going to school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Additionally, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, and Knokey (2009) noted that most students with ED still do not live independently 3 to 5 years beyond graduation, with only 21% living in their own homes. In light of these staggering statistics, educators need to understand what educational programming is needed within school districts to provide appropriate supports for students identified as ED, especially in high school settings.

Statement of the Problem

These bleak statistics of students with emotional disorders (Barrat et al., 2014) and their possible futures concerning employment instability, lack of skills for successful independent living, and increased potential for incarceration (Wagner & Newman, 2012) denotes a significant concern for students identified with ED. Furthermore, due to the increasing numbers of students

with mental illness (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2019), the number of students identified as ED is likely to increase. Likewise, with data revealing there is a significant gap between the graduation rates of regular education students and students diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance (NCES, 2016), more supports are needed to be in place to decrease this gap.

Additionally, there appears to be little research identifying successful programs or comparisons of programs for how to increase the graduation rate of this student population identified as ED. Furthermore, there is a need to identify effective characteristics of ED programs used in schools, and if they assist students with being able to obtain and consistently hold a job over time. In a landmark inquiry, Ju and Zhang (2010) identified that as the number of students diagnosed (or undiagnosed) in these areas increases, the importance of finding programs becomes more critical. Other research (Swank & Huber, 2013; Wagner, 1995; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992; Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008) has found that programs need to allow students to complete school and enter the workforce with skills that will continue to support their success such as finding and maintaining jobs, independent living, and positive self-care. Since the ED student is highly susceptible to these challenges, it becomes important to study ED programs in high school settings.

Purpose of the Study

Because of these challenges, the purpose of this study was to identify what ED programs in 9-12 high schools have been implemented that have assisted in closing the graduation gap and helping students be best prepared to be college and career ready post-high school. The goal was to understand how the programs were decreasing this graduation gap and examine what if any barriers existed concerning graduation and post-graduation experiences. Wagner and Newman

(2012) noted while some special education programs are seeing a gradual decrease in this educational gap needed is further inquiry especially at the high school level. Specifically, a secondary focus of the study was to examine how these identified programs are making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

Research Questions

This study has the potential to identify a framework for which school districts could use to build a program within their special education departments that would provide proven techniques and avoid barriers found by other schools. Therefore, the following questions guided this study:

1. What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?
2. How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?
3. What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?
4. What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?
5. What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

6. What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

Theoretical Frameworks

Whether these emotional disability symptoms are due to the genetic make-up of the student or caused by trauma, as noted in the definition of Emotional Disturbance (ED) provided within IDEA (2001), three theories within the theoretical framework of learning theory became of interest to the researcher. Chosen were these learning theories because they could assist the researcher in understanding and interpreting the outcomes of programs supporting students with ED (Casanave & Li, 2015). Each of these learning theories has related concepts concerning the emotional nature of students or how behavior might be modified. The theoretical frameworks examined were Skinner's Behavioral Theory (Skinner, 1984), Gross' (2015) Emotional Regulation Theory, and Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory. Within the following sections, discussed will be the theories, ultimately narrowing to the conceptual framework used within this investigation.

Behavioral Theory

Skinner's (1984) behavioral theory and operant conditioning model noted, if the behavior is positively reinforced, it is more likely to occur again. To be more effective, each behavior needs to be separately strengthened for it to gain the response desired (B. F. Skinner Foundation, 2016; Culatta, 2019). Hypothesized within the theory is the idea that free will does not exist and external determinants cause a human's choice in behavior (Rutherford, 2000). Skinner (1984) believed that external factors mattered and that one could manipulate the behavior of any person using response behaviorism (Rutherford, 2000). While Skinner (1984) was extremely passionate about the American educational system, he was criticized for his concepts being too narrow-

minded (Rutherford, 2000). Consequently, while there is some importance of Skinner's behavioral theory (2001) in assisting ED students in performing the desired behavior in school by rewarding them for making good choices, this theory was not used as the conceptual framework due to its narrow focus of not considering all factors that could contribute to a student's behavior. Additionally, this theory does not address any biological factors that might inhibit a student from processing appropriately, regardless of a reward or punishment system (Rutherford, 2000). Furthermore, while Skinner's (1984) theory explained why reward systems work for students with behavioral disorders, the focus was too narrow and did not address any internal concerns for the student. Additionally, this framework does not allow consideration for the environment of the student and was therefore not used for this study.

Emotional Regulation Theory

Next, Gross (2015) emotional regulation theory was examined. Gross (2015) highlighted a supplementary idea for humans and their behavior, in that emotions and moods play a role in responding to stress or the environment. This emotional regulation (something that might not be an ability of a student with ED to do) allows one to have a healthier response to their environment (Gross, 2015). Gross (2002) argued emotional regulation is a process for each event and has three stages: which emotion we will feel, when will we feel it, and how will we express these emotions. Through these stages, Gross (2002, 2015) explained how humans approach every event with a pre-conceived notion of what should occur and then choose if active participation is a need, or if feelings are warranted. At this point, humans begin to try to manipulate this event to tailor it towards a perceived emotion that we want to feel (Gross, 2002; Gross & Cassidy, 2019). As emotions are automated in our system, our brain then tries to redirect behavior as the event occurs to have control over the outcome of emotions that prefer to

be felt or avoided (Gross, 2015). An example of this theory is a student that is struggling with a particular class at school. This student may tailor their outcome of emotions felt with off-task behavior to avoid feeling the frustration of not knowing how to do the academic work. While this theory is enlightening as to why students might behave in any environment (Gross, 2015; Gross & Cassidy, 2019), it does not appear to be as holistic as other theories in how educational staff can assist students to support positive behavior. Due to a lack of offering external control of assisting students with Emotional Disturbance, this theory was not the selected conceptual framework.

Social Cognitive Theory

The last learning theory examined was the social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001). Based on the belief that a human's behavior has three main factors, the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment is Bandura's social cognitive theory (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Additionally, all of these factors operate about each other, not one determining the other, however, while the environment may not be controlled, how one reacts to it can be more flexible in types of outcomes (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Bandura (2001) stressed if one wants to change the behavior of others, one must monitor the "pattern of behavior and the cognitive and environmental conditions under which it occurs" as the "first step toward doing something to affect it" (p. 8). Child behaviorist Greene (2014) suggested that if we understand what stimulant is causing the undesired behavior through patterns, then one can help extinguish the stimulant to avoid the expected outcome (Greene, 2014). Most important about SCT (Bandura, 2001) is that it encompasses the student's previous learned experiences by learning vicariously through seeing the success of other students (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018).

Included also are the student's physical and mental state during the time a response is needed (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018), and includes the expressed positive support offered by those around the students, rules, and modeling (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2016)

Similarly, Bandura's theory (2001) is extensively more comprehensive than Gross's Emotional Regulation Theory (Gross, 2015) as to why a person views an event in a certain way. This theory differs from others in that self-efficacy plays an immense role in how we view ability to envision the outcomes (Bandura, 1989). This theory extended the idea that the result itself is the reward or punishment (Bandura, 1989). Moreover, the theory is focusing on the whole person and the environment, thus, Bandura's theory (2001) was the chosen as the conceptual framework for this inquiry. Specifically, it allows for a comprehensive explanation of how multiple factors affect a student and their behavior and further guides how to implement change for a more desired outcome (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk and Dibenedetto, 2016). This study used a holistic point of view of addressing all areas of the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Theory: the student's needs to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment (Bandura, 2001).

Design of the Study

Creswell (2014) described, "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Therefore, the researcher conducted a qualitative study to gain insight into perceptions of successful approaches to assist students identified as emotionally disturbed to persist to graduation and assist them with post-high school success. Additionally, used as the foundation

for the data source is a social constructivist approach that focuses on understanding reality by being socially constructed (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, “Ontological assumptions associated with constructivism which infer that reality is not absolute, but is defined through community consensus; [and the idea that] multiple realities exist that are time and context-dependent” (Mertens, 2005, p. 231) supported the basis for the data collection and research. Additionally, it was the goal of this researcher that “meaning is negotiated and understood through interactions with others in social processes,” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1374). The researcher intended to compare and find commonalities between programs believed to be successful to create a guide for all districts of the similar contextual logistics to use in their programs for students identified with ED. This follows what Bansal and Corley (2012) deemed the importance of “telling a story” to gain insight by consistent transparency about sources used and how data will be disseminated.

Specifically, the researcher conducted a multiple comparative case study approach using interviews. Seidman (2013) noted education as a “social abstraction” and the best way to understand how institutions like education function are through understanding the perspective of the participants using interviews (p. 9). Furthermore, the multi-case study design was used to understand the meaning of the data. Yin (2003) argued when the research “aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people and events” (p. 3) a case, or unit of analysis, is appropriate. As noted by Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) the case is a “single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). A multi-case study “involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases that may have subunits or sub cases embedded within” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 40). Therefore, a multi-case study may “strengthen the findings...[through] deliberate and contrasting comparisons” (Yin, 2003 p. 6) of the data.

The researcher followed the recommended two stages of analysis by first examining the data within each case separately and then a second phase of “cross-case analysis” of examining the data and patterns between buildings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). Seidman (2013) noted that while interviewing has not always been approved as a scientific way to collect data the information collected allows a researcher to identify patterns from people's experiences. The data collected from these patterns allowed the researcher to build a general explanation that could apply to multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews followed a semi-structured format so that there are “guidelines for structured interview questions” but allowed for flexibility for the conversation to naturally flow as needed to gain insight and data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.110). This provided additional information that the researcher might have overlooked when creating the interview questions and allow additional information to be gathered.

Study Setting

The researcher conducted this study in the natural setting within four suburban school districts utilizing a purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) method. The notion of purposefully selected high school sites is based on what will “best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Likewise, purposeful sampling provided the researcher to select sites that would provide for richer and in-depth study to better understand the problem and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, it was important to the researcher that the high schools examined have similar demographics for what is “typical” for these high schools (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, the researcher started with a pool of schools from Jackson County, Missouri. There are approximately 15 public school districts in the Greater Kansas City, Missouri Secondary Principals Association. From

these 15, purposefully chosen were four districts based upon their analogous demographics in the student population, their student populations, and their grade level composition of 9-12 grades. In addition, each of these four high schools had an ED program that has been in existence for over five years with documentation of having similar graduation and post-graduate success as identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (Missouri Department of Education, 2019).

High school A serves 1,976 students in grades 9-12. Demographically, 11.6 % are black, 6.4 % are Hispanic and 20% are free/Reduced lunch. High school B serves 1,326 students grades 9-12, 2.6% are Black, 8.2 % are Hispanic and 19.5% free/reduced lunch. High school C serves 1,481 students in grades 9-12. Six percent are black and 9.2% Hispanic. This school has a larger free/reduced lunch population at 49%. School D serves 1,909 students in grades 9-12. 16.2 % of the population is Black, 6.8% are Hispanic and 20.7% are free/reduced lunch. All four high schools have almost identical graduation rates, dropout rates and all had approximately 90% of their students after one year of attending college and/or working after one-year post-graduation (Missouri Department of Education, 2019). While the researcher understands that the populations of these four school districts do not represent a diverse population, they do represent a typical suburban high school in Jackson County, Missouri. With similar demographics, the desire is that the patterns that emerge from these schools would apply to all students of various backgrounds demographically. Presented in Table 1 are the demographics for each school.

Table 1

Demographics of Each School

High School	Student Population	Ethnicity	Free/Reduced	Special Education
High School A	1,976	11.2% Black 4.9% Hispanic 76% White	21.8%	10.4%
High School B	1,326	2.6% Black 8.2% Hispanic 82.4 % White	21.9%	10.4%
High School C	1,481	8.6% Black 10.2% Hispanic 76.1% White	48.2%	9.9%
High School D	1,909	11.6% Black 6.8% Hispanic 73.6% White	20.9%	9.8%

Note: N= Four Case studies with a total student population of 6,622

Participants

The researcher used a network sampling as a part of the purposeful sampling of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of sampling starts with a few chosen “key” participants that are important to the study, who then recommend or refer the researcher to additional participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of sampling was chosen based upon the assumption that the key participants will know who best to seek information from for this study. After permission was sought and received from the gatekeeper for each district (Appendix A), and after the proposal hearing, the researcher submitted the formal University Institutional Review Board application. Upon receiving approval from the University of Missouri (see Appendix B) the researcher then contacted participants which in these cases was the Director of Special Services, the researcher started the procedure by contacting the Process

Coordinator of each of the selected sites along with the Principal of each building. Each Process Coordinator for the building were asked for permission for their staff to participate in the study, however, the researcher asked permission to contact and interview staff personally as opposed to the participants being contacted from a top-down process. Seidman (2013) suggested that this would allow for building a better interview relationship resulting in a more solid foundation of trust and comfort. This initial contact to interview included the process of going over the informed consent form (Appendix C) to help reduce the risk that these participants may carry when agreeing to participate (Seidman, 2013). Interviews occurred with the process coordinator of the special education program in each building. These individuals serve as the department leader and organizational implementer of programs. They provided information about the set-up and utilization of the programs for emotionally disturbed, school and district wide. In addition, they knew which teachers within each High School work in direct contact with students with ED and could share rich information about how the utilization of the program within the classroom setting. The researcher had the process coordinator recommend at least two teachers in the classroom that work directly with any ED programs and students. The reason for only including two teachers at each site was to maximize information collected yet assist with the elimination of possible “saturation” in responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another selected participant from each school was the Transition Coordinator. This participant is in charge of connecting any student with special needs with outside resources about post-secondary education, training, and jobs. In addition, they connect students on an IEP to jobs and job training while in the high school setting. The researcher also interviewed the Director of Special Education in the district to understand the point of view of the direction that each district is moving regarding overall services to students identified as ED. Last, the researcher interviewed anyone recommended by

building or district leadership that provided emotional support to students with ED outside of the classroom teacher, such as behavioral specialists or other educators that interact with students that are ED. The researcher believed this type of participant might offer further insight that leads to support of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory.

Overall, the expectation was to include at least 6-7 participants from each site with a total of 24-28 participants (N=24-28) for this study. The participants included the Director of Special Education, the process coordinator, the transition coordinator, two teachers from each site, and an emotional-support person such as the district therapist or social worker that may work with students with ED. However, the researcher would not limit themselves to these intentional interviews to gather information. The researcher was open to adding interviews if one of the district professionals believes that important information can be gathered by the inclusion of another professional. The researcher believed that this should allow for a "holistic account" that Creswell (2014) identified as providing a "larger picture that emerges" (p. 186). It was preferred that interviews be conducted in person, however, under the circumstances of COVID-19, the interviews were offered virtually using Zoom capabilities, unless the participant would prefer in-person.

Data Collection

Information gathered from interviews accounted for a "firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 178). This data supports Merriam and Tisdell's opinion that the "data collection techniques...are determined by the problem and purpose of the study" (p. 106).

Interview Protocol

Seidman (2013) described interviewing as a “way of knowing” (p. 7) and a “basic mode of inquiry” (p. 8) and over time has been scrutinized about its legitimacy to be used as data, but as Merriam and Tisdell (2014) described, it is one of many data collection techniques used in qualitative research.

Merriam and Tisdell (2014) labeled three types of interviewing structure when collecting data: Highly structured/Standardized, Semi-structured, and Unstructured/Informal. The researcher had a set of semi-structured interview questions to guide each interview based upon the role of the participant in each district, however, the researcher engaged in follow-up questions that might lead to additional information of interest not initially discovered if the interview protocol is too structured. Yin (2014) supported the idea of semi-structured interviews in that it adds to the fluidity of the information given about the topic. To assist with question selection, the researcher “piloted” the interview questions as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) with process coordinators and special education teachers not involved in the study. This procedure allowed for re-evaluation of the written questions and revision of interview techniques if they are not supporting the objective of the study (Seidman, 2013) and reported in the findings. The intent of using these individuals allowed the researcher to modified three interview questions regarding clarification and allowed better information needed by the researcher. Additionally, the credibility of the participant’s answers becomes a concern for the desire of achieving true results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to increase the trustworthiness of the participants’ answers, it was important for the researcher to provide an environment of safety for participants to answer questions honestly (Seidman, 2013). The researcher reassured participants

that their answers would not be linked to them as an individual during the presentation of the results of the study.

Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Seidman (2013) structured questions around recommended formats. Twelve of the 13 questions were either opinion questions or knowledge questions to seek out factual knowledge about the programs and their perceived opinions of what is working versus what is not working to assist students with ED (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While Merriam and Tisdell (2014) recommend not using Yes-or-No questions, the researcher added one with the intent of knowing if there was a separate program for ED students as opposed to the supports in place for any student labeled as needed special education (See Appendix D). While the other three questions sought background information on the participants.

The researcher planned for each interview to last approximately 45 minutes in length and will have each interview recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Additionally, to assist with credibility as noted by Shenton (2004) each interviewee had the opportunity to “refuse to participate in the project to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only those who are genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely” (p. 66). Additionally, the researcher’s transparency with data collection was important. Therefore, used was member checking of the data that involved the researcher showing all or part of the study’s findings to participants to determine if they accurately represented their experiences (Kuper et al., 2008).

Data Analysis

Since the study is ethnographic, it was important to examine the data collected to determine what is going on, how it is seen “interchangeably” and finding out what it all means in terms of a program serving students with ED (Seidman, 2013, p. 229). Due to a large amount of

interview data that the researcher collected and used, a data analysis program assisted with analysis to realize any themes or patterns that might emerge as recommended by Creswell (2014). The researcher followed the coding process as Creswell (2014) stated data tended to fall into three categories: expected topics or themes, topics not expected by the researcher, and outliers of information viewed as “unusual”. This information then allowed the researcher to create the “story” or “narrative” that will provide some insight into the researcher's proposed questions (Creswell, 2014). It was the hope of the researcher that patterns would emerge that parallel those in Bandura’s (1977) Social Cognitive Theory. Specifically for the conceptual framework examined were the parts of the programs tailored to the student’s genetic make-up, the school’s environment provided, and how addressed is the person’s behavior within that environment. Additionally, coded were data according to each of the research questions. The researcher examined common phrases used by educators in this field or any habits within these environments that are not conducive to students with ED and their progress towards education. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) denoted this process as category construction or coding. The researcher understood the need to be flexible for “open” coding, which are themes or categories that might emerge during document analysis that were not already predetermined (p. 204), followed by axial coding. Axial coding is a grouping method used to take codes and group them into a larger theme that makes sense for the research and results sharing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Design Controls

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the importance of the “trustworthiness” of research in connection to the validity and reliability of the information presented by any researcher as noted by Creswell (2014). Two issues would include the researcher and the use of interviews.

As mentioned earlier and suggested by Seidman (2013), there is importance to pilot the interview questions with a small number of participants to ensure the appropriateness of the questions. This way of “thoughtfulness” of the process will allow the questions to be objectively focused on obtaining the information needed (Seidman, 2013, p.43). This added to the face validity of the study in that it is was consistent across buildings (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, to assist with the validity of the study, the researcher followed suggestions as noted by Creswell (2014) using complete transparency. The researcher used “rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings” “clarify(ing) the bias of the researcher,” “present discrepant information,” and “prolonged time in the field” (p. 202) to add to the credibility of the researcher. The researcher has more than eight years of experience working with students diagnosed with ED in the area of discipline and program solutions for students with ED in special education programs. This background and expertise supported the understanding of working with students with ED, with this particular study and assisted with the credibility of readers (Shenton, 2004).

To assist with providing qualitative reliability, the interview protocol remained consistent so that the study may be transferable to any school for other researchers to seek out the same type of information about programs offered in their school districts of interest. Shenton (2004) noted that “in positivist work, the concern lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population” to assist with the importance of transferability,” (p. 69). Creswell (2014) suggested that the researcher focus on the coding of the transcripts to help with reliability. Practices such as “cross-checking” coding and checking for errors in the transcripts was used in the analysis of the findings (p. 203). Due to the “typical purposeful

sampling” used in this study, which focused upon suburban high schools, results were only transferable to these types of student populations.

Definition of Key Terms

Defined are the following terms to provide a deeper understanding of the study.

Emotionally Disturbed: IDEA (2001) identified and defined students as emotionally disturbed (ED) if exhibiting “serious emotional disturbance” (IDEA, 2001, Section 1401). Identified, as an inability to learn not explained by any intellectual, sensory, or health factors is an emotional disturbance (IDEA, 2001). Additionally, the behaviors manifested by a failure to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general or pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and tendencies to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2001, Section 300.8). Information about mental health will be included for the purpose that students with ED may be considered in conjunction with a lack of mental health.

Social Cognitive Theory: This study uses a holistic point of view of addressing all areas of the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Theory: the student’s needs to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student’s ability to adapt to the school environment (Bandura, 2001).

Success of any program supporting students with ED: Success will be inclusive of the perceptions of the participants in the study AND any data that shows ANY improvement in the graduation rates or otherwise studied. The purpose of qualitative research in this manner is to understand how people make sense of their lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, any supporting data to show that the experiences of these participants will be utilized in the findings.

Significance of the Study

“Leaving high school is an exciting threshold for many youths in this county, both those with and those without disabilities. It can occasion many changes, which, taken together, can alter students’ daily lives dramatically” (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levin, 2005, p. ES-1). With the challenges facing students identified as ED such as lower graduation rates, increased emotional needs, lower employability, high incarceration rate, high schools are seen as the last line of defense in preparing our kids to be successful in life and as humans. By examining this problem of practice, the researcher sought the best strategies to create a system of supports for students with emotional disorders that allows for persistence to graduate and skills to be able to get and maintain employment. The intended audience for this information is any educational practitioners in need of creating or restructuring any program within the high school setting that would support any student with emotional disturbances.

Summary

The number of students diagnosed (or undiagnosed) with emotional needs and classified as Emotionally Disturbed continues to grow. The gap in the graduation rate of students with these needs and their lack of ability to sustain employment or continue education after school in comparison with the rest of the student body is concerning and could have an effect on themselves and their community overall as an adult. This study aimed to identify successful traits of programs established in high schools that have a goal to improve this gap. The researcher believed that in answering the research questions provided, that one would see patterns of successful program characteristics emerge. These programs should address the needs of the whole student concerning preparing students to improve social-emotional learning; age-appropriate societal skills that meet expectations of retaining a job, and skills about how to

obtain post-secondary education a created model for high schools to follow when setting up programs for students with emotional disorders.

SECTION TWO
PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Understanding the framework of organizations allows for “sorting essence from trivia, maps that aid navigation, and tools for solving problems, and getting things done” (Boleman & Deal, 2013). Examined within this section are the four school districts. Also, information about their Emotional Disturbed populations and programs will provide a general depiction of the frameworks that guide some of the decision-making processes for these 9-12 educational institutions.

History of the Organizations

Built in 1953 and only housed juniors and seniors was High School A. It was not until 1963 that freshman and sophomores were introduced. This school is located 22 miles outside of the closest metropolitan area and houses about 1,800 students with very little growth in the last few years; enrollment numbers have remained very constant. Seventy-six percent of these students identify as Caucasian and almost 22% are free and reduced lunch status. There are 140 full-time teachers listed for this building with five administrators (DESE). The classroom average of students is 19 students and the administrators average 360 students. The staff on this team averages almost 16 years of experience per teacher and 86% of this staff has a Master’s degree or higher (DESE). This building reports their graduation rate is 96.8% for all students, and for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the reported graduation rate is 94.4%. For the last several years, this building has reported close to a 1% dropout rate (DESE). Discipline for this school averages about two incidents per 100 students and there were 37 occurrences of 10-day suspensions with none of them occurring more than 10 days. This is one of three high schools for the district (DESE). There are currently 16 teachers for the Special Education Department in this building.

High school B's history can be traced back to the late 1800s; however, this building was not built until the 1970s. This city is located 23 miles outside of the nearest metropolitan area. While the current population of this city has almost doubled since 2005, the growth has seen a slow steady increase in the last three years; nonetheless, the population of the school has increased by only 100 students 9-12 to a little over 1,900. Demographics have remained constant with approximately 83% of the students identifying as Caucasian and about 20% free and reduced lunch status (DESE). There are 81 full-time teachers in this building that average almost 13 years of experience and 64.8% have a Master's degree or higher and class sizes average 23 students(DESE). There are five administrators in this building with an average discipline incident rate of 1 per 100 students with 12 occurrences of students being suspended out 10 days or longer (DESE). There are 11 teachers in their Special Education department. This high school reports that they have had no dropouts in the last 10 years, and their current graduation rate is 96.6% with students with IEPs have a graduation rate of 91.2% (DESE). This graduation rate is slightly lower than the year prior. This is the only high school serving this district, other than a career technical building.

High school C's history started in the late 1800s, but this high school building began in 1954. This high school serves students from parts of different cities and is 28 miles outside of the nearest metropolitan area. There are approximately 1467 students enrolled in this building with 78 full-time teachers and 5 administrators. This district has only experienced an increase of about 60 students for this building this past year. About 77% of these students identify as white with a higher free and reduced lunch rate than the other schools at 48.2% (DESE). The class averages are 26 students per class and an average of 299 students per administrator (DESE). The average years' experience of this staff is almost 15 years with 73% having a Master's degree or

higher (DESE). The graduation rate reported by this school is 94.4%, and the graduation rate of students with IEPs is 91.4% (DESE). Reported to be less than 1% for several years is the dropout rate. The discipline rate at this school is higher with almost 3 incidents per 100 students and 42 students suspended 10 days or longer (DESE). This is the only high school that serves this community.

High school D was originally a middle school that converted to a second high school that serves its community. There are approximately 2,000 students enrolled in this school with 73% of these students identifying as Caucasian. Twenty-one percent of these students are free and reduced lunch recipients. There are 125 full-time teachers with an average of 16 years of experience, and 90% of these staff members have a Master's degree or higher (DESE). There are six administrators with an average of 400 students per administrator. The class average is 31 students (DESE). This school reports a 96% graduation rate with a 77.6% graduation rate of students with IEPs (DESE). The dropout rate for this building is less than .5%. The discipline averages 4 incidents per 100 students with 84-10 day or more out-of-school suspensions (DESE). This school is located 23 miles away from the nearest metropolitan area.

While all four high schools have very similar graduation rates, high school D's rate for graduation for students with IEPs is notably less by almost 15%. High school D is the only school that has a specialized program for students identified with autism, emotional disorders, and deaf and hard of hearing students. This means that the district offers special services only in certain buildings to alleviate the cost and help with time management for providers to not have to travel to all buildings.

For all four of these builds, you might notice a discrepancy between the percentage of dropouts and the graduation rate. If students are transferred to be homeschooled and the parents

do not provide proof of completion of their homeschooling program within a certain amount of time, these homeschooled students are factored into the school's graduation rate.

The most notable difference between these four schools is in the data of graduate follow-up. As a part of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP-5), schools are measured by “the percent of graduates who attend post-secondary education/training or are in the military within six (6) months of graduating meets the state standard or demonstrates required improvement” (DESE). And “the percent of graduates who complete career education programs approved by the department and are placed in occupations directly related to their training, continue their education or are in the military within six (6) months of graduating meets the state standard or demonstrates required improvement” (DESE). Therefore, while the demographics of these four school districts look similar in the type of student attending while in high school, their post-secondary direction of where they go after high school notably varies. Present in Table 2 is information about the graduate follow-up for each building and the percentage of student direction post-secondary occupation after graduation.

Table 2

Graduate Follow-Up of Each School

High School	4 Yr. College/ University	2 Yr. College	Technical Institution	Employment	Military
High School A	50.2%	28.4%	1.9%	9.2%	3.5%
High School B	39.8%	32.3%	2.4%	19.5%	3.0%
High School C	19.5%	32.6%	0.6%	35.8%	2.6%
High School D	53.2%	22.1%	1.0%	21.5%	1.2%

Note: Total student population approximately 6767

Organizational Analysis

All four high schools are public school systems structurally set up similarly: a simple hierarchy, where there are middle managers communicate to a higher power who supervises and manages operational details (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Much of this framework is rooted in a long history in the educational system and has not altered much since education began. This organizational setup parallels the structural framework in that “organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives,” “organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor,” and “suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 45). All of these assumptions mentioned by Bolman and Deal are at the core of how school systems are organized.

Curriculum and educational programming in all four of these districts put into place either middle managers and/or those in higher power such as directors and superintendents overseeing these areas. Teachers implement these programs and curricular goals with students. The teacher can give feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of these programs to the middle managers. Middle managers are then able to monitor and decide what information to filter up to the superintendent. All districts are vertically coordinated with people in authority to “harmonize the efforts of individuals...to keep action aligned” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 51). Those in authority, principals, process coordinators, and directors, help standardize rules and policies in place to maintain consistency and control. Bolman and Deal (2013) discussed some traditionally organized systems have morphed some into what has been coined “Helgeson’s Web of Inclusion” (p. 83). In this system, the hierarchy stems from a center and moves out into an “interconnected cosmic web in which the treads of all forces and evens form an inseparable net of endlessly, mutually conditioned relations” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 83).

This type of structural organization of hierarchy naturally leads into the political frame of how schools and school systems are driven. As Bolman and Deal (2013) posited “politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests” (p. 183). At one extreme of the educational system, one would think that educational decisions are made based upon the needs of children; however, on the other extreme of the system is the success of schools based upon standards set by state governments. The National Bureau of Economic Research (nber.org, 2013) shared that the home value, success of schools, and money spent per student is all linked. The success of schools draws families to communities. Higher home value allows for more dollars allocated towards education through taxes. Higher and appropriately allocated funds within schools lead to more resources for

student success; a very cyclical process, so the goal of the district is to score well on student success.

The process of decision making as Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested becomes a “backward design” where the goals are established based upon the outcome needed. The Department of Secondary Education (DESE) in the state of Missouri has several categories that schools must show improvement. These include, but are not limited to, state testing, graduating students on time, drop-out rates, and continuing education in career areas they studied in high school. It is from this place of evaluation that schools might structure or restructure how students are educated to meet these particular standards set by DESE.

The district must use the four key skills as denoted by Bolmen and Deal (2013) to keep communities functioning cohesively by agenda-setting, mapping the political terrain, networking and building coalitions, and bargaining and negotiating (p. 208). Districts cannot function without the support of the community and the district must be able to maintain a stable environment of support.

Additionally, school districts become political arenas as school districts try to function from a place of supporting students, there is an underlying pursuit of competing to be “the best.” The unwritten “goal” is that the district that has the best programs or greatest promotional agenda to best prepare our students changes not only the design of how we educate our students but also how funds are allocated differently within the districts for these programs. This supports Bolman and Deal’s (2013) description of political agents “operat[ing] in complex ecosystems-interdependent networks of organizations engaged in related activities and occupying particular niches” (p. 226).

As mentioned earlier, the political framework involved “allocating resources in a context of scarcity” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 183). Districts receive money from the government and taxes as public entities, “an organization’s role in an ecosystem affects how it can balance the pursuit of its interest with the overall well-being of the ecosystem” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p.233).

Leadership Analysis

While each educational organization has its individualized way of functioning, at the core, most US schools function from performance orientation (Northhouse, 2016). Our educational system is set up in a manner where a school’s performance-based upon student’s academic testing (Northhouse, 2016). Since the common goal of districts is to score well on testing to fulfill the larger societal expectations, the way leaders influence followers for this common goal becomes very important with funding and local control at stake.

Most leaders in the educational setting are assigned leaders, placed into leadership roles by assignment, rather than emergent leaders (Northhouse, 2016). However, many times, there are staff/teachers that are placed in leading roles for groups such as local teachers unions or teacher leadership teams. These staff members are chosen due to their natural ability to lead their colleagues “accepting the individual’s behavior” as successful and representative of themselves (Northhouse, 2016, p. 8) due to the “person that fits the identity of the group as a whole” (Northhouse, 2016, p. 9).

Not having enough understanding of each of the four organizations before this study, one cannot accurately identify any particular leadership theory or approach; however, examined is the ethics of leadership involved.

Northouse (2016) described Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In level one, Kohlberg discussed morality based upon self-interest in an exchange type of manner. The phrase "I will do a favor for you if you do one for me" (Northouse (2016, pg. 331) is an unconscious idea of how schools and communities support each other. As mentioned earlier in the political framework, the idea of support from schools and communities becomes very cyclical. We need the help of the community, so in turn; we will promote supporting businesses, governments, and other local agencies by all of the entities doing "favors" for each other.

Level two of Kohlberg's stages are based upon behaving in a way that supports "society's views and expectations" (Northouse, 2016, p. 331). This level is all-encompassing on what every member of these organizations tries to emanate for the greater good, however, one might argue that in the race of skill underperformance orientation, one might take a closer look at the ethical theories that influence the conduct of each leader.

Implications for Research

The goal of this study was to identify characteristics of programs focused on assisting students with an emotional disorder towards graduation and post-graduation employment. As referred to earlier, the increase in mental illness, unemployment, and incarceration is costly to the individuals and the communities in which they live if the skills needed are not being addressed prior to entering into "adulthood". What seems to be lacking from much of the research is follow-up data on many of the suggestions for programs for students with ED. Several researchers suggest that further research needs to be conducted on longitudinal studies of employment and schooling of students with ED after graduation from high school (Flower, McKenna, Haring, & Pazyey, 2015; Nochajski & Schweitzer, 2014; Swank & Hubor, 2013).

Examining this type of follow-up information would lead to confidence in changing how schools provide services to students with emotional disorders.

Summary

While all four of the schools and district function from a similar type of leadership and organizational style in that they function much from a top-down hierarchical system, the demographics add another element to the types of students they are serving. Even though the schools appear on the surface to be similar in size and the demographic of race, they differ somewhat in socioeconomic backgrounds and direction of post-secondary plans.

SECTION THREE
SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Expected to maintain the social and emotional health of all students are public schools. In addition, they do this while maintaining high academic standards to ensure that all students are ready and prepared to enter the workforce or post-secondary education (LaSalle, Peshak, McCoach, Polk & Evanovich, 2018). However, mental illness continues to increase with teenagers (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018), and, specifically, students with emotional disorders have the highest risk of failure in the school setting than any other disability (Wagner & Camuto, 2004).

As viewed through the literature, there was a significant gap between the graduation rates of regular education students and students diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance. Furthermore, there appeared to be little research in identifying successful programs or comparisons of programs for how to increase the graduation rate of this particular student population. As the number of students diagnosed or undiagnosed in these areas increases, the importance of finding effective programs becomes more critical to help students complete school and enter the workforce with skills that will continue to support their success in their communities.

Because of these challenges, the overarching focus of this study was to identify what successful programs implemented in 9-12 high schools that focus on decreasing this graduation gap and examine what, if any, barriers exist. A secondary focus of the study was to examine how these identified programs are making a difference for the student's success regarding student persistence. Within this section, discussed is a historical view of programming for the emotionally disturbed student. This will be followed by the theoretical framework discussion, narrowing it down to the conceptual framework. Presented finally will the extant literature, all of which guided the researcher seeking answers to the research questions posed.

Historical Aspects

Completely excluded from public schools during the 1970s were 1.75 million children with disabilities. Similarly, three million students with disabilities that attended school did not receive services that assisted with their needs (Crockett, 2015). It was not until the 20th century that the importance of educating with an emphasis on helping children labeled as emotionally disturbed occurred (Webber & Plotts, 2008). As a result of students with disabilities being denied access to public education school and being fully segregated (Martin, 1991), a myriad of legislation such as the *All Handicapped Children Act* in 1975 followed by the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) in 1991 (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003) resulted. During this time, Congress mandated that all schools provide free and public education to all students with a disability (FAPE). Due to these changes to educate a student with disabilities, the cost became too much for districts to bare and congressional efforts were made to pass the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHC, 1975) that offered financial incentives for states that aligned their state laws to parallel those of federal requirements to offer meaningful programming (Freeman, Michell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019). Later came the *No Child Left Behind Act in 2001* (NCLB, 2001) and the *Every Student Success Act* (ESSA) (Zinskie & Rea, 2016), mandating major reform in education and emphasizing the need for educators to find new ways to help all students. This new inclusion of all students started many reforms that held educational systems to new standards of preparing students for life outside of school (LaSalle, Peshak, McCoach, Polk & Evanovich, 2018).

Specifically, IDEA (2001) identified and defined students as emotionally disturbed (ED) if exhibiting “serious emotional disturbance” (IDEA, 2001, Section 1401). Recognized as an inability to learn not explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors was a serious emotional

disturbance (IDEA, 2001). Additionally, other behaviors could be manifested by a failure to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general or pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and tendencies to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2001, Section 300.8). A study by Freeman et al. (2019), determined that each state had its own definition to determine which students are served as an ED population, as long as a group can be identified. This allowed inconsistencies in identifying students as ED and how they are served from state to state. Further analysis of this definition revealed that it does not distinguish those that are occasionally socially maladjusted from those considered long-term (Forness & Kavale, 2000). Furthermore, the identification of ED does not diagnose a student with a mental disorder that could meet criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-R) (Becker, Paternite, Evans, Andrews, Christenson, Kraan, & Weist, 2011). However, a study by Garland, Hough, McCabe, Yeh, Wood, and Aarons (2001) reported 70% of the students labeled as ED also met the criteria for at least one of those mental disorders. Forness and Knitzer (1992) addressed this concern in their study by suggesting an alternative definition of labeling a student as ED to include emotional disorders that adversely affect educational performance to include students that need services that are not receiving them under the current definition.

In addition to inconsistencies with the definition, the prevalence of students identified as ED has fluctuated over the years. The number of students served by the identification of emotional disturbance (ED) in 1977 was 283,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) (NCES). This number increased to 489,000 in 2004, then decreased to 349,000 in 2015 (NCES, 2018). During this time, however, a “new” identified disorder of Autism was added in

2001, and as this disability identification increased, while the areas of ED and Intellectual Disability saw a decrease of students identified, even though the total number of students served since 2005 remained constant (NCES, 2018). Concurrently as public school systems in America has seen an overall 23% increase in the number of students served with the identification of ED, the National Institute of Mental Health identified that almost 50% of our adolescents (ages 13-18) had some level of mental disorder, while 22.2% had “severe impairment” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010 (NIMH); Kessler, Berglund, & Demler, 2005).

A study by Chandra and Minkovitz (2006) estimated that among adolescents with mental health needs, 70% do not receive the care they need. Paralleling this statistic, Wagner, Friend, Burscuck, Kutash, Duchnowski, Sumi, and Epstein (2006) noted that 86% of students labeled ED had no access to any school psychologists. Although there are guidelines written in IDEA (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003) classifying the characteristics of children identified as ED, most of the 50% of students with mental disorders who could fall into the ED category based upon how the guidelines are written are not being served (Wagner et al., 2006).

Outside of the educational setting, statistics further reveal that underserved students with ED have an uncertain future. Redfield and Nance (2016) noted 65% of those incarcerated met the definition of having a disability, with almost 50% of them in the ED category (Quinn, Rutherford, Leon, Osher, & Poirier, 2005) and are more likely to re-offend. A Canadian study identified teenagers with a mental disorder were four times more likely to be arrested (Youth Mental Health, 2017), and the Southern Poverty Law Center (2007) identified only 37% of the students qualified to be diagnosed with ED were receiving any service in their school. These statistics are supported by numerous studies suggesting these numbers may be even higher (Foley & Gao, 2002; O’Neill, 2005; Quinn et al, 2005). Kutcher and McDougall (2009),

identified more than 70 percent of incarcerated youth had some sort of diagnosable mental health issue, and that “detention facilities have become the largest provider of mental health services for young people, and are often considered the last resort for mentally ill youth and their families” (p. 4). The cost to incarcerate one student for a year is approximately \$112, 000 (Holodny, 2016). With similar statistics, the Alliance for Excellence in Education (2011) estimated the dropouts from the class of 2008 would cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost earnings throughout their lifetimes. The report further noted that dropouts are not as healthy individuals as high school graduates with a shorter life span and required more medical attention. They also reported if our graduation rate, overall, would improve by 50%, our nation would save \$7.3 billion in costs related to healthcare spending (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Alliance for Excellent Education (2018) reported finding that in the year 2020, 65% of all jobs in America will require knowledge and training beyond high school level education. With the current increase of students identified with emotional disorders and the cost to provide support and students not graduating, educators must help students identified with ED to graduate or receive training to earning a high school level education.

It is not an easy task to educate the growing number of students with ED. One of the major reasons for this is the lack of training for teachers. Many teachers do not feel that their level of pre-service training is anywhere near where it should be for them to feel successful in educating these youth (Kourkoutas, Stavrou & Plexousakis, 2018). Another challenge affecting these students is the teacher turnover rate of about one-third within the first five years of teaching (NCES, 2012). This high turnover rate of teachers is due to dissatisfaction with their jobs due to the lack of support (Carver-Thomas & Hammond, 2017). Additionally, teachers of students in special education programs have as much as twice the rate of regular education teachers (Boe,

Cook & Sunderland, 2008) regarding turnover rates (Gilmore & Wehby, 2019). . Moreover, a teacher's lack of ability to cope well with educating students with ED could exacerbate poor student behaviors often seen in the classroom (Kourkoutas, 2012).

Furthermore, schools are under immense pressure to have all students perform academically. Under NCLB (2001) and ESSA (Zinskie, & Rea, 2016), there is increased accountability to graduate all students within four years. For example, in the state of Missouri, the Missouri School Improvement Plan, 5th cycle (MSIP5), measures and holds schools accountable for the number of students who graduate within four years and grant points based upon the increasing percentage of students graduating every year, especially in special education (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). The NCES illustrated that America's average graduation rate for students in public high schools in 2016 was 84%. However, the dropout rate of students identified as ED is 44% (NCIE, 2019; Wagner et al., 2005). These are significant challenges to the issues identified within the Missouri School Improvement Plan, 5th cycle (MSIP5).

Theoretical Framework(s)

Whether these emotional disability symptoms are due to the genetic make-up of the student or caused by trauma, as noted in the definition of ED in IDEA (2001), three theories became of interest to examine programs offered in high schools to assist students identified with ED. The theoretical frameworks examined were Skinner's Behavioral Theory, Gross's Emotional Regulation Theory, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Discussed will be each of these theories with the intent of narrowing the lens down to the conceptual framework of the inquiry.

Behavioral Theory

Skinner's (1974) behavioral theory and operant conditioning model noted that behavior if positively reinforced, is more likely to occur again. To be more effective, each behavior needs to be separately strengthened for it to gain the response desired (Skinner, 1974). Conceptualized within the theory is the idea that free will does not exist, and external determinants cause a human's choice in behavior (Rutherford, 2000). Skinner believed that no external factors mattered and that one could manipulate the behavior of any person using response behaviorism (Rutherford, 2000). While Skinner (1984) was passionate about the American educational system, his concepts were considered too narrow-minded (Rutherford, 2000). However, Martin (2017) noted that while Skinner was visiting his daughter's math class, he was amazed at the teacher's inability to correctly and positively reinforce students' correct responses; thus, he started to invent alternative "teaching machines" (p. 220). These "machines" would allow teachers to focus on enrichment and remediation with students (Martin, 2017). Additionally, Skinner believed in the idea of self-control and self-management (Epstein, 1997). In this theory, Skinner postulated that, as humans, we could identify personally perceived negative consequences of certain behaviors and can "delay punishment" by choosing certain courses of action (Epstein, 1997). While there is some importance of Skinner's (1984) behavioral theory in assisting ED students in performing the desired behavior in school by rewarding them for making good choices, not used as a conceptual framework due to its narrow focus was this theory. This framework does not take into consideration external environmental factors that could contribute to a student's behavior or biological factors that might inhibit a student from processing appropriately, regardless of a reward or punishment system.

Emotional Regulation Theory

Gross (2015) highlighted an additional idea for humans and their behavior that emotions and moods play a role in responding to stress or the environment. This emotional regulation (something that might not be an ability of a student with ED) allows one to have a healthier response to his/her environment (Gross, 2015). Gross argued emotional regulation is a process for each event and has three stages: which emotion we will feel, when will we feel it, and how will we express these emotions (2002). Through these stages, Gross explained humans approach every event with a pre-conceived notion of what should occur and choose if we want to participate, or how we feel. At this point, we then begin to try to manipulate this event to tailor it towards a perceived emotion that we want to feel (Gross, 2002). As emotions are automated in our system, our brain then tries to redirect behavior, as the event occurs to have control over the outcome of emotions that we prefer to feel or avoid (Gross, 2002). Gross and Cassidy (2019) name this avoidance of emotion as “expressive suppression” (p. 1940). Developed as a strategy to meet the individual’s goals towards regulating his own emotions is expressive suppression (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). An example of this theory is a student who is struggling with a particular class at school. This student may tailor his outcome of emotions felt with off-task behavior to avoid feeling the frustration of not knowing how to do the academic work. This theory is enlightening as to why many students with ED might struggle with emotional regulation. Children with “normative development” (p. 1940) have had caregivers who have supported and modeled emotional regulation during critical times of emotional development (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). A lack of this environment may be one of the causes of a student having ED. While this theory is informative as to why students might behave in any environment, it does not appear to be as holistic as other theories in how educational staff can

assist students to support positive behavior. Due to a lack of offering external control of assisting students with ED, not used as a conceptual framework was this theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory (SCT) is the belief that a human's behavior focused upon three main factors: the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Known as "triadic reciprocally or reciprocal interactions" (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019, p.1) are these three key parts. Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann (2020) reported, "in essence, SCT estimates the ability of an individual to engage in determining behavior based on internal and external parameters and their interrelationships" (p. 332). In regards to personal processes, Bandura feels that self-efficacy (SE) is the most dominant role player in the Social Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy of a person sets the tone in which a person sets goals and views possible outcomes (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016) but that self-efficacy can also be affected by "vicarious experiences, forms of social persuasion, and physiological/emotional indexes" (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019, p.3). Vicarious experiences allow for a human's previous experience witnessing peers in their success in performance and forms of social persuasion allow for the encouragement of success from others (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018). Physiological and /Emotional indexes refer to the mental and physical state of the human at the time of the response (Jenkins, Hall, & Reside, 2018; Martin et. al, 2020). Martin et al. (2020) identified seven different variables that influence self-efficacy of an individual. The first being skills training that increases one's ability to self-monitor. The authors use an example of understanding how pedometers work to monitor steps taken (p. 332). Other influences of SE not already

previously mentioned by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016) include perceived barriers/obstacles and stimuli that are “antecedent to the behavior and are associated by experience over several trials with behavioral outcomes/expectancies and/or verbal rules and/or modeling” (Martin et al., 2020, p. 333)

In terms of behavior within the environment, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2019) discussed that this area is the choice a human has in what type of “activity, effort, persistence, achievement and environmental regulation” (p. 4) is exhibited. Bandura believed in the significant effect of modeling (Schnuck & DiBenedetto, 2019). For humans to predict possible outcomes, they must observe modeled behavior and remember that behavior to replicate it to move towards the desired outcome (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019).

The last of the triad of this theory is environmental influences. Schunk and Usher (2019) found “instructional and social environments can also impact learner’s process and motivational outcomes” (p. 5). The presented information can either hinder or help a human's understanding of an event, and the safety within this environment, socially, can affect behavior (Martin et. al., 2020; Schunk & Usher, 2019).

All of these factors operate around each other, not one determining the other; however, while the environment may not be controlled, how one reacts to it can be more flexible in types of outcomes (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Martin et al., 2020; Wulfert, 2013). Bandura (2001) stressed if one wants to change the behavior of others, one must monitor the “pattern of behavior and the cognitive and environmental conditions under which it occurs” as the “first step toward doing something to affect it” (p. 8). Moreover, Greene (1998) suggested that if humans understand what stimulant is causing the undesired behavior through patterns, then we could help extinguish the stimulant to avoid the expected outcome.

Bandura's (1977) theory is extensively more comprehensive than Gross's (2015) emotional regulation theory as to why a person views an event in a certain way. This theory differs from others in that self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to complete a task, plays a considerable role in how we view ourselves and in our ability to envision the outcomes in any situation (Bandura, 1989). This idea of self-efficacy can be increased through practice and modeling to drive the increase of self-efficacy (Wulfert, 2019). This theory extended the idea that the result, itself, is the reward or punishment, coined "outcome expectancies" (Bandura, 1989, Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019), and due to focusing on the whole person in terms of and the environment, Bandura's theory was chosen by the researcher as the conceptual framework for this inquiry. It is a well-rounded explanation for how multiple factors affect a student and their behaviors, and further gives guidance on how to implement change for a more desired outcome.

Extant Literature

The lack of success in most ED programs in high schools shown through low graduation rates and poor employment outcomes led this researcher to believe that three crucial elements are involved in the educational success of a student labeled as ED (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Carver-Thomas & Hammond, 2017; NCIE, 2019; Wagner et al., 2005). These three elements are the students themselves and their emotional needs, the school environment, and the instructor's influence when trying to educate the whole child. With these three key components in mind, the researcher has chosen to focus on the counseling support for the students for emotional education, what strategies have been used to lead ED students towards the success of graduation and post-graduation, and what training and support for the teachers are needed to enhance the educational lives of these students.

Counseling Support for the Emotional Needs of ED Students

Currently, students experience significant social and economic stressors due to exposure to a more complex world that is frequently unfiltered (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). Often high school students face increased social media exposure, leading to the feeling of not being safe in their environments (Greenberg et al., 2017). James-Ward, Harkrider, Bowden, KeXu, and Portilla (2019) pinpointed that for students to reach any sort of “self-actualization” or previously reported self-efficacy, students must first meet lower needs on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (p. 43), with the most important need on the hierarchy noted by James-Ward et al. (2019) as the need for feeling safe and the need for belongingness. This idea of feeling safe only supports stronger a sense of being able to have confidence in one’s self to complete any task (James-Ward et al., 2019). The findings aided a necessity to have increased emotional help and academic support for students with ED to find greater success in the classroom especially when they have significant challenges with emotional regulation (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010). In recent years, greater national attention focused on mental health support is due to the “high-profile suicides and school shootings” (Rossen & Cowan, 2015, p. 9). In 1999, *The Surgeon’s General’s* report proposed that there be an expansion of mental health services in school systems, and even the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) highlighted the need to have “student access to quality mental health care” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education 2002, p. 427). Furthermore, the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) outlined the goals for a national mental health overhaul (Weist, 2005). Understanding this inclusion of mental health care into federal reports and legislation is important as statistics revealed, in a high school of 750 students, 150 will have a mental illness that interferes with learning behavior, and

only about 50 of them will receive the support required (Rossen & Cowan, 2015). These statistics support Forness and Knitzer's (1992) earlier suggestion that states need to adjust the definition of labeling a student as ED to include an alternative definition to assist more students with mental illness. Kutash, Duchnowski, and Lynn (2006) identified that educators and therapists both feel that, for maximum improvement for students with ED, both the mental health and the educational setting must work hand-in-hand (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). This mental health support within the school is viewed as "educational enhancers" by meeting students at their present level of needs so that they can better spend their time in the classroom focusing on learning as opposed to outside stressors (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010). For 70%-80% of students in school districts, school is an initial exposure to mental health support and the receiving of services mainly through the special education programs in the district (Farmer et al., 2003). This focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) has been a research topic for over 20 years but most recently viewed with increased interest (Greenberg et al., 2017). While Atkins et al. (2010) noted little empirical evidence to support that mental health in the educational setting has an impact, other studies (Greenberg et al., 2017) are showing a huge impact in schools as SEL interventions and programs are producing a positive response to the increase in mental health help. While not all students need to receive the same mental health support, Greenberg et al. (2017) described that programs are often broken down into categories that are determined based upon the needs of the students, with ED students identified as being at the highest risk. Atkins et al. (2010) further noted that as funding for education decreases, schools are more selective in how funds are allocated rather than spending on the "whole" child. Weist (2005) noted that while educational professionals are supportive of time spend on the "whole" child, "the general

sense within all public schools [...] was of well-meaning hardworking professionals with too little time, training, and material resources to cope with the demand of the mission” (p.736).

Consequently, the pressure of mental health support in the school falls on the shoulders of school counselors (American School Counselor Association, 2016) trained as academic counselors and not as mental health professionals. Students are coming to counselors with issues that are impeding their educational progress at a time when the counselor-to-student recommended ratio is 250:1, but a current average is 471:1 (American School Counselor Association, 2013). Combined with assisting students with diagnosed ED, school counselors cannot provide the mental health support needed (American School Counselor Association, 2016). As a result, schools are hiring more social workers to help address the needs of students and to relieve the mental health support burden that is bearing down on school counselors (Huffman, 2013). School social workers are trained health professionals that can assist students further than the school counselor and connect them with additional community resources (Finigan-Carr & Shaila, 2018). In addition, social workers can also provide support and resources to families of students in need to alleviate the increased need (Finigan-Carr & Shaia, 2018). Nonetheless, as Dupper, Rocha, Jackson, and Lodato (2014) reported not all schools are using social workers in a well-rounded manner for which they are intended, therefore not receiving the benefits that could be served to students in need.

The School Environment: Modeling/Inclusion and Career Preparation

Cheney and Bullis (2004) argued it is “the school’s responsibility to provide educational environments for secondary-level students that will help them make successful transitions from school to work or to higher educational placements” (p.370). Specifically, with the inclusion of students identified ED, schools need to consider how significant any behavior might pose an

issue to themselves and other students (Cheney & Muscott, 1996; Eller et al., 2015; Kauffman, Lloyd, Wills, Baker, & Riedel, 1995; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Just as important and necessary is the training of staff to be able to help assist ED students with de-escalation, transition into the regular educational setting, and differentiating instruction for these students (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007; Muscott, Morgan & Meadows, 1995). Data from the U. S. Department of Education in 2007 noted the 57% of students with any disability are serviced 80% of their day in a regular education classroom and with Federal mandates to measure student success by being included in state testing, regular education teacher must be properly trained to support inclusion (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010).

Wagner et al. (2006) noted regular education teachers had strong negative opinions about ED students in their regular education classroom. A few studies have discussed how important teacher preparation for the inclusion of students with ED is to finding success (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007). Additional research has studied the importance of school-wide buy-in, consistent discipline approaches, individual plans, and familial involvement in ED programming contributing to the success of the inclusion of students with ED (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007; Cheney & Muscott, 1996).

Kirby's (2016) study of full inclusion identified inconsistent teacher opinions about the success of inclusion. Some staff felt that inclusion of students allowed for modeling of appropriate behavior; however, some felt that the behavioral issues that the ED student created in the classroom were more detrimental to all students than the benefit of the one ED student (Kirby, 2016). However, as earlier noted in Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory,

modeling is an important part of humans to observe for them to increase their self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019).

While there are mixed opinions about the inclusion of students with ED in the regular education setting, some are due to the lack of training or support staff feel they have to help students with ED, and there is growing research on how to better prepare educators. The most recent research by LaPorte (2020) explained we train our teachers in a way that undermines the actual abilities of the student because of the disability. Teachers assume that they cannot do certain things and lower our standards as educators and are doing a disservice to students with special needs (LaPorte, 2020). LaPorte noted a need for a change in the way we train our teachers to better prepare them to serve students with disabilities (2020). Teachers who have greater self-efficacy and welcome addressing the needs of any student with a disability will more likely meet the needs of the student appropriately, create a more positive learning environment, and engage in collaboration with teaching peers that will benefit the learning of all students in the classroom (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, & Hudson, 2013). This type of self-efficacy is supported through pre-service training addressed later.

Career Preparation

In the realm of career education, the United States Department of Education (2019) noted students need skills beyond academia that will make them better prepared for a “global, knowledge-based economy” (College- and Career-Ready Standards, 2019, para. 1) resulting in an emphasis on college and career readiness in secondary education. In the state of Missouri, one portion of the secondary school evaluation tool for MSIP-5 is to award points for students who take career preparation classes, concentrated in one area over time (DESE, 2013). Most of the funding of these programs require students to gain certification in that career area, resulting

in employability upon completion from high school (DESE, 2013). As mentioned earlier, Alliance for Education (2018) reported finding that in the year 2020, 65% of all jobs in America will require knowledge and training beyond high school level education. Currently estimated is that approximately two-thirds of high school graduates were enrolling in colleges or universities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). These numbers emphasize the importance of allowing for ED students, who currently have a 40% graduation rate, significantly lower than their non-diagnosed peers, (NCIE, n.d.; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005) to have opportunities for career preparation opportunities.

The future for students with ED regarding career preparation and the post-high school has not always been successful (Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008). Newman, Wagner, Cameto, and Knokey (2009) discovered there was a significant difference in the employment rate for students with ED as opposed to their regular educated peers by almost 25%. The National Longitudinal Transition Study found, that after three years of leaving high school, only 50% of students with ED had jobs and only 30% had sought out additional schooling or training (Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman & Blackorby, 1992; Wagner et al., 2005). These statistics demonstrated that students with ED would benefit from having career-ready skills emphasized to enhance their ability to get and keep a job over time (Carter & Lunsford, 2005).

Bradley, Doolittle, and Bartolotta (2008) compared the outcomes of three longitudinal studies that had a comprehensive view of students with disabilities, including students identified with ED. The first finding revealed there have been insignificant gains in student success in and outside of the educational setting. Next, findings revealed there is little difference in the accommodations for ED students when compared to other students with learning disabilities, and

lastly the post-secondary training of students with ED is alarmingly low. These findings are alarming knowing our current statistics about students with ED and their career outcomes.

Another concern for students with ED is they lack the social skills needed for them to maintain gainful employment over time (Carter & Wehby, 2003). Carter and Lunsford (2005) discussed how important it is for our students to receive on-the-job training before leaving high school and be encouraged to take courses that provide career preparation; however, Bullis, Moran, Benz, Todis, and Johnson (2002) found that even students with ED who have participated in successful transition programs still experience up to 46% unemployment rate. Some of this could be due to a lack of communication or social skills. Wagner and Davis (2006) give specific recommendations that programs should be based on three principles: rigor, relevance, and relationships. These same researchers also noted that educational professionals need to step up addressing the needs of the whole child due to the idea that these “other” unmet needs might interfere with students with ED’s ability to be prepared. Additionally, there is a need to involve families in transitional planning as a support system in place once the student has graduated and left high school (Wagner & Davis, 2006). For many of these students, addressing the whole child means the inclusion of learning appropriate skills to interact with their employer.

Teacher Preparation

As NCLB (2001) became the new realm of how schools organized and IDEA was revised in 2004, “highly qualified teacher” became more important in how schools hired for their classrooms (Gage, Josephs, & Lund, 2017). Several studies of teacher preparation programs have pinpointed some key features to be included for students preparing in the field of education. However, few studies pinpointed important traits for programs for teachers going into special education (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). Brownell et al. (2005) reviewed

literature about the preparation of the special education teacher vs. the regular education teacher and found there were several differences. Special education teachers received less training in the importance of vision and content matter; however, general education programs (while both focused on diversity) focused less on diversity in learning with disabilities (Brownell et al. 2005). The quality of support, training, number of, and attrition rate of teachers of students with ED are concerning (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Gage et al., 2017) and detrimental for students and schools for consistency with students with ED (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). Students with ED present different challenges and solutions to behavioral issues that impede personal students' learning for themselves and other students. Those with this type of learning disorder might have more of an effect on the overall environment of the classroom (Wehby, Lane, & Falk, 2003; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Dewey, Sindelar, Bettini, Boe, Rosenberg, and Leko (2017) note that the number of special education teachers has declined over the years, more so than the decline of students labeled with special education needs. This in turn has increased the overall student-to-teacher ratio (Boe, Bettencourt, Dewey, Rosenberg, Sindelar, & Leko, 2013). Wehby (2003) found in specialized instruction classes inclusive of ED students, only 30% of the time was spent on academic instruction as opposed to behavioral interventions. Similar results were found by Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) noting that this frustration of lack of instruction by novice special education teachers was frustrating to them. This lack of time spent instructionally is having a long-term effect on students and their academic success, and teachers must have appropriate training to assist students with ED while spending more time on academics (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). In support of the importance of increasing time spent academically, a study conducted by Tyler-wood, Cereijo, and Pemberton (2004), found that ED students who were academically more engaged saw a reduced rate in the number of office

referrals made. This connects back to the importance of increasing content knowledge alongside pedagogy that Brownell et al. (2009) found lacking in special education programs preparing student teachers.

For ED students that are integrated into the general population of regular education students, Baker (2005) reported finding that regular education teachers feel inadequate in their training to support students with ED and are less willing to provide support for these students (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018). Flower, McKenna, and Herring found in their study that for regular education teacher programs, only 62% of them offered some sort of behavioral management course as opposed to special education programs that were found that 89% of them offered some sort of behavioral management focus for teachers (2017). However, despite regular education teachers' feelings of inadequacy, expectations are to provide the same level of supports as the specialized instruction special education teacher (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). One study showed that only approximately 13% of high school general education teachers felt that they had the proper training to work with students with ED (Wagner et al., 2006), and only 65% of teachers, overall, supported the idea of inclusion, but this varied depending on the type of disability (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Studies have shown that poorly prepared teachers use ineffective management methods which then leads to a myriad of issues such as stress, lower student achievement and higher teacher turnover (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Kaff, Zabel, & Miham, 2007). Brouwers and Tomic's (2000) discovered that teachers that reported feeling better prepared and more confident in their skills experienced less burnout and teacher turnover than those staff members who had lower self-confidence in their abilities to support students. Krieg, Goldhaber, and Theobald (2020) studied the importance of placement in student teaching. Their findings report that there is a link to the

effectiveness of the supervising teacher and the future effectiveness of the novice teacher's success. Supporting teachers that provide concrete examples of how to plan and implement strategies for students in the special education setting has an impact on the perceived instructional ability of the student teacher (Ronfeldt, Goldhaber, Cowan, Bardelli, Johnson, & Tien, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, LaPorte's (2020) research found that pre-service learning environments could be possibly setting our teachers up based upon a "deficit model" (p. 93). LaPorte (2020) stated pre-service models teach our teachers to modify the curriculum without fully understanding the student's deficits. Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) noted four particular areas needed for pre-service teachers to support the inclusion of students. They include the pre-service teacher's role in the special education process, how to differentiate instructions based upon severe types of disabilities, effective classroom management strategies to "promote academic engagement and pro-social behavior while minimizing disruptions to the learning environment" (p. 299), and how to communicate and collaborate with the special education staff. The importance of teacher preparation has now been included at the federal level. The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* is requiring states to create some sort of assessment program to link student success to the teacher preparation programs (Smith et al., 2010). Due to the extreme cost of implementing such plans, Smith et al. (2010) noted, there were only three such programs created by that time.

A further concern is a possible link to teacher turnover. One study linked the number of discipline incidents to an increase in teacher turnover (Feng, 2009). Feng discovered that as the increase of discipline referrals increased by one unit, this increased the odds of a staff member changing districts by 14% (2009). Students who have disabilities are two times more likely to

get suspended from school, and ED students, specifically, are twice more likely than other health impaired students to be suspended (Mitchell, Kern, & Conroy, 2019). Data collected by several studies indicated that there is a gap in the preparation programs of teachers to be best equipped to assist students with ED (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). The outcome of lack of teacher preparation not only harms the students, but also the stress caused by staff trying to manage behavior results in staff feeling emotionally drained and anxious (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018). Ingersoll (2001) has shown these greater demands of stress and anxiety in a study that special education staff has a 37% greater chance of leaving the profession. For those that stay, the increased frustration and anxiety, in turn, creates adverse feelings towards the difficult student, which leads to changes in how the educational professional reacts towards all students with ED (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007). This negative effect changes the environment for the entire classroom, creating toxicity for all involved.

Important Components and measurement of Success for Programs for Students with ED

Wagner et al. (2006) noted in their longitudinal study of schools and their programs for students with ED that literature suggested the most frequently noted components of a program for students with ED include structured environments, peer learning and tutoring, independent learning opportunities, and staff with strong behavior management skills. All of these components are mentioned earlier in support of inclusion, teacher preparation, and career preparation; however, Walker, Clancy, Tsai, and Chesney (2013) noted, while tracking our student's successes through testing or other grading measurements, there are very few program evaluations that monitor educational practices within specific settings for students with ED. One study did a review of documents and made recommendations for what should be considered, specifically in terms of transition included "paid or unpaid work experience, employment

preparation, family involvement, general education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills training, self-determination skills training, and community or agency collaboration” (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010, p. 167). Walker et al. (2013) argued there are very few evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED and very little research showing use of these tools in any school.

Conclusion

As government policy promotes education to all students in the “least restrictive environment,” persistence to graduate, and accountability to be “college and career ready,” this qualitative study will observe practices and programs for students with ED. In this particular case study, the researcher sought to understand how schools design and implement programs to assist students with ED effectively. The researcher wanted to understand how the staff perceives these programs to be “successful.”

The overarching focus guiding this study was to discover main areas of support for students with emotional disorders that foster the ability to be college and/or career ready upon graduation. While there is literature on several areas of programs for students with ED or opinions on ideas of what should be in place for students with ED, there does not seem to be a consensus for an all-encompassing description of the definitive, data-supported program(s) to assist students with ED. This literature review aimed to show that there are significant gaps in the knowledge of how to best support students with ED progress towards graduation and an ability to maintain a job or post-secondary security with their future. Wagner et al. (2006) noted that literature suggested the most frequently noted components of a program for students with ED include structured environments, peer-learning and tutoring, independent learning opportunities, and staff with strong behavior management skills in addition to program

evaluations currently being implemented, if at all, in participating schools. This provided a guiding structure when examining programs designed with ED students in mind.

PLAN FOR SECTION FOUR
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Introduction

The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Public Law 94-142) enacted by Congress in 1975 mandated the right of students with disabilities to receive a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (*The Handicapped*, 1977). But even with this existing legislation and the subsequent amendments under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2001) challenges remain in schools regarding providing the most appropriate education for all students and especially those who have been identified as having emotional disorders.

Furthermore, the National Institute of Mental Health (2019) reported 49.5% of adolescents between the ages of 13-18 live with a mental disorder. Similarly, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2017) noted 1 in 5 adolescents has a severe disorder and that less than half are receiving any kind of treatment. With these high numbers of youth not receiving care, the outcomes might be overwhelming for these students.

Many of these students with mental illness can and do receive support under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2001) through special education services in the school system (Garland, Hough, McCabe, Yeh, Wood, & Aarons, 2001). However, even with special education support, the graduation rates of students identified as ED is often below 50% (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Chen-Gaddini, 2014). In light of these realities, educators need to understand what effective educational programming is needed within school districts so that appropriate instruction and resources are provided for students identified as ED, especially in high school settings. Due to the small amount of research that exists identifying successful high school programs (or comparisons of programs) about how to increase the graduation rate of this student population identified as ED, this inquiry was important. Furthermore, there was a

need to identify effective characteristics of ED programs used in schools and identify if they assisted students with being able to obtain and consistently hold a job after graduation. With the challenges that ED students face, the overarching focus of this study was to identify what implemented programs have been successful in 9-12 high schools that are designed primarily to focus on students identified as ED. The goal was to understand if the programs are impacting the graduation gap and to examine what barriers might exist concerning graduation and post-graduation experiences. Specifically, a secondary focus of the study was to examine how these identified programs were making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

Research Questions

The researcher focused on the following questions to gather information regarding services provided to students identified as ED to assist with persistence to graduation and employment sustainability.

1. What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?
2. How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?
3. What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?
4. What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?
5. What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social

Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

6. What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

Connection to the Conceptual Frameworks

Skinner's (1984) behavioral theory and operant conditioning model, and Gross (2015) emotional regulation theory were considered as the conceptual framework for this inquiry, but for various reasons were not selected as the conceptual framework. Each of them assisted the researcher in understanding and interpreting the findings of programs supporting students with ED (Casanave & Li, 2015) because each theory had related concepts concerning the emotional nature of students or how behavior might be modified. However, both were ultimately discarded as it became apparent that they didn't address as many components as the conceptual framework, social cognitive theory (SCT)(Bandura, 2001).

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) is based on the belief that a human's behavior has three main factors, the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment is Bandura's social cognitive theory (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Additionally, all of these factors operate about each other, not one determining the other, however, while the environment may not be controlled, how one reacts to it can be more flexible in types of outcomes (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Bandura (2001) stressed if one wants to change the behavior of others, one must monitor the "pattern of behavior and the cognitive and environmental conditions under which it occurs" as the "first step toward doing something to affect it" (p. 8). Child behaviorist Greene

(2014) suggested that if we understand what stimulant is causing the undesired behavior through patterns, then one can help extinguish the stimulant to avoid the expected outcome (Greene, 2014). Most important about SCT (Bandura, 2001) is that it encompasses the student's previous experiences learned vicariously through seeing the success of other students (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018). Included also are the student's physical and mental state during the time a response is needed (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018), and includes the expressed positive support offered by those around the students, rules, and modeling (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2016)

Similarly, Bandura's theory (2001) is extensively more comprehensive than Gross's Emotional Regulation Theory (Gross, 2015) as to why a person views an event in a certain way. This theory differs from others in that self-efficacy plays an immense role in how we view the ability to envision the outcomes (Bandura, 1989). This theory extended the idea that the result itself is the reward or punishment (Bandura, 1989). Moreover, the theory is focusing on the whole person and the environment, thus, Bandura's theory (2001) was the chosen conceptual framework for this inquiry. Specifically, it allows for a comprehensive explanation of how multiple factors affect a student and their behavior and further guides how to implement change for a more desired outcome (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk and Dibenedetto, 2016). This study used a holistic point of view of addressing all areas of the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Theory: the student's needs to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment (Bandura, 2001).

Design of the Study

A qualitative study was used to gain insight into perceptions of successful approaches to assist students identified as emotionally disturbed to persist to graduation and assist them with post-high school success. Additionally, used as the foundation for the data source rationale was the social constructivist approach focused on understanding reality by being socially constructed (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005). It was the goal of this researcher for this study whereby “meaning is negotiated and understood through interactions with others in social processes,” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1374). A multiple comparative case study approach was used using interviews. The researcher followed the recommended two stages of analysis by first examining the data within each case separately and then a second phase of “cross-case analysis” of examining the data and patterns between buildings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). The data collected from these patterns allowed the researcher to build a general explanation that should apply to multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Study Setting

Four districts were chosen based upon their analogous demographics in the student population and their grade level composition of 9-12 grades. Also, each of these four high schools has served students identified as ED for over five years with documentation of having similar graduation and post-graduate success as identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (Missouri Department of Education, 2019). While the researcher understands that the populations of these four school districts do not represent a diverse population, they do represent a typical suburban high school in Jackson County, Missouri. With similar demographics, the desire was that the patterns that emerge from these schools would

apply to all students of various backgrounds demographically. Presented in Table 3 are the demographics for each school.

Table 3

Demographics of Each School

High School	Student Population	Ethnicity	Free/Reduced	Special Education
High School A	1,976	11.2% Black 4.9% Hispanic 76% White	21.8%	10.4%
High School B	1,326	2.6% Black 8.2% Hispanic 82.4 % White	21.9%	10.4%
High School C	1,481	8.6% Black 10.2% Hispanic 76.1% White	48.2%	9.9%
High School D	1,909	11.6% Black 6.8% Hispanic 73.6% White	20.9%	9.8%

Note: N= Four Case studies with a total student population of 6,622

It is important to note, that while all four schools are similar in demographics, the districts in which they reside are different in size and some can provide more and varied resources based upon their size as a district, overall. These differences were seen in the information provided by the participants. Schools A and D have multiple high schools within their district and have their special education programs organized in a manner that allocates their resources to provide services to students in an efficient way to maximize opportunities to students across their districts. Furthermore, schools A and D have students attend specific buildings if they are needing services at a higher level where they can allocate resources and get their “biggest bang for their buck” as noted by a participant.

Conversely, since districts B and C have only one high school to provide services to students identified with ED, they are organized in a more traditional manner where students in all identified Special Education categories are in the same building. Another important discovery is that Schools A, B, and C's case managers all have a mixture of students with disabilities on their caseloads, while school D has case managers specific to the identification of Autism and Emotionally Disturbed.

Participants

The qualitative data collection tools used for this study were interviews. Due to COVID-19, each school and participant was given the option of in-person interviews or to interview virtually using video conferencing media of their preference resulting in all interviews being on video conferencing media or zoom. All interviews were recorded through digital means with appropriate permissions given. The researcher used a semi-structured interview with initially 17 questions to guide each interview based upon the role of the participant in each district, however, the researcher engaged in additional follow-up questions that led to the information of interest that might not have been discovered if the interview protocol was too structured. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to an hour.

Six participants from three schools and four from the fourth site were involved in the interview process for a total of 22 participants ($N = 22$). The researcher used network sampling as a part of the purposeful sampling of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Either the Director of Special Services for the district or the principal of the building recommended the initial participants. They were asked to include the process coordinator, the transition specialist, the director of special services, two special education teachers that work with students identified as ED, and one regular education teacher that works with students with ED. Some schools chose

alternative participants based upon their skill set and the information they would provide due to how they worked with students identified as ED. Illustrated in Table 4 are the demographics of the 22 participants.

Table 4

Individual Interview Participants

Participant	Site	Gender	Years in Education	Role at School
1	D	F	16	Special Education Teacher
2	D	F	25	Process Coordinator
3	D	F	19	Transition Specialist
4	D	F	26	Special Education Teacher
5	D	M	13	Regular Education Teacher
6	D	F	29	Director of Special Services
7	B	F	21	Transition Specialist
8	B	F	16	Process Coordinator
9	B	M	7	Special Education Teacher
10	B	M	15	Regular Education Teacher
11	C	F		Regular Education Teacher
12	C	F	12	Process Coordinator
13	A	M	10	Social-Emotional Behavioral Teacher
14	C	M	8	Special Education Teacher
15	A	F	17	Special Education Teacher
16	C	F	24	Director of Special Services
17	B	M	13	Board Cert Behavior Analyst
18	C	F	14	Transition Specialist
19	C	F	14	Special Education Teacher
20	B	F	30	Director of Special Services
21	A	M	12	Regular Education Teacher
22	A	F	13	School Psychologist

Note: Twenty 22 participants across four sites.

Presentation of the Data

The interviews were typed and full transcripts were reviewed only by the researcher to ensure confidentiality. Initially, the interviews were read through twice and were followed through by open coding across all interviews to search for themes. Through this first level of

studying the information, the codes of strategies provided to assist students, programs supplemental to schools offered, staff training, changes that staff perceive that need to be added to school programs, data collected to evaluate student progress, and unanticipated factors that are important were identified. The resulting themes with sub-themes were: *Strategies provided for ED students, Desired changes to further support students with ED, Supplementary programs to assist students, Professional training for staff, Data to evaluate progress, And Community Involvement*. All of these themes emerged and will be discussed later as the researcher sought data to address each of the following research questions.

Research Questions

Research Question One

What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?

There were five reoccurring characteristics in each of the four high schools within their ED programs. They were focused on receiving credits and credit recovery, provided use of case managers and paraprofessionals as one-on-one, provided work programs that taught skills to students to be successful post-high school, provided specialized instructional programs and behavioral assistance, and provided transition programming and skills.

In terms of receiving credits and credit recovery, all four schools have one or more strategies for obtaining the needed credits to graduate. These opportunities included an alternative high school at all sites, an online credit recovery system, or modifications and accommodations to courses for all ED students.

At each of the four sites, provided to the ED student was a case manager. Also at all of the sites, the ED student was provided a paraprofessional as one-on-one support. The focus of

each of the programs was a heavy emphasis on the use to be proactive in placing the ED student into the most least-restrictive environment possible. As noted by a participant:

I think that we have the added benefit of having Paras that maybe other districts don't have as many as we do, and that's a huge help. Also, the use of case managers is so important. So I just think you're as good as your people are, and I think we got a good team so just communication and, and with each other and coming up with good plans and implementing those plans and being consistent with those plans is huge.

Another participant stated:

We have case managers that really get to know students and I think that's, in all districts, but we also have Eagle time which I don't know if you guys have that where it's a gen ed teacher that leads with those students. Those students are separated out in classroom but are still in that eagle time with all the other students, and that academic strategies class and the co-teaching, and also the small class groups. And like I said with the para's help that's probably the things that we have organized to help support our students.

Also in each of the four sites, the ED program offered work programs that taught skills to ED students to be successful post-high school and further allowed them to earn elective credit. However, the sequence of these work skills varied among the sites.

Three out of the four high school personnel mentioned specialized instruction (SI) classes and class-within-a-class (CWC) services. As one participant noted:

The specialized instruction pieces are beneficial, especially our work experience that has specialized instruction however it's out in the community and so it's where our students. You know, hope to be successful at not just within the four walls because a lot of our

students with emotional disturbance, they're not traditional students. And so they need that experience and I feel like we do a lot of good specialized instruction in that area.

Similarly, another participant highlighted a variety of instructional strategies:

I mean from limiting the size of work, changing the types of activities that kids would do, I mean we may have you know some sort of big project but then for you know another student we shorten it down, it became like a quick little oral presentation do. So just being willing to go through and change activities and things for those kids and then also a lot of times we've had it where you know, they just the kid can't handle in the class so we found ways to get them to other places where they can still be successful work through the computer with us, have some quiet space. So you know not every kid learns the same, so just trying to find something that is successful for each of those kiddos.

While all four schools offered the different types of learning environments just mentioned (SI, and CWC), they tended to not be at the forefront of what was considered to be a “characteristic for an ED program” to assist kids with ED. However, each of the programs had specialized strategies for the students’ behavior, as one participant noted:

The behavior program is what sets us apart because we do have counseling services, which are noted in the kids IEP if they get 30 minutes a week is typically what they'll have me as a case manager who triages with them, and we also have a classroom setup with smaller rooms for the kiddos that they need to go in there for whatever reason. So we're just set up better, I guess handle different behaviors follow behavior plans. And we have different people in place to handle things like that.

Another participant highlighted:

Here's a team of people who are aware of the students' behavior issues. So our goal is not to send them to their principal, where I think other schools might not have that buffer, like we do so our goal is to give the kid a plan, work with that kid, there might be several adults in on that plan, but the goal is to get them out of the principal's office keep them with their case manager or preferred adult in the program.

Each of the four sites had an assigned transition coordinator. This individual assisted ED students in identifying what life skills they currently possess, what skills they need to learn, communication of these skill sets to parents and students, connecting students and families to outside programs that will assist students post-graduation with post-secondary education and employment resources. As one participant responded:

Transition skills are so important. You know we have them for three years, and I think the relationships with the kids are really important. We work really well as a team. I think we really work on strategies for behavior, especially in your day-to-day life but in the workplace, and how to be appropriate so you'll be successful. So I would say yeah the transition piece has been huge. As we're expanding on that. But we do really work as a team and work not just on graduating but giving them those strategies to change the behavior in the workplace.

Research Question Two

How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?

Each of the sites noted that they were narrowing the graduation gap between ED students and regular education students by providing transitional skills, providing work programs.

Providing training in Trauma-Sensitive skills, and seeking to establish alternative credit systems for ED students. However, they also noted that more emphasis was still needed to close the gap.

As noted earlier each of the four sites had a transition coordinator who worked closely with each of the ED students. The responsibility for this individual was to assist ED students in identifying what life skills they possess, what skills they needed to learn, and to communicate these skill sets to parents and the student. Furthermore, the transition coordinator was responsible at each site to connect students and families to programs outside the school setting that would support students post-graduation with post-secondary education and employment resources. As a participant highlighted:

We also have work experience programs so those students can learn some work skills if needed, both in the school building and in the community. The transition specialist works with those students to make sure that they're connected with outside resources so whether it'd be vocational rehabilitation or different employment services or connecting them with colleges, whatever their goal is just making sure that they have those supports in place as they transition from high school to post-secondary.

At each site, there was a work program that placed these students into some type of work setting that provides credit. While these work programs varied from setting to setting, each provided some type of work and work resources. These work sites were supervised by the transition coordinator who oversaw the connection of transition skills to the workplace. This supports previous research (Swank & Huber, 2013; Wagner, 1995; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992; Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008) has found that programs need to allow students to complete school and enter the workforce with skills that will continue to

support their success such as finding and maintaining jobs, independent living, and positive self-care.

Also across each site was the implementation of Trauma-Sensitive training. This training focused on the growing need for educators to understand student behaviors and students identified with emotional disturbances. This implementation of Trauma-Sensitive training for all educators, regular education, and special education, also provided a larger safety net schools are casting around this student population. Providing students with opportunities to receive therapy and manage their behaviors lays the groundwork for the longevity of retaining employment.

As a participant highlighted:

We're doing the trauma-informed, you know, training for our staff. And I think that needs to continue on, because I think it's a really great training. And I, personally, hope there is some individual training in the more instructional on information on the different types of mental health and what it looks like. Teachers need to understand the difference between behavior and mental health.

The final way these high schools were narrowing the graduation gap between ED students and regular education students was the increased emphasis on alternative credit systems. All of the participants discussed the need for implementing an alternative credit system that would best support students with ED. While each site was at different levels of implementation on this strategy it was at the forefront of the participant's discussions as a start towards closing the graduation gap. As a participant reported:

So we have a transition coordinator. And we also offer transition services through our academic strategies and Future Planning classes. And so, of course, we try to get the students in that class, and we also have a training class where students can work on job skills and earn

alternative credits. The transition coordinator, she meets with all the seniors, monthly, and also contacts a lot of agencies, so students can be in touch with agencies that are going to support them post-secondary.

Research Question Three

What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?

There were several perceived barriers to the implementation of an ED program. However, the three barriers mentioned the most by all participants were graduation requirements by the state, properly trained staff, and resources tied to funding.

Several participants from each site mentioned the frustration of trying to get students through the credit system as dictated by the state. This one participant summed this frustration up eloquently by stating:

So, I wish there was a way that we could teach at their level a little bit more, rather than try to meet every, every single, you know, standard in place, which is kind of a double-edged sword because I understand the need for standards. I understand the need that you have to you know be proficient in these areas and that things like that, but some of these kids I feel like are struggling so much that as special education staff we just put a band-aid on to get them across but there's really no actual learning going on, it's more of just going through the motion of help, we must graduate them.

To further note the difficulty in getting students through the Missouri credit system, the credits required in their four settings ranging from Missouri required 24 credits up to 28 credits required at one of the high schools. The challenge for the educators is that often

the ED students are behind in their credits and are having difficulty in recovering those credits, even when there are credit recovery systems in place.

Another barrier to implementing a successful ED program was the lack of having enough staff appropriately trained to help prevent behavior and assist students to work through behaviors. This was noted in participants in all four settings. The special education staff discussed the need for more ongoing training, especially in how they could assist regular education teachers who had their ED students in their classrooms. These same special education teachers discussed the need for more training in helping the ED access mental health resources outside of school. Also mentioned by all participants was the issue that there is a significant population of regular education staff that needs to better understand how to make effective modifications and accommodations for students identified with ED. The lack of regular education teachers to fully understand the behaviors and disability had been observed by the majority of the participants as a barrier to making adjustments to curriculum and instruction to assist students with ED. Specifically, at least one participant from each site noted the need for regular education teachers to be more accepting and open-minded about assisting the ED student through instructional modifications. This was illustrated by a participant who stated:

I think the regular ed teachers really need to have some more training, and it would be interesting for them to be able to actually like go around with some of the sped teachers and see what the day is like for them and like understand that there is a lot of work that goes in on that side and when the sped teacher asked you to try something I mean, it's important like there's a reason why these are being done, there's a reason why that paperwork has to be done. There's a reason

why you need to be showing up to meetings because it is important for those kiddos to be successful. So I really think the regular ed side needs to kind of have their eyes open to some of the things that are going on and how much their classroom does make a difference for those kids to be successful.

The two directors of student services at the smaller school districts of B and C mentioned that funding was a challenge. They both noted that the lack of funding did not create the educational environments they would wish to provide for their ED population. They both mentioned the need for hiring more mental health professionals at each building and behavioral specialists at all buildings, but that would require hiring additional staff. They both noted that their schools were already struggling to provide enough staff for the needs they currently have, so providing specialists in these areas was not a priority for spending in their districts.

Research Question Four

What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?

All four sites utilized school counselors, social workers, and off-campus service providers such as Comprehensive Mental Health. Three of the four schools have their students working with some type of school psychologist/psychiatrist as a part of their IEP, and the 4th site relied upon the outside agency to provide the therapy needed for students identified as ED. They all varied in the services provided and based upon the funding the district allocated. Also, many of the participants noted that in the future students with ED might receive lower-tier mental support from all staff with the introduction of Trauma-Informed Care. Many of the participants noted that the required Trauma-Informed Care was going to have a positive impact on the ED student population. As a participant pointed out:

We do have a behavior specialist that comes in and works with students. Typically each student works with our counselor. Oh and, our social worker, on site, works with our students, several of our students. And we also have comprehensive mental health that can be provided. I also do referrals to KC Regional Office, Department of Mental Health, also a support services like if there's groups to help families like something specifically, you know, to family loss, you know, losing a parent or something along that line, we try to do referrals to them. But the TIC is going to be a huge resource.

Research Question Five

What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

In terms of the Social Cognitive Theory, each of the participants' responses supported each of the areas addressed by this theory. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory (SCT) is the belief that a human's behavior focused upon three main factors: the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013).

Concerning the "genetic make-up" of a student identified as ED (Bandura, 1977), trauma-informed care training is beginning to provide the knowledge and understanding to staff about how the brain of a student with trauma functions and how their brain might be affected. This awareness or education for all staff will hopefully provide the ability for all educators to change the student environment to be safe for students.

Regarding the environment (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013) many participants wanted to create for the ED student strong relationships. Two participants, in particular, felt that relationships and a safe environment were the key to the students' brains being able to learn. As one participant noted, "If staff is trained to assist students self-manage and retrain their brain in how they react, then the student will be better equipped to adjust to their environments." Other participants reported, "My students feel the safest in my classroom and usually do their best work there." This brings to the forefront how more training is needed so that the ED student feels this safety throughout the school building.

Some of the participants mentioned the importance of having students learn in the most least-restrictive environment that would parallel how they will experience life after graduation. One highlighted, "By placing students in the least restrictive learning environment be are preparing them for a work environment. And then we are putting into place a skill that won't have to be learned later." Finally, as the Director of Special Services at site D said "keeping students in too restrictive of a setting gives them a fake sense of how to deal with things in the real world." The data from this inquiry supports the conceptualization of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory the conviction that a human's behavior focused upon three main factors: the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Within this inquiry, the ED programs in all four settings through the characteristics of their program and the strategies they employed supported the three factors articulated by Bandura (1977) within his social cognitive theory.

Research Question Six

What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

Most participants agreed that data collected to evaluate whether or not a student was achieving their behavioral goals in their IEP was one way to determine success, but other ideas mentioned repeatedly were observations of behavior, graduation rates, and the number of discipline referrals a student might have. Most intriguing mentioned by three different participants was student self-observations or “student agency expressed in their terms”. If the idea is to create self-efficacy with students with ED, then what would be more powerful than self-identification of successes and areas needed to improve? The caveat with this finding is that while many of the participants noted an interest in having students do self-observations, only one district used self-observation regularly. Overall it appears that the IEP drives the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program for the student. The secondary indicators of the success of these programs were graduation rate and discipline referrals.

Discussion of Findings through the Themes

The resulting themes with sub-themes were: *Strategies provided for ED students, Desired changes to further support students with ED, Supplementary programs to assist students, Professional training for staff, Data to evaluate progress, and Community Involvement*. Each of the themes with sub-themes will be discussed and framed within the literature.

Strategies provided for ED students

Common strategies mentioned at all four sites were transition supports, relationships/safe environment, behavior plans, credit recovery, counseling department support, and some sort of soft skills class offered. Three out of the four high school personnel mentioned specialized instruction (SI) classes, class-within-a-class (CWC) services, and para support. While all four schools offer the different types of learning environments just mentioned (SI, CWC, and para support), they tended to not be at the forefront of what was considered to be a “strategy” to assist

kids with ED. The researcher considered the definition of “strategies to help students with ED” any supports or services provided by the schools that assisted them in their persistence to graduate or their ability to be college/career ready post-high school.

Out of the 22 participants, 15 of them specifically mentioned transition services/programs at least once or more times as a strategy to assist students identified as ED. Transition services and programs at all four sites included meeting with a transition coordinator regularly throughout their high school career. Each of the four sites has a transition coordinator that assists students in identifying what life skills they currently possess, what skills they need to learn, communicating these skill sets to parents and students, connecting students and families to outside programs that will assist students post-graduation with post-secondary education and employment resources. If the school offers some type of work program, which is a program that places students in employment for credit during the school year, then the transition coordinator also oversees the connection to these work resources. All four sites have some sort of work program, but due to COVID, no site has been able to provide outside work experiences for the safety of all involved and some have found experiences within their buildings, such as assisting the custodians, librarians, and administrative offices to gain experience.

Eight of the 22 participants across all four sites specifically mentioned that creating a safe environment and relationships was an important factor when working with students identified as ED. One participant mentioned

getting to know your kiddo [...] what makes them tick and get through their day [...].

See where they are coming from and look at the individual. It’s important to know what their needs are and what’s going to make them successful.

Another participant stated,

Once you've built that trust, you build those relationships, and you help with that emotional level, then any struggles that they're having academically, you're able to then make that inroad with me, just like with anything in education. Too often we try to start with the inroad being the academic, right? That's what really the block is and so once we get that. So, I think with students who really with the emotional piece [...] it's just a rapport, a one-on-one getting, you know for me, getting comfortable in an environment where they, they'll never say it, and they don't phrase it this way, they really do realize that the whole group is kind of support for everybody and you see that development.

These participants' observations and belief support previous research that pinpointed that for students to reach any sort of "self-actualization" or previously reported self-efficacy, students must first have their lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs met (James-Ward, Harkrider, Bowden, KeXu, & Portilla, 2019, p. 43). And these participants' responses further aligned with the most important need of the hierarchy noted by James-Ward et al. (2019), as the need for feeling safe and the need for belongingness. This idea of feeling safe only supports stronger a sense of being able to have confidence in one's self to complete any task (James-Ward et al., 2019). The findings aided a necessity to have increased emotional help and academic support for students with ED to find greater success in the classroom especially when they have significant challenges with emotional regulation (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010).

Another strategy mentioned was the use of Behavior Plans, also referred to as BIPs. These were mentioned across all four sites as a component of strategies used to help students. Of interest was that no one participant went into depth about the use of a BIP for a student even after prodding, but that it merely was a strategy. However several process coordinators and Directors noted that BIPS is Behavioral Improvement Plans that outline what behaviors are

inhibiting the learning of the student and what strategies will be used by all educational staff that interacts with the student to implement before an observed behavior and during the behavior being exhibited. Examples given by these participants were strategies included in the BIP such as “safe passes” where a student is allowed to leave the room immediately and report to a “safe” area where the student can regulate their behavior, opportunities to meet with a counselor, sitting in a “cool down” room for the day as a less stimulating environment. Several respondents noted that a BIP is separate from the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), which typically outlines the educational/behavioral goals to be achieved by the student in a school year, the BIP addresses what to do directly for the behavior, leaving less autonomy for the educator on how to work with the student.

Another strategy provided specifically to students identified with ED is having some sort of soft-skills class as an elective. However, like the BIPs, not a lot of time was spent discussing this service by many of the participants, as it seems to be an expectation of any program to be offered. One participant did note that soft skills that are typically taught in these classes are concepts such as social skills, empathy, time-management, patience, customer service, how to work as a team, professionalism, and public speaking. While another participant when mentioning this type of curriculum also mentioned social skills as the focus. These types of classes would help assist students with what Bandura (1977) believed is the most dominant role player in the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of a person sets the tone in which a person sets goals and views possible outcomes (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). These types of classes would help students better be able to set goals and learn through vicarious experiences to allow for a human’s previous experience witnessing peers in their success in performance and forms of

social persuasion allow for the encouragement of success from others (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018).

Last, while mentioned at all four sites was the use of the counseling department as a strategy. However, only four participants mentioned counseling as a strategy, and none expanded on the type of services provided and how they assisted with students identified with ED, other than connecting the students to additional services such as outside mental health resources.

Other strategies mentioned but not used widely across all four sites were noted by the researcher as important, such as the use of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, earlier identification of ED, creativity with credits earned for graduation requirements, alternative scheduling for students identified as ED, triage, mediation, and paraprofessional support, and community resources for families. Illustrated in Table 5 are the strategies as they were presented from each set.

Table 5

Strategies for Students for all four buildings

School A	School B	School C	School D
Counseling	Counseling	Team of Indv for	Counseling
Resource Rooms	CMH	kids	Resource Rooms
Mediation	Behavior Plans	Safe Environment	Behavior Plans
ReDiscover	BCBA	Behavior Plans	Alt Discipline
Soft Skills		IEP Goals	
training	Relationships	Relationships	Relationships
Specialized			
instruction	Para Support	Para Support	Communication
Credit Recovery	Alternative	Learning Lab	Alternative
Class	Schedules	CLASS	Schedules
Transition	Specialized		Soft Skills
Program	Instruction	Trauma Informed	training
		Good	
Safe Environment	Parent Support	collaboration for	Specialized
		teachers	instruction
	Eagle Time	Creativity with	Case managers
More Individual	Transition	credits	for ED or Autism
Support	Program	Transition	Transition
Transition as the		Program	Program
main Focus of	Case Manager on		
grad plan	Personality	Social Workers	Triage
Behavioral	Guidance	Behavioral	Guidance
Specialist	counselors	Specialist	counselors
Least restrictive			
environment	Social Workers		Social Workers
Vocational Prep	Behavioral		Behavioral
Class	Specialist		Specialist
	Least restrictive		Least restrictive
Study Centers	environment		environment
	Good Sp Ed Staff		Good Sp Ed Staff
	Individualization		
	Leave class if		
	needed		

Desired Changes to further support Students with ED

The three most common sub-themes that emerged from desired change to support students with emotional disorders were more counseling/therapy, not only for students, but for their families, additional transition support for students to be successful after graduation, and different graduation requirements, or more flexibility with requirements to graduate in the state of Missouri.

All four sites mentioned that our students need more therapy. As all teachers within each high school have become trained in trauma-informed care, the participants noted that the educational staff was becoming aware that these biological differences in students that are identified with ED can be addressed through how they interact with students to keep students functioning. But the majority of them noted the importance of their students needing therapy or counseling in order to help heal from the trauma. Currently, two of the 4 sites mentioned having 30 minutes of counseling per week possible for students identified with ED within their school setting. However, the two smaller districts, B and C, did not have a district psychiatrist/psychologist and had to rely on outside resources for counseling to be provided for students. Moreover, participants from three of the four sites recognized that counseling should not be limited to students, but also the families of the students. As one participant even mentioning that trauma and emotional disorders are generational.

I think we're seeing it more and more [...] this educational box, [...] and more kids are not fitting inside it. I think [...] that's a sad thing that society is seeing. Almost every kid is being exposed to some sort of traumatic experience, whether that be physical abuse, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, whatever. So, we're seeing a lot more of this, maybe, you know, uneducated, you know, parents or you know, parents that ignorant parenting

[...], they inadvertently expose kids to trauma because of, you know, their lack of understanding.

Out of all of the high schools, only site B offered a Mental Health Education Day in their school district where parents can attend free, sessions directly related to mental health and access to programs to assist with mental health.

All four buildings have a social worker on-site to assist with counseling, but they also all mentioned a need for additional assistance to provide the appropriate mental health counseling with people that are trained. As one participant stated

I don't feel crazy comfortable helping a kid unpack it because I'm not. I'm very objective and science-based and the emotions and the feelings are hard for me to kind of help coach and get them through, right, as far as like suggestions on what we could do is like, you know, how can we educate the general population staff to kind of help these kids unpack this stuff.

The second sub-theme that arose was the idea that needed is more transition services to students identified with ED. As a participant, who works on community placement for his students stated that he would like for there to be a shift in the IEP to emphasize and revolve around the student's goals for transition and post-high school plans. The participant went on to note, "The idea behind this is those behavioral and learning goals should be specifically tailored to prepare the students for after high school." Another participant noted that he saw an improvement in behaviors when they have a more realistic setting in which they are expected to behave when he stated:

I think this can be very critical for them because I think that real-world learning, like I have students that I've had within the class, you know, in the school building, or

behaviors might be more difficult for that traditional day has been hard. When I've gotten them out in the community and working, behavior has fully turned around, motivated, has like that real, you know, intrinsic value to seeing, like, that end goal for them more immediately.

This supports what Carter and Lunsford (2005) found regarding that students with ED would benefit from having career-ready skills emphasized to enhance their ability to get and keep a job over time, and that placing them in these circumstances before leaving high school might increase their statistics of keeping employment.

Finally, another sub-theme across all four sites was a need to re-evaluate the graduation requirements for students identified with receiving supports for ED. A participant mentioned that students with ED might be better served by learning more life skills or coping skills as opposed to Algebra II. Similarly, another participant supported this idea when noting, “That many of our elective courses that students are required to take are not as useful to students with ED, which are already struggling to pass their core classes and elective classes.” Likewise, another participant reported,

So, I wish there was a way that they could graduate by doing the core classes with some other creative aspect where they're getting, you know, on-the-job training or, you know, just a different modified type of electives to get them across the stage.

Currently, in the state of Missouri, students are required to earn three credits of math, four credits of English, three credits of history, Health, Government, PE, Fine Arts, Personal Finance, and seven credits of electives, for a total of 24 credits (www.dese.mo.gov). Presented in Table 6 are the different graduation requirements for each site.

Table 6

Graduation requirements by site

Site	Number of credits required	Difference from Missouri requirements
A	26	2 additional electives
B	28	.5 additional PE 4.5 additional electives
C	25	1 additional elective
D	24	No difference

And as another participant added:

I don't feel like sometimes all those credits that they necessarily have to have, or they're mandated to have for graduation are appropriate and or are really benefit them for what they're going to need to be able to survive, right accessible, outside of, you know, high school graduation, but I also feel like if those are the things we have to do. What can we then put in place to help them be successful in those classes because I feel like we're also lacking that piece, just being able to manage, seven hours a day, being able to manage, homework, getting stuff turned in, you know, social skills and class how to be engaged. All of those skills to be taught to them; they don't come with them and we just expect them to know all of those.

Other changes that were noted by individual participants, but were not mentioned often were alternative discipline practices for students identified as ED, more job certification opportunities for students, more community involvement, more mainstreaming for students with their regular educated peers, and earlier intervention. Presented in Table 7 are the desired changes by the school.

Table 7

Desired changes by school

School A	School B	School C	School D
Diff Grad Requirements Fluidity of program movement based upon need	More defined Tier System	More Specialized Program for ED	Diff Grad Requirements
More Transition	Early Intervention	Electives for SEB Alternative Grad Requirements	Alternative Discipline as a district
More Counseling	Peer Training	More Parental Involvement	More Transition
More Mainstream More hands-on job training certification in programs - technical schools	More Counseling More Community Involvement	More Community Involvement	More Counseling Nothing Needs to change More hands-on job training certification in programs - technical schools
Less Mainstream More collaboration on team Earlier Intervention	More Therapy for Kids Therapy for Families	Curriculum for SEB Different way to do TIC training	
	More Checks and Balances	Better Comm across building	
	GVHS Success CARE Team SOS Parent Family Mental Health Support Legal Assistance		

Supplemental Programs to Assist Students

Another major theme that emerged was the use of outside agencies to assist students with ED. While these services are not limited to just students with ED, they are widely used specifically for this group to assist with either graduation or assisting students to be college/career ready.

First, each site offers some sort of credit recovery and alternative high school setting where students who are credit-deficient due to not passing enough classes to graduate can attend. The two sites (A and D) that are from districts with multiple high schools were able to offer an alternative high school that functions as a separate building for students to earn more credits per year than they would in a traditional high school setting. These alternative settings have smaller class sizes and teachers facilitating in-person learning. Schools A and D also offered online curriculum for credit recovery in their traditional high school settings. High school B's alternative setting for credit deficiency was at an alternate location, but learning is from an online platform only. While a teacher is supporting the students, they only work on credit recovery by taking on online classes. Students with higher needs of supports for ED would remain at their home high school location to receive services needed and the traditional high school setting would try to make accommodations for credit recovery. High school C, while it offered an alternative setting, this location was primarily for students with the most extreme need for behavioral services that needed to be in a more restrictive environment. Most of the credit recovery for students with ED at this site is provided through an online curriculum on the traditional campus.

Most frequently mentioned by the transition coordinator at each site and several other special education educators were the use of Vocational Rehabilitation. Vocational Rehabilitation is an employment and training service that can assist someone with a physical or mental impairment that might keep someone from being successfully employed (www.dese.mo.gov). Vocational Rehabilitation starts working with students in high school but once graduated, assist students with guidance and counseling, job-seeking skills and job placement, and vocational

training. In certain cases, it can provide connections for financial assistance for post-secondary education and assist with living arrangements.

All four sites were also connected to some sort of mental health agency. While site D provided its counseling services to students identified with ED, sites B and C worked specifically with Comprehensive Mental Health (CMH) and Site D worked with ReDiscover. Both CMH and ReDiscover provide mental health workers to provide counseling to students identified with ED. Important to note that three of the four sites mentioned providing counseling as service provided as a part of their IEP, however, when further prodded, one district stated that counseling is not written into IEPs. Highlighted in Table 8 are the supplemental programs by sites.

Table 8

Supplemental Programs by building

School A	School B	School C	School D
Alternative HS Voc REHAB	Alternative HS Voc REHAB	Online Credit Recovery CMH Transition	Alternative HS Voc REHAB
ReDiscover Transition Fairs	KC Regional Transition Fairs Support for Parents	Program Lewis and Clark	KC Regional Transition Fairs Support for Parents
MoOptions Work Experience Program Transition Program Outside Placement	Dept of Mental Health CMH Transition Program Outside Placement		Dept of Mental Health Work Experience Program Transition Program Outside Placement Strategies for calming ED Students RegEd to be less rigid and more grace

Training for Staff

In terms of college preparation, every single participant said that their college experience prepared them for the paperwork aspect and compliance of their job, but they all said that the only experience they received to assist students with behaviors was an actual experience in the classroom after they began their career of working with students. Twenty of the participants said that they might have had one or two classes that addressed behaviors, but the common response was that the learning process was through trial and error. The other two participants, who were, the behavioral “specialists”, had more specialized schooling because their degree programs focused on behavior. As one participant responded

I say experience has been the most on the job training. Of course I have my masters and so that's been great foundation but really it's just getting, you know, pushing up my sleeves and getting my hands dirty in the sense of just getting out there and being part of meetings and collaboration and current, you know research of what's going on.

Another participant said she used the internet often to get new information. While another participant expressed that some of his training came from personal experience, mentorship, and wanting to do that for other students. His response:

I came from my house that low income. You know, I've come from domestic violence situations and things. You know, I tell [...] all the time, I kind of felt like a kid who, who only had like one roller skate and I was kind of just skating in this circle, and he gave me my other skate. And I think a lot of what he did for the emotional things that I felt that I had, you know, For me school was a release to get away from those things. And so, what he instilled in me. It was purely why I got an education, I, if I could do that for a kid that somebody did that for me, and through the vehicle of history, the way he did it for me. Yeah, that's all I've ever wanted to do.

As noted in the literature, the suicide rate for ages 10-24 increased by 56% from 2007-2017, and for ages 10-14 the suicide rate tripled from 2007-2017 (www.cdc.gov, 2019). In response, all 4 schools and their districts have implemented Trauma-Informed Care professional development and training (TIC) to become Trauma-Sensitive Schools. In terms of districts' providing training to Special Education staff and regular education staff, all schools held a strong belief that the current Trauma-Informed Care training that they were undergoing was extremely valuable. The majority of participants noted that all staff needed training in behavior

management in terms of preventative strategies, but more extensive training was needed regarding reactive strategies of what to do when a student exhibits behaviors in the classroom.

TIC identifies that all schools are seeing a rise of students that have been exposed to traumatic events such as violence, mental illness, homelessness, or substance abuse. Consequently, the response of the students to the trauma is often social, emotional, and academic difficulties that are affecting their ability to learn. The TIC training is based on research that shows that the brains of students that have experienced trauma diminish the student's ability to function on several levels. TIC training provides informative information about how trauma changes the brain of these students, how it affects how students react to stimulus in the classroom, and how staff can assist students. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has issued its model for Trauma-Informed Schools (DESE, 2020). Below is the graphic that Missouri uses to show the progression of training (see Table 9).

Table 9

Missouri Model for Trauma Informed Schools

STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Pre-Trauma Aware	Trauma Aware	Trauma Sensitive	Trauma Responsive	Trauma Informed
Leadership and staff are unable to identify the impact and prevalence of trauma	<p>Staff members are able to articulate basic information about the impact and prevalence of trauma</p> <p>All staff have received a standardized training on trauma and trauma-informed schools</p>	<p>Staff show signs of understanding information about trauma, referencing it informally</p> <p>Staff begin to understand the importance of addressing their own stress and trauma</p>	<p>Staff begin to change their approach to instruction and discipline to better reflect the impact of trauma</p> <p>Staff begin to proactively work to strengthen their own regulation and the regulation of their students</p>	<p>All staff respond to students and one another in a way that reflects the science of trauma</p> <p>Staff members routinely share new information and innovative ideas to meet the changing needs of students</p> <p>Trauma-informed responses are embedded within the organization</p>

Note: Retrieved from https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/cnsl_Missouri_Model%20school_guidance_doc.pdf

Trauma-Informed Care is a movement that “infuses the science about trauma and its impacts into daily practice and program design” (The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools, 2020). This idea suggests that the student has experienced some sort of trauma that has altered how they are able to respond appropriately. As one participant stated about this training “I really think that it is has opened a lot of people's eyes, in regards to, you know, where maybe if they just thought this darn kid, you know like, it's really got them thinking that they're not just a bad kid you know that there's something behind, you know, the functioning of their brain.”

Trauma-Informed Care training not only explains *why* the behaviors are occurring but also *how* to address the behaviors. All participants, in some manner or another, shared that there

is a need for educators to have more strategies to help them assist students exhibiting behaviors.

As a participant, a regular education teacher stated the need for an

overall package from identification to how they, you know, how then a student takes that designation to then what are the strategies and things that as teachers we could be doing. Because I think if we knew what they were they're people that are capable of doing I think it's just a lack of knowledge.

The transition specialist from school D felt very strongly about the importance of TIC training. She stated that most of the time, students identified with ED self-sabotage. She included with the thought “because students [with identified with ED] look normal, sometimes they [educators and community members] don’t understand why they are having those behaviors.”

Trauma-Informed Care training, while it has been implemented at all four schools, has been implemented in different ways. Due to COVID, the ability for staff to gather has been limited. Sites B and C specifically mentioned that staff was self-facilitating training videos about TIC. Processing information learned with colleagues has been limited as noted by one participant:

I think the trauma-informed is good but the way that our district has presented it this year, it's kind of like, ‘go in the group and watch the videos and in you’re done’ type thing and there's no ‘you're supposed to be following up having group discussion’, but there's no follow up from it. So, you never hear from the administrator ‘Hey, what did you think about your trauma-informed? What strategies did you learn from that trauma-informed?’ So, there's no follow-up from the PD, aside from like a three-question questionnaire, Sit, click, and submit.

Additionally, mentioned often at all four schools by eleven participants was the need for all staff to have professional development that involves more training about behavior management and strategies. As one participant stated a desire to have more skills because “you may not be the teacher that got them [the student] started that day, but you may be the one that’s, you know, going to have to take care of the issue at that point.” And then went on to state, “things that are calming down, like what can we do to isolate them if they start, you know, be damaging towards the classroom or maybe, you know, towards the other students”.

Another training challenge is discipline. Three of the participants mentioned a need to be trained in how to decrease discipline referrals for students identified as needing assistance due to ED. As another participant noted, “If staff were better trained in the area of how to assist with deescalating behaviors, this also might reduce the number of referrals to the office or time spent out of the classroom due to disruptive behaviors.” Illustrated in Table 10 are the training needs as identified by the participants.

Table 10

Training for staff by building

School A	School B	School C	School D
Strategies for calming ED Students		Training on IEP Goals for ED	College
Training on teaching Core areas	Experience	Supports after HS	Experience
Reg Ed teachers to help with behavior	More TIC	More TIC	PD for HS Level and Not elem
More training about trauma and understanding ED for ALL teachers	Understanding SpEd in general	Reg Ed understand Mod and Accom	Reg Ed teachers trained to make accomodation Reg Ed teachers to help with behavior
Preventative Training	How to better ID	Relevant Data collection	
Behavior Management for all	More training about trauma and understanding ED for ALL teachers	More training about trauma and understanding ED for ALL teachers	More training about trauma and understanding ED for ALL teachers Understanding
Trauma Informed Care	Student Advocacy Training Behavior Management for all Reg Ed need to better understand SpEd role	Student Advocacy Training Behavior Management for all	what supports are post-HS Continue to collab with ED teachers Behavior Management for all Reg Ed need to better understand SpEd role

Data to Determine Student Success

All four sites put the most emphasis on the main type of data collection to determine student success on the IEP goals written. As a participant responded

Goals for students identified as ED might include being able to have fewer outbursts in the classroom, ability to advocate for themselves when they need assistance behaviorally, appropriate interactions with classmates, or other goals pertaining to the specific behaviors a student might be challenged with.

Also mentioned across all four sites was the use of observations of student behavior. While most schools relied on staff observations of behavior, two sites, A and B, mentioned specifically the importance of student self-observation.

Other data that was important to note concerning ED student progress that was mentioned were graduation rate, numbers of student participants with ED in the transition programs, decrease in discipline referrals, and standardized assessments. Presented in Table 11 is the myriad of data used to measure success by building.

Table 11

Data used to measure success by building

School A	School B	School C	School D
IEP Goals	IEP Goals	IEP Goals	IEP Goals
BIPS	BIP Plans	BIP Plans	Graduation
Decrease in discipline	Parent Reports	Credits earned	Follow-up
Observation	Observations	Observations	Collecting data on
Information			Triggers
	Student Self		Standardized
Self-Monitoring	Observation	Referral numbers	assessment
	Reg Ed teachers		# of participants
	to be less rigid		in transition
			programs

Community Involvement

The topic of community involvement was discussed on a much smaller scale than any of the other themes previously mentioned, however, the researcher felt it was important to include and discuss. As mentioned earlier, a participant discussed the idea that students identified as ED have no physical differences, resulting often in their behaviors not being understood. Because this participant is a transition specialist, she tries to educate business owners about how to help students with ED. Other participants specifically mentioned the need to have more opportunities for students with ED to be trained or earn a work certification while still in high school for credit. This would involve having more employers from the community willing to train students. As a participant stated

Maybe working with, even talking with the Department of Mental Health or Vocational Rehabilitation to talk about specific incidences or things they are experiencing out in the community so that we can start better addressing when they are with us because we are not thinking that far.

The data revealed that each school participates in transition fairs and/or employment fairs. These are opportunities typically provided by the schools that connect students to outside agencies and employers to practice skills such as interviewing and advocating for themselves. There has been a more recent move towards reverse job fairs where the student presents themselves and the employers move around the venue talking to students to find a good fit for their company.

The other side of community involvement mentioned were for entities such as counselors and legal counsel to offer services for free or a reduced rate through the school for families

needing assistance. An example of this strategy was presented by School B who offers an evening just for this type of connection to be made with families and the community.

Conclusions

In regards to the six research questions the following conclusions are suggested. These conclusions were drawn from the information gathered from the literature review and the data provided by the twenty-two participants.

It can be concluded that effective programs for students identified as ED should include: receiving credits and credit recovery, provided use of case managers and paraprofessionals as one-on-one, provided work programs that taught skills to students to be successful post-high school, provided specialized instructional programs, and behavioral assistance, and provided transition programming and skills. These characteristics include a myriad of opportunities for students to receive credit for work that assists them in being better prepared to self-advocate and maintain stability in their endeavors after school. Moreover, to have an effective program for students identified as ED there must be a sufficient number of trained case managers and paraprofessionals so one-to-one support is provided. Similarly, the schools must provide a comprehensive work program that provides these students with the necessary workforce skills to be successful after graduation, especially in the area of soft skills, such as relationship building. Furthermore, the instructional processes and strategies provided within an ED program must be varied and specialized in both instruction and in behavior assistance. Finally, an effective ED program will have a highly trained and dedicated transitional coordinator, who will, daily, provide provided transition programming and skills.

To narrow the graduation gap between students identified with ED and regular education students it was concluded that a wide range of strategies must be utilized. It must be the

responsibility of all of the teachers to contribution in the goal of assisting students to graduate on time. And while they are focusing on this goal, they are finding creative ways to issue a credit, working with regular education staff to provide accommodations and modifications to curriculum to assist students with earn credit, providing one-on-one help, and consistently seeking out opportunities for students to graduate with their cohort.

Also concluded from this research is that while these four programs were perceived by participants to be effective there remained a myriad of barriers that limited that effectiveness. The perceived barriers for some districts were not having enough resources, financially, to assist students with ED as they should. Another barrier was providing counseling in a much more in-depth manner to assist students to work on their SEB concerns while and still having enough time to work on credits towards graduation. While all of the educators felt that students needed more intense counseling, the need to earn credits often became the forefront of the time spent for students at school.

Another perceived barrier was the lack of training that all staff in education has to best assist students identified as ED. As the shift in training focuses on all staff trained in TIC, more staff should be better equipped to assist students with SEB concerns. Research has studied the importance of school-wide buy-in, consistent discipline approaches, individual plans, and familial involvement in ED programming contributing to the success of the inclusion of students with ED (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007) and TIC training appears to be an opportunity that parallels this research.

It can also be concluded that while there seem to be several opportunities for mental health supports for students through social workers and outside agencies, the amount of time spent with these counselors seems to be lacking. Again, research has indicated that mental

health support within the school is viewed as “educational enhancers” by meeting students at their present level of needs so that they can better spend their time in the classroom focusing on learning as opposed to outside stressors (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010).

And it can be concluded that if an ED program included the three elements of Bandura’s(1977) social cognitive theory the outcomes for the program will be more successful for the ED student. As noted from the data, through TIC training, all education staff is gaining a better understanding of the student’s ability to learn based upon the functioning of their brain and levels of stress. Schools are learning how to create more safe environments for students to learn about themselves and if they should have any SEB issues, the adults in education are learning how to be better equipped to assist students to return to a safe space in their body to be able to learn. This new self-awareness that students are supported in across all of their classes will assist them to adapt to their environment and be in a space to learn. The need for TIC training needs to continue with plenty of opportunities for staff to collaborate about best practices.

Finally from the data, it can be concluded that effective ED programs use a variety of data sources to measure success with some limited effectiveness. Specifically, schools are still mainly utilizing IEP goals, behavioral plans, and graduation rates as their common assessments of effectiveness, however, it is not clear if they are using those to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, but rather the improvement of the student behavior for each individual. It would appear that as trauma-sensitive schools, more schools will be implementing the use of student self-evaluation tools to assist students. It appears that the ability to have time for staff to examine data to determine the effectiveness of a program is limiting. In light of the statistics of graduation rates, lack of employment sustainability, and lack of ability to live independently after leaving high school, districts would be served best by delving deeper into a variety of

indicators to assist with determining the effectiveness of their programs, however, time and money are limiting the feasible for this type of data collection. However, it should be noted, that if a district wants to change the trends in graduation rates, lack of employment sustainability, and lack of ability to live independently, time and resources must be found.

Implications

To create a learning environment that fully supports students identified with emotional disorders to progress towards graduation and possess the skills to be college and career ready, school personnel will need to create ED programs that include strategies that address the three areas in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977). The three focuses that should be incorporated into programs are understanding the student's biological make-up and fully understand the reason behind any behavior. Next within the school environment understanding what is happening in all classroom settings and how it could trigger a student's behavior, thus allowing them to learn in a safe environment. And thirdly, provide the ED student with the skills needed to react within their environments with socially acceptable and self-monitoring skills.

Another implication for practice is the need to increase the professional training not only for special education faculty but also for teachers in regular education. While Trauma-Informed Care training has been implemented in all four high schools, there is a need for this training to be continued and additional resources provided. Furthermore, special education staff need additional training in how to gather, analyses, and make recommendations from the myriad of data sources provided in a school setting. Using primarily the IEP as an indicator of success is limiting and further avenues of data sources are warranted.

Another implication for practice is for an expansion of the mental health resources needed in high schools. It is essential that social workers, along with school counselors are

provided the resources to continue working with ED students. Additionally, policy makers at both the district and the State Department Level need to consider policy modifications regarding the required credits for graduation for ED students. The modifications needed should focus on maximizing the career readiness and transition skills needs of these students. So systemically, the state needs to allow for more creative ways for students to earn credits that are going to be more meaningful to them than to have to take high-level English or Math classes that may not serve them as well. Until changes can be made to credit requirements, districts need to look at the graduation credits they are requiring their students to meet above the state requirements to meet the student at their level of functioning. Additionally, schools need to have a better system to work with students proactively to retain the credit, but to also recover credit without the classes stacking upon themselves for the student.

Recommendations

Whether the school district is a smaller school district or a larger district, the following are the recommendations suggested from the data gathered within this study. These recommendations should be for any student needed SEB assistance, not just students that qualify for services through an IEP.

Recommendation one. Identification – Each district needs to have some type of system that identifies students that have social, emotional, or behavioral concerns that directly inhibit the student from academic success. This identification should not be limited to students who qualify for services through an IEP or a physician’s diagnosis. Through this identification system, different tiers of support should be in place that all students who struggle have access through. Such an assessment would break down the student's need by behavioral support, social support, academic support, and emotional support. Under each of these areas of need, the districts should

have in place opportunities for students to receive plans individualized to assist them towards graduating with their cohort and possessing skills that will allow them to maintain success at a post-secondary institution or employment. Types of interventions that need to be in place: access to therapy or counseling every week, access to group support to create a sense of community for students, and an understanding that they are not alone. Therapy should be based upon the need of identifying the trauma that is causing the behavior, how to address healing from the trauma, and how to self-manage behaviors to function in society. Other interventions would alternative learning settings to assist with gaining credit the first time a student attempts a credited class to be proactive, as opposed to reactive credit recovery.

Recommendation two. Staff training – All staff should be required to attend pre-school service trauma-informed care training that involves collaboration as a staff to create a list of strategies and common vocabulary that students are hearing consistently for their building. Regular education staff should be trained and learn to use accommodations and modifications as provided by the special education teachers. Additionally, special education teachers and schools should be prepared to learn to write behavioral goals that meet the needs of the students identified as needing SEB support.

Recommendation three. Familial Support – For any student that is identified by the school as needing support, the family should be brought in (if possible), to be a part of the student's educational plan, but to also address the needs of the family. Many times the trauma these students are experiencing is coming from home, therefore the school must become a safe place for them. If the school can provide assistance or resources to help the root of the issue at home, then hopefully, the student benefits as well. The familial support should not be limited to therapy, but also outside agencies that help with job skills training, employment assistance, legal

help, and access to healthcare. There are some schools across the country that have started providing “whole” care to families of students that attend their school district. Many times, these extra agencies will work with schools free-of-charge as a part of grants or other federal or state funding. The United States Department of Education (2018) calls this their Full-Service Community Schools Program that supports provides funding for the services mentioned above.

Recommendation four. Community Involvement – When a district decides to create a program to assist students to graduate and be college/career ready post-high school and it is successful, the community benefits by having fewer people unemployed and needing supplemental help. As mentioned earlier, the unemployment rate of the mentally ill is 80%, and that 70% of students in centers have some sort of mental illness or condition (NAMI, 2012). If the community members, business owners, and local government become involved with training and placing students, a greater safety net for these students will be created. The expectation with more community involvement is that districts can create an increased awareness for ED and mental illness and provided strategies in how to help assist students during their work experiences to maintain the ability to stay employed.

Recommendation five. Evaluation tools to evaluate success – To understand if the program the school has put in place, there should be multiple types of evaluation tools used depending upon the services and supports provided to the student. And teachers should be trained in how to analyze, interpret, and used the data to drive decision-making.

Suggestions for Future Research

A few research paths come to mind when considering the need for more information on this topic. First, research is needed to investigate how to incorporate more intense therapy for students in the school setting. Another area for further inquiry is the need for alternative

graduation requirements for students in an alternative setting. While the practitioners interviewed for this study all felt that these areas were of great need in their educational setting, it would be good to back these beliefs with data.

Another area for further investigation is examining if students need to be placed in experiential environments and internships while still in high schools. By doing so the engagement of students might increase and result in lower dropout rates if students are vested in their “education” to be employable. Last, more information is needed concerning the impact of schools implementing Trauma-Informed Care training in their schools, and that impact on behavior, graduation rates, and employment sustainability.

Executive Summary

This executive summary outlines the main points in the dissertation study *An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students with Emotional Disorders*. The problem of practice in this study was the large gap in graduation rates between students identified as emotionally disturbed and students without disabilities. Additionally, the number of students identified as ED that maintain jobs over time is low. While the purpose of the study was to understand if the programs are decreasing this graduation gap, a secondary focus of the study was to examine how these identified programs are making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability. This study addresses the research questions:

What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?

How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?

What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?

What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?

What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

Conceptual Framework

The study used the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Theory when analyzing data from educational staff that work with students identified as ED. Also discussed were the Behavioral Theory and Emotional Regulation Theory, but they were not comprehensive enough to use.

Methods

The study was conducted using qualitative methods, utilizing interviews with educational practitioners that work with students with ED and secondary documents that provided data about students with ED through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The data were analyzed using open coding to find recurring themes within the data. The study setting included 4 high schools in the suburbs of a metropolitan area of Missouri. Conducted were twenty-two interviews across the four sites.

Results and Discussion

In terms of the research questions, schools are making efforts to close the graduation gap of students with ED and providing opportunities for students to be more college and career-ready. While data collection techniques are still a weakness, the focus at the moment is creating spaces for students and educators to create more effective programs. Highlighting what is happening across the four sites are revealed through the six themes that emerged from the results.

Strategies provided for ED student

Depending on the school, environments in the schools are changing to meet the needs of students with ED to assist with managing and improving behaviors.

Desired changes to further support students with ED

There is an overwhelming desire for more intense therapy for students with ED and a need for alternative graduation requirements that best fit the needs of these students post-high school.

Supplementary programs to assist students

There are several outside programs in schools that assist students with additional counseling and help to be more college/career ready.

Professional training for staff

Schools are diving into becoming more aware of SEB and how it affects how students interact with their environment, however, more training is needed to provide strategies for students to be supported.

Data to evaluate progress

While data is being used to measure the success of individual students, this area is still lacking to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

Community Involvement

Schools and communities are starting to connect to create opportunities and provide services for students that best serve their needs and training.

Implications

To create a learning environment that fully supports students identified with emotional disorders to progress towards graduation and possess the skills to be college and career ready, school personnel will need to create ED programs that include strategies that address the three areas in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977). The student's general biological

make-up, the environment provided by the educator, and assisting students with how they adjust to the environment.

Another implication for practice is the need to increase the professional training not only for special education faculty but also for teachers in regular education. Staff needs to be trained to understand the behavior and strategies that assist students.

Another implication for practice is for an expansion of the mental health resources needed in high schools.

Additionally, policy makers at both the district and the State Department Level need to consider policy modifications regarding the required credits for graduation for ED students. The modifications needed should focus on maximizing the career readiness and transition skills needs of these students.

Significance to the Field of Study

Recommendation for Schools

System of Identification and Supports

The study highlights the need for identifications and supports to be in place based upon the type of supports needed for each student.

Training for Staff

The study discussed a specific type of training that allows for staff to understand the biological factors behind behavior and strategies to assist students with SEB needs.

Familial Support

Schools should include families of the student in the process of providing support, but also provide support to family members as needed.

Community Involvement

Community members, business owners, and local government should be involved in the process of supporting students so that the student becomes a productive member of their society.

Suggestions for further research

The research behind incorporating more intense therapy for students in the school setting and alternative graduation requirements for students in an alternative setting. Second, in the ever-changing landscape of education, placing students in experiential environments and internships while still in high schools seems to be a new and upcoming trend vs. the traditional learning environment of the school. Last, more information about the impact of schools implementing Trauma-Informed Care training in their schools, the impact it has on behavior, graduation rates, and employment sustainability.

SECTION FIVE
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal and Rationale

The journal *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* is the targeted journal for submission of findings. This SAGE journal focuses solely on what the title implies and is in conjunction with the Division on Career Development and Transition of the Council for Exceptional Children. The journal is published quarterly in both print and online editions.

Rationale

This qualitative study focuses on qualities of a transition program, specifically for students with ED at the secondary level. This journal is targeted towards secondary education, transition and career development for students with disabilities.

Plan for Submission

The article will be ready upon completion of the Dissertation-in-Practice and the oral defense. Manuscript submissions are electronic and are to be made in Word format. SAGE utilizes 3 or more peer reviewers per manuscript and decisions are made within three months. Timeframe for submission is open-ended.

Submission-Ready Article for the journal
Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals

Title Page

An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students
with Emotional Disorders

By Shelley L. Brown and Dr. Barbara N. Martin

University of Missouri

1200 SE Adams Dairy Parkway

Blue Springs, Missouri 64014

Sbrown4@bssd.net; bmartin@ucmo.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify what programs to assist students identified with emotional disorders in 9-12 high schools have implemented to close the graduation gap and help students be best prepared to be college and career-ready post-high school. The results of this study were organized to answer six research questions that addressed the purpose of the study and then organized into the themes of strategies provided for ED students, desired changes to further support students with ED, supplementary programs to assist students, professional training for staff, data to evaluate progress, and community involvement.

Introduction

The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Public Law 94-142) enacted by Congress in 1975 mandated the right of students with disabilities to receive a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (*The Handicapped*, 1977). But even with this existing legislation and the resultant amendments under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2001) challenges still remain in schools regarding providing the most appropriate education for all students and especially those who have been identified as having emotional disorders.

Furthermore, the National Institute of Mental Health (2019) reported 49.5% of adolescents between the ages of 13-18 live with a mental disorder. Similarly, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2017) noted 1 in 5 adolescents has a severe disorder and that less than half are receiving any kind of treatment. With these high numbers of youth not receiving care, the outcomes might be overwhelming for these students.

Many of these students with mental illness can and do receive support under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2001) through special education services in the school system (Garland, Hough, McCabe, Yeh, Wood, & Aarons, 2001). However, even with special education support, the graduation rates of students identified ED is often below 50% (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Chen-Gaddini, 2014). In light of these realities, educators need to understand what effective educational programming is needed within school districts so that appropriate instruction and resources are provided for students identified as ED, especially in high school settings. And in light of little research identifying successful high school programs or comparisons of programs for how to increase the graduation rate of this student population identified as ED this inquiry was important. Furthermore, there was a need to identify effective

characteristics of ED programs used in schools, and if they assisted students with being able to obtain and consistently hold a job over time. Due to the challenges that ED students face, the overarching focus of this study was to identify what implemented programs have been successfully in 9-12 high schools that are designed primarily to focus on students identified with emotional disorders. The goal was to understand if the programs are decreasing the graduation gap and to examine what if any barriers that exist concerning graduation and post-graduation experiences. Specifically, a secondary focus of the study was to examine how these identified programs were making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

Research Questions

The researcher focused on the following questions to gather information regarding services provided to students identified as ED to assist with persistence to graduation and employment sustainability.

1. What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?
2. How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?
3. What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?
4. What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?
5. What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social

Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

6. What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

Connection to the Conceptual Frameworks

Skinner's (1984) behavioral theory and operant conditioning model, and Gross (2015) emotional regulation theory were considered as the conceptual framework for this inquiry, but for various reasons were not selected as the conceptual framework. While each of them assisted the researcher in understanding and interpreting the findings of programs supporting students with ED (Casanave & Li, 2015), because each had related concepts concerning the emotional nature of students or how behavior might be modified, they were ultimately discarded as it became apparent that the conceptual framework for this inquiry would be social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001).

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) is based on the belief that a human's behavior has three main factors, the person's genetic makeup itself, the environment, and the person's behavior within that environment is Bandura's social cognitive theory (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Additionally, all of these factors operate about each other, not one determining the other, however, while the environment may not be controlled, how one reacts to it can be more flexible in types of outcomes (An & Meaney, 2015; Oppong, 2014; Wulfert, 2013). Bandura (2001) stressed if one wants to change the behavior of others, one must monitor the "pattern of behavior and the cognitive and environmental conditions under which it

occurs” as the “first step toward doing something to affect it” (p. 8). Child behaviorist Greene (2014) suggested that if we understand what stimulant is causing the undesired behavior through patterns, then one can help extinguish the stimulant to avoid the expected outcome (Greene, 2014). Most important about SCT (Bandura, 2001) is that it encompasses the student’s previous experiences learned vicariously through seeing the success of other students (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018). Included also are the student’s physical and mental state during the time a response is needed (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018), and includes the expressed positive support offered by those around the students, rules, and modeling (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2016)

Similarly, Bandura’s theory (2001) is extensively more comprehensive than Gross’s Emotional Regulation Theory (Gross, 2015) as to why a person views an event in a certain way. This theory differs from others in that self-efficacy plays an immense role in how we view ability to envision the outcomes (Bandura, 1989). This theory extended the idea that the result itself is the reward or punishment (Bandura, 1989). Moreover, the theory is focusing on the whole person and the environment, thus, Bandura’s theory (2001) was the chosen conceptual framework for this inquiry. Specifically, it allows for a comprehensive explanation of how multiple factors affect a student and their behavior and further guides how to implement change for a more desired outcome (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk and Dibenedetto, 2016). This study used a holistic point of view of addressing all areas of the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Theory: the student’s needs to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student’s ability to adapt to the school environment (Bandura, 2001).

Design of the Study

A qualitative study was used to gain insight into perceptions of successful approaches to assist students identified as emotionally disturbed to persist to graduation and assist them with post-high school success. Additionally, used as the foundation for the data source rationale is the social constructivist approach focused on understanding reality by being socially constructed (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005). It was the goal of this researcher for this study whereby “meaning is negotiated and understood through interactions with others in social processes,” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1374). A multiple comparative case study approach was used using interviews and secondary support documents to collect data. The researcher followed the recommended two stages of analysis by first examining the data within each case separately and then a second phase of “cross-case analysis” of examining the data and patterns between buildings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). The data collected from these patterns allowed the researcher to build a general explanation that will apply to multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Study Setting

Four districts were chosen based upon their analogous demographics in the student population, their student populations, and their grade level composition of 9-12 grades. In addition, each of these four high schools had an ED program that has been in existence for over five years with documentation of having similar graduation and post-graduate success as identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (Missouri Department of Education, 2019). While the researcher understands that the populations of these four school districts do not represent a diverse population, they do represent a typical suburban high school in Jackson County, Missouri. With similar demographics, the desire was that the patterns that

emerge from these schools would apply to all students of various backgrounds demographically.

Presented in Table 1 are the demographics for each school.

Table 1

Demographics of Each School

High School	Student Population	Ethnicity	Free/Reduced	Special Education
High School A	1,976	11.2% Black 4.9% Hispanic 76% White	21.8%	10.4%
High School B	1,326	2.6% Black 8.2% Hispanic 82.4 % White	21.9%	10.4%
High School C	1,481	8.6% Black 10.2% Hispanic 76.1% White	48.2%	9.9%
High School D	1,909	11.6% Black 6.8% Hispanic 73.6% White	20.9%	9.8%

Note: N= Four Case studies with a total student population of 6,622

It is important to note, that while all four schools are similar in demographics, the districts in which they reside are different in size and some are able to provide more and varied resources based upon their size as a district, overall. These differences were seen in the information provided by the participants. Schools A and D have multiple high schools within their district and have their special education programs organized in a manner that allocates their resources to provide services to students in an efficient way to maximize opportunities to students across their districts. Furthermore, schools A and D have students attend specific buildings if they are needing services at a higher level where they can allocate resources and get their “biggest bang for their buck” as noted by Participant 6.

Conversely, since districts B and C have only one high school to provide services to students identified with ED, they are organized in a more traditional manner where students in all identified Special Education categories are in the same building. Another important discovery is that Schools A, B, and C’s case managers all have a mixture of students with disabilities on their caseloads, while school D has case managers specific to the identification of Autism and Emotionally Disturbed.

Participants

The qualitative data collection tools used for this study were interviews and secondary data from auxiliary documents were reviewed about the school’s graduation rate and the school’s graduate follow-up information to collect information pertaining specifically to the researcher's questions for this study. There were 22 participants interviewed for this investigation.

Due to COVID-19, each school and participant was given the option of in-person interviews or to interview virtually using video conferencing media of their preference resulting in all interviews being on video conferencing media or zoom. All interviews were recorded

through digital means with appropriate permissions given. The researcher used a semi-structured interview with initially 17 questions to guide each interview based upon the role of the participant in each district, however, the researcher engaged in additional follow-up questions that led information of interest that might not have been discovered if the interview protocol was too structured.

Six participants from three schools and four from the fourth site were involved in the interview process for a total of 22 participants ($N = 22$). The researcher used network sampling as a part of the purposeful sampling of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Either the Director of Special Services for the district or the principal of the building recommended the participants. They were asked to include the process coordinator, the transition specialist, the director of special services, two special education teachers that work with students identified as ED, and one regular education teacher that works with students with ED. Some schools chose alternative participants based upon their skill set and the information they would provide due to how they work with students identified as ED.

Discussion of Findings through the Themes

The resulting themes with sub-themes were: *Strategies provided for ED students*, *Desired changes to further support students with ED*, *Supplementary programs to assist students*, *Professional training for staff*, *Data to evaluate progress*, and *Community Involvement*. Each of the themes with sub-themes will be discussed and framed within the literature.

Theme One: Strategies provided for ED students

Common strategies mentioned at all four sites were transition supports, relationships/safe environment, behavior plans, credit recovery, counseling department support, and some sort of soft skills class offered. Three out of the four high school personnel mentioned specialized

instruction (SI) classes, class-within-a-class (CWC) services, and para support. While all four schools offer the different types of learning environments just mentioned (SI, CWC, and para support), they tended to not be at the forefront of what was considered to be a “strategy” to assist kids with ED. The researcher considered the definition of “strategies to help students with ED” any supports or services provided by the schools that assisted them in their persistence to graduate or their ability to be college/career ready post-high school.

Out of the 22 participants, 15 of them specifically mentioned transition services/programs at least once or more times as a strategy to assist students identified as ED. Transition services and programs at all four sites included meeting with a transition coordinator on a regular basis throughout their high school career. Each of the four sites has a transition coordinator that assists students in identifying what life skills they currently possess, what skills they need to learn, communicating these skill sets to parents and students, connecting students and families to outside programs that will assist students post-graduation with post-secondary education and employment resources. If the school offers some type of work program, which is a program that places students in employment for credit during the school year, then the transition coordinator also oversees the connection to these work resources. All four sites have some sort of work program, but due to COVID, no site has been able to provide outside work experiences for the safety of all involved and some have found experiences within their buildings, such as assisting the custodians, librarians, and administrative offices to gain experience.

Eight of the 22 participants across all four sites specifically mentioned that creating a safe environment and relationships was an important factor when working with students identified as ED. One participant mentioned

getting to know your kiddo [...] what makes them tick and get through their day [...].

See where they are coming from and look at the individual. It's important to know what their needs are and what's going to make them successful.

Another participant stated,

Once you've built that trust, you build those relationships, and you help with that emotional level, then any struggles that they're having academically, you're able to then make that inroad with me, just like with anything in education. Too often we try to start with the inroad being the academic, right? That's what really the block is and so once we get that. So, I think with students who really with the emotional piece [...] it's just a rapport, a one-on-one getting, you know for me, getting comfortable in an environment where they, they'll never say it, and they don't phrase it this way, they really do realize that the whole group is kind of support for everybody and you see that development.

This participants' observations and belief support previous research that pinpointed that for students to reach any sort of "self-actualization" or previously reported self-efficacy, students must first have their lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs met (James-Ward, Harkrider, Bowden, KeXu, & Portilla, 2019, p. 43). And these participants' responses further aligned with the most important need of the hierarchy noted by James-Ward et al. (2019), as the need for feeling safe and the need for belongingness. This idea of feeling safe only supports stronger a sense of being able to have confidence in one's self to complete any task (James-Ward et al., 2019). The findings aided a necessity to have increased emotional help and academic support for students with ED to find greater success in the classroom especially when they have significant challenges with emotional regulation (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010).

Another strategy mentioned was the use of Behavior Plans, also referred to as BIPs. These were mentioned across all four sites as a component of strategies used to help students. Of interest was that no one participant went into depth about the use of a BIP for a student even after prodding, but that it merely was a strategy. However several process coordinators and Directors noted that BIPS is Behavioral Improvement Plans that outline what behaviors are inhibiting the learning of the student and what strategies will be used by all educational staff that interacts with the student to implement before an observed behavior and during the behavior being exhibited. Examples given by these participants were strategies included in the BIP such as “safe passes” where a student is allowed to leave the room immediately and report to a “safe” area where the student can regulate their behavior, opportunities to meet with a counselor, sitting in a “cool down” room for the day as a less stimulating environment. Several respondents noted that a BIP is separate from the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), which typically outlines the educational/behavioral goals to be achieved by the student in a school year, the BIP addresses what to do directly for the behavior, leaving less autonomy for the educator on how to work with the student.

Another strategy provided specifically to students identified with ED is having some sort of soft-skills class as an elective. However, like the BIPs, not a lot of time was spent discussing this service by many of the participants, as it seems to be an expectation of any program to be offered. One participant did note that soft skills that are typically taught in these classes are concepts such as social skills, empathy, time-management, patience, customer service, how to work as a team, professionalism, and public speaking. While another participant when mentioning this type of curriculum also mentioned social-skills as the focus. These types of classes would help assist students with what Bandura (1977) believed is the most dominant role

player in the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of a person sets the tone in which a person sets goals and views possible outcomes (Martin, Rivera, Hekler, Riley, Buman, Madams, & Magann, 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). These types of classes would help students better be able to set goals and learn through vicarious experiences to allow for a human's previous experience witnessing peers in their success in performance and forms of social persuasion allow for the encouragement of success from others (Jenkins, Hall, & Raeside, 2018).

Last, while mentioned at all four sites was the use of the counseling department as a strategy. However, only four participants mentioned counseling as a strategy, and none expanded on the type of services provided and how they assisted with students identified with ED, other than connecting the students to additional services such as outside mental health resources.

Other strategies mentioned but not used widely across all four sites were noted by the researcher as important, such as the use of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, earlier identification of ED, creativity with credits earned for graduation requirements, alternative scheduling for students identified as ED, triage, mediation, and paraprofessional support, and community resources for families.

Desired Changes to further support Students with ED

The three most common sub-themes that emerged from desired change to support students with emotional disorders were more counseling/therapy, not only for students, but for their families, additional transition support for students to be successful after graduation, and different graduation requirements, or more flexibility with requirements to graduate in the state of Missouri.

All four sites mentioned that our students need more therapy. As all teachers within each high school have become trained in trauma-informed care, the participants noted that the educational staff was becoming aware that these biological differences in students that are identified with ED can be addressed through how they interact with students to keep students functioning. But the majority of them noted the importance of their students needing therapy or counseling to help heal from the trauma. Currently, two of the 4 sites mentioned having 30 minutes of counseling per week possible for students identified with ED within their school setting. However, the two smaller districts, B and C, did not have a district psychiatrist/psychologist and had to rely on outside resources for counseling to be provided for students. Moreover, participants from three of the four sites recognized that counseling should not be limited to students, but also the families of the students. As one participant even mentioning that trauma and emotional disorders are generational.

I think we're seeing it more and more [...] this educational box, [...] and more kids are not fitting inside it. I think [...] that's a sad thing that society is seeing. Almost every kid is being exposed to some sort of traumatic experience, whether that be physical abuse, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, whatever. So, we're seeing a lot more of this, maybe, you know, uneducated, you know, parents or you know, parents that ignorant parenting [...], they inadvertently expose kids to trauma because of, you know, their lack of understanding.

Out of all of the high schools, only site B offered a Mental Health Education Day in their school district where parents can attend free, sessions directly related to mental health and access to programs to assist with mental health.

All four buildings has a social worker on site to assist with counseling, but they also all mentioned a need for additional assistance to provide the appropriate mental health counseling with people that are trained. As one participant stated

I don't feel crazy comfortable helping a kid unpack it because I'm not. I'm very objective and science-based and the emotions and the feelings are hard for me to kind of help coach and get them through, right, as far as like suggestions on what we could do is like, you know, how can we educate general population staff to kind of help these kids unpack this stuff.

The second sub-theme that arose was the idea that needed is more transition services to students identified with ED. As a participant, who works on community placement for his students stated that he would like for there to be a shift in the IEP to emphasize and revolve around the student's goals for transition and post-high school plans. The participant when on to note, "The idea behind this is those behavioral and learning goals should be specifically tailored to prepare the students for after high school." Another participant noted that he saw an improvement in behaviors when they have a more realistic setting in which they are expected to behave when he stated:

I think this can be very critical for them because I think that real-world learning, like I have students that I've had within the class, you know, in the school building, or behaviors might be more difficult for that traditional day has been hard. When I've gotten them out in the community and working, behavior has fully turned around, motivated, has like that real, you know, intrinsic value to seeing, like, that end goal for them more immediately.

This supports what Carter and Lunsford (2005) found regarding that students with ED would benefit from having career-ready skills emphasized to enhance their ability to get and keep a job over time, and that placing them in these circumstances prior to leaving high school might increase their statistics of keeping employment.

Finally, another sub-theme across all four sites was a need to re-evaluate the graduation requirements for students identified with receiving supports for ED. A participant mentioned that students with ED might be better served by learning more life skills or coping skills as opposed to Algebra II. Similarly, another participant supported this idea when noting, “That many of our elective courses that students are required to take are not as useful to students with ED, which are already struggling to pass their core classes and elective classes.” Likewise, another participant reported,

So, I wish there was a way that they could graduate by doing the core classes with some other creative aspect where they're getting, you know, on-the-job training or, you know, just a different modified type of electives to get them across the stage.

Currently, in the state of Missouri, students are required to earn three credits of math, four credits of English, three credits of history, Health, Government, PE, Fine Arts, Personal Finance, and seven credits of electives, for a total of 24 credits (www.dese.mo.gov). Presented in Table 2 are the different graduation requirements for each site.

Table 2

Graduation requirements by site

Site	Number of credits required	Difference from Missouri requirements
A	26	2 additional electives
B	28	.5 additional PE 4.5 additional electives
C	25	1 additional elective
D	24	No difference

And as another participant added:

I don't feel like sometimes all those credits that they necessarily have to have, or they're mandated to have for graduation are appropriate and or are really benefit them for what they're going to need to be able to survive, right accessible, outside of, you know, high school graduation, but I also feel like if those are the things we have to do. What can we then put in place to help them be successful in those classes because I feel like we're also lacking that piece, just being able to manage, seven hours a day, being able to manage, homework, getting stuff turned in, you know, social skills and class how to be engaged. All of those skills to be taught to them; they don't come with them and we just expect them to know all of those.

Other changes that were noted by individual participants, but were not mentioned often were alternative discipline practices for students identified as ED, more job certification opportunities for students, more community involvement, more mainstreaming for students with their regular educated peers, and earlier intervention. Presented in Table 7 are the desired changes by the school.

Supplemental Programs to Assist Students

Another major theme that emerged was the use of outside agencies to assist students with ED. While these services are not limited to just students with ED, they are widely used specifically for this group to assist with either graduation or assisting students to be college/career ready.

First, each site offers some sort of credit recovery and alternative high school setting where students who are credit-deficient due to not passing enough classes to graduate can attend. The two sites (A and D) that are from districts with multiple high schools were able to offer an

alternative high school that functions as a separate building for students to earn more credits per year than they would in a traditional high school setting. These alternative settings have smaller class sizes and teachers facilitating in-person learning. Schools A and D also offered online curriculum for credit recovery in their traditional high school settings. High school B's alternative setting for credit deficiency was at an alternate location, but learning is from an online platform only. While a teacher is supporting the students, they only work on credit recovery by taking on online classes. Students with higher needs of supports for ED would remain at their home high school location to receive services needed and the traditional high school setting would try to make accommodations for credit recovery. High school C, while it offered an alternative setting, this location was primarily for students with the most extreme need for behavioral services that needed to be in a more restrictive environment. Most of the credit recovery for students with ED at this site is provided through an online curriculum on the traditional campus.

Most frequently mentioned by the transition coordinator at each site and several other special education educators were the use of Vocational Rehabilitation. Vocational Rehabilitation is an employment and training service that can assist someone with a physical or mental impairment that might keep someone from being successfully employed (www.dese.mo.gov). Vocational Rehabilitation starts working with students in high school but once graduated, assists students with guidance and counseling, job-seeking skills and job placement, and vocational training. In certain cases, it can provide connections for financial assistance for post-secondary education and assist with living arrangements.

All four sites were also connected to some sort of mental health agency. While site D provided its counseling services to students identified with ED, sites B and C worked specifically

with Comprehensive Mental Health (CMH) and Site D worked with ReDiscover. Both CMH and ReDiscover provide mental health workers to provide counseling to students identified with ED. Important to note that three of the four sites mentioned providing counseling as service provided as a part of their IEP, however, when further prodded, one district stated that counseling is not written into IEPs. Highlighted in Table 8 are the supplemental programs by sites.

Training for Staff

In terms of college preparation, every single participant said that their college experience prepared them for the paperwork aspect and compliance of their job, but they all said that the only experience they received to assist students with behaviors was the experience in the classroom after they began their career of working with students. Twenty of the participants said that they might have had one or two classes that addressed behaviors, but the common response was that the learning process was through trial and error. The other two participants, who were, the behavioral “specialists”, had more specialized schooling because their degree programs focused on behavior. As one participant responded

I say experience has been the most on-the-job training. Of course, I have my masters and so that's been a great foundation but really it's just getting, you know, pushing up my sleeves and getting my hands dirty in the sense of just getting out there and being part of meetings and collaboration and current, you know the research of what's going on.

Another participant said she used the internet often to get new information. While another participant expressed that some of his training came from personal experience, mentorship, and wanting to do that for other students. His response:

I came from my house that low income. You know, I've come from domestic violence situations and things. You know, I tell [...] all the time, I kind of felt like a kid who, who only had like one roller skate and I was kind of just skating in this circle, and he gave me my other skate. And I think a lot of what he did for the emotional things that I felt that I had, you know, For me school was a release to get away from those things. And so, what he instilled in me. It was purely why I got an education, I if I could do that for a kid that somebody did that for me, and through the vehicle of history, the way he did it for me. Yeah, that's all I've ever wanted to do.

As noted in the literature, the suicide rate for ages 10-24 increased by 56% from 2007-2017, and for ages 10-14 the suicide rate tripled from 2007-2017 (www.cdc.gov, 2019). In response, all 4 schools and their districts have implemented Trauma-Informed Care professional development and training (TIC) to become Trauma-Sensitive Schools. In terms of districts' providing training to Special Education staff and regular education staff, all schools held a strong belief that the current Trauma-Informed Care training that they were undergoing was extremely valuable. The majority of participants noted that all staff needed training in behavior management in terms of preventative strategies, but more extensive training was needed regarding reactive strategies of what to do when a student exhibits behaviors in the classroom.

TIC identifies that all schools are seeing a rise in students that have been exposed to traumatic events such as violence, mental illness, homelessness, or substance abuse. Consequently, the response of the students to the trauma is often social, emotional, and academic difficulties that are affecting their ability to learn. The TIC training is based on research that shows that the brains of students that have experienced trauma diminish the student's ability to function on several levels. TIC training provides informative information about how trauma

changes the brain of these students, how it affects how students react to stimulus in the classroom, and how staff can assist students. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has issued its model for Trauma-Informed Schools (DESE, 2020).

Trauma-Informed Care is a movement that “infuses the science about trauma and its impacts into daily practice and program design” (The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools, 2020). This idea suggests that the student has experienced some sort of trauma that has altered how they can respond appropriately. As one participant stated about this training “I really think that it is has opened a lot of people's eyes, in regards to, you know, where maybe if they just thought this darn kid, you know like, it's really got them thinking that they're not just a bad kid you know that there's a, there's a, there's something behind, you know, the functioning of their brain.”

Trauma-Informed Care training not only explains *why* the behaviors are occurring but also *how* to address the behaviors. All participants, in some manner or another, shared that there is a need for educators to have more strategies to help them assist students exhibiting behaviors. As a participant, a regular education teacher stated the need for an

overall package from identification to how they, you know, how then a student takes that designation to then what are the strategies and things that as teachers we could be doing. Because I think if we knew what they were they're people that are capable of doing I think it's just a lack of knowledge.

The transition specialist from school D felt very strongly about the importance of TIC training. She stated that most of the time, students identified with ED self-sabotage. She included with the thought “because students [with identified with ED] look normal, sometimes

they [educators and community members] don't understand why they are having those behaviors.”

Trauma-Informed Care training, while it has been implemented at all four schools, has been implemented in different ways. Due to COVID, the ability for staff to gather has been limited. Sites B and C specifically mentioned that staff was self-facilitating training videos about TIC. Processing information learned with colleagues has been limited as noted by one participant:

I think the trauma-informed is good but the way that our district has presented it this year, it's kind of like, 'go in the group and watch the videos and in you're done' type thing and there's no 'you're supposed to be following up having group discussion', but there's no follow up from it. So, you never hear from the administrator 'Hey, what did you think about your trauma-informed? What strategies did you learn from that trauma-informed?' So, there's no follow-up from the PD, aside from like a three-question questionnaire, Sit, click, and submit.

Additionally, mentioned often at all four schools by eleven participants was the need for all staff to have professional development that involves more training about behavior management and strategies. As one participant stated a desire to have more skills because “you may not be the teacher that got them [the student] started that day, but you may be the one that's, you know, going to have to take care of the issue at that point.” And then went on to state, “things that are calming down, like what can we do to isolate them if they start, you know, be damaging towards the classroom or maybe, you know, towards the other students”.

Another training challenge is discipline. Three of the participants mentioned a need to be trained in how to decrease discipline referrals for students identified as needing assistance due to ED. As another participant noted, “If staff were better trained in the area of how to assist with deescalating behaviors, this also might reduce the number of referrals to the office or time spent out of the classroom due to disruptive behaviors.”

Data to Determine Student Success

All four sites put the most emphasis on the main type of data collection to determine student success on the IEP goals written. As a participant responded

Goals for students identified as ED might include being able to have fewer outbursts in the classroom, ability to advocate for themselves when they need assistance behaviorally, appropriate interactions with classmates, or other goals pertaining to the specific behaviors a student might be challenged with.

Also mentioned across all four sites were the use of observations of student behavior. While most schools relied on staff observations of behavior, two sites, A and B, mentioned specifically the importance of student self-observation.

Other data that was important to note concerning ED student progress that was mentioned were graduation rate, numbers of student participants with ED in the transition programs, decrease in discipline referrals, and standardized assessments.

Community Involvement

The topic of community involvement was discussed on a much smaller scale than any of the other themes previously mentioned, however, the researcher felt it was important to include and discuss. As mentioned earlier, a participant discussed the idea that students identified as ED

have no physical differences, resulting often in their behaviors not being understood. Because this participant is a transition specialist, she tries to educate business owners about how to help students with ED. Other participants specifically mentioned the need to have more opportunities for students with ED to be trained or earn a work certification while still in high school for credit. This would involve having more employers from the community willing to train students. As a participant stated

Maybe working with, even talking with the Department of Mental Health or Vocational Rehabilitation to talk about specific incidences or things they are experiencing out in the community so that we can start better addressing when they are with us because we are not thinking that far.

The data revealed that each school participates in transition fairs and/or employment fairs. These are opportunities typically provided by the schools that connect students to outside agencies and employers to practice skills such as interviewing and advocating for themselves. There has been a more recent move towards reverse job fairs where the student presents themselves and the employers move around the venue talking to students to find a good fit for their company.

The other side of community involvement mentioned were for entities such as counselors and legal counsel to offer services for free or a reduced rate through the school for families needing assistance. An example of this strategy was presented by School B who offers an evening just for this type of connection to be made with families and the community.

Conclusions

In regard to the research questions, using the information gathered from the literature review and information given by staff, the following conclusions were made.

Characteristics of high school programs should include opportunities for students to receive credit for work that assists them in being better prepared to self-advocate and maintain stability in their endeavors after school. So systemically, the state needs to allow for more creative ways for students to earn credits that are going to be more meaningful to them than to have to take high-level English or Math classes that may not serve them as well. Until changes can be made to credit requirements, districts need to look at the graduation credits they are requiring their students to meet above the state requirements to meet the student at their level of functioning. Additionally, schools need to have a better system to work with students proactively to retain the credit but to also recover credit without the classes stacking upon themselves for the student.

All educators have the goal of assisting students to graduate on-time, they are finding creative ways to issue a credit, working with regular education staff to provide accommodations and modifications to curriculum to assist students with earn credit, providing one-on-one help, and consistently seeking out opportunities for students to graduate with their cohort.

The perceived barriers for some districts are having enough resources, financially, to assist students with ED as they should. Providing counseling in a more in-depth manner to assist students to work with any of the causes of their SEB concerns and still have enough time to work on credits to graduate seems to be a large barrier. While all of the educators felt that students needed more intense counseling, the need to earn credits becomes at the forefront of the time spent for students at school.

Another perceived barrier is the lack of training that all staff in education has to best assist students identified as ED. As the shift in educational focus becomes training staff in TIC, more staff should be better equipped to assist students with SEB concerns. Research has studied

the importance of school-wide buy-in, consistent discipline approaches, individual plans, and familial involvement in ED programming contributing to the success of the inclusion of students with ED (Kourkoutas, Stavrou, & Plexousakis, 2018; Mintz, 2007; Cheney & Muscott, 1996) and TIC training seems to be an opportunity that parallels this research.

There seem to be several opportunities for mental health supports for students through social workers and outside agencies, however, the amount of time spent with these counselors seems to be lacking. Again, research has indicated that mental health support within the school is viewed as “educational enhancers” by meeting students at their present level of needs so that they can better spend their time in the classroom focusing on learning as opposed to outside stressors (Atkins, Hoagwood, Kutash, & Seidman, 2010).

Through TIC training, all education staff is gaining a better understanding of the student’s ability to learn based upon the functioning of their brain and levels of stress. Schools are learning how to create more safe environments for students to learn about themselves and if they should have any SEB issues, the adults in education are learning how to be better equipped to assist students to return to a safe space in their body to be able to learn. This new self-awareness that students are supported in across all of their classes will assist them to adapt to their environment and be in a space to learn. The need for TIC training needs to continue with plenty of opportunities for staff to collaborate about best practices.

Schools are still mainly utilizing IEP goals, behavioral plans, and graduation rates as their common assessments of effectiveness, however, it is not clear if they are using those to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, but rather the improvement of the student behavior for each individual. It would appear that as trauma-sensitive schools, more schools will be implementing the use of student self-evaluation tools to assist students. It appears that the ability to have time

and staff look at data to determining the effectiveness of a program might be at play. In light of the statistics of graduation rates, lack of employment sustainability, and lack of ability to live independently after leaving high school, districts would be served best by finding out this information to assist with determining the effectiveness of their programs, however, time and money would probably not be feasible for this type of data collection.

Implications

Whether the school district is a smaller school district or a larger district, the following are the recommendations suggested from the data gathered within this study. These recommendations should be for any student needed SEB assistance, not just students that qualify for services through an IEP.

Identification – Each district needs to have some type of system that identifies students that have social, emotional, or behavioral concerns that directly inhibit the student from academic success. This identification should not be limited to students who qualify for services through an IEP or a physician's diagnosis. Through this identification system, different tiers of support should be in place that all students who struggle have access through. Such an assessment would break down the student's need by behavioral support, social support, academic support, and emotional support. Under each of these areas of need, the districts should have in place opportunities for students to receive plans individualized to assist them towards graduating with their cohort and possessing skills that will allow them to maintain success at a post-secondary institution or employment. Types of interventions that need to be in place: access to therapy or counseling every week, access to group support to create a sense of community for students, and an understanding that they are not alone. Therapy should be based upon the need of identifying the trauma that is causing the behavior, how to address healing from the trauma, and how to self-

manage behaviors to function in society. Other interventions would alternative learning settings to assist with gaining credit the first time a student attempts a credited class to be proactive, as opposed to reactive credit recovery.

Staff training – All staff should be required to attend pre-school service trauma-informed care training that involves collaboration as a staff to create a list of strategies and common vocabulary that students are hearing consistently for their building. Regular education staff should be trained and learn to use accommodations and modifications as provided by the special education teachers. Additionally, special education teachers and schools should be prepared to learn to write behavioral goals that meet the needs of the students identified as needing SEB support.

Familial Support – For any student that is identified by the school as needing support, the family should be brought in (if possible), to be a part of the student’s educational plan, but to also address the needs of the family. Many times the trauma these students are experiencing is coming from home, therefore the school must become a safe place for them. If the school can provide assistance or resources to help the root of the issue at home, then hopefully, the student benefits as well. The familial support should not be limited to therapy, but also outside agencies that help with job skills training, employment assistance, legal help, and access to healthcare. There are some schools across the country that have started providing “whole” care to families of students that attend their school district. Many times, these extra agencies will work with schools free-of-charge as a part of grants or other federal or state funding. The United States Department of Education (2018) calls this their Full-Service Community Schools Program that supports provides funding for the services mentioned above.

Community Involvement – When a district decides to create a program to assist students to graduate and be college/career ready post-high school and it is successful, the community

benefits by having fewer people unemployed and needing supplemental help. As mentioned earlier, the unemployment rate of the mentally ill is 80%, and that 70% of students in centers have some sort of mental illness or condition (NAMI, 2012). If the community members, business owners, and local government become involved with training and placing students, a greater safety net for these students will be created. The expectation with more community involvement is that districts can create an increased awareness for ED and mental illness and provided strategies in how to help assist students during their work experiences to maintain the ability to stay employed.

Evaluation tools to evaluate success – In order to understand if the program the school has put in place, there should be multiple types of evaluation tools depending upon the services and supports provided to the student.

Suggestions for Future Research

A few research paths come to mind when considering the need for more information on this topic. First, research is needed to investigate incorporating more intense therapy for students in the school setting. Another area for further inquiry is the need for alternative graduation requirements for students in an alternative setting. While the practitioners interviewed for this study all felt that these areas were of great need in their educational setting, it would be good to back this feeling up with data.

Another area for further investigation is examining if students need to be placed in experiential environments and internships while still in high schools. By doing so the engagement of students might increase and result in lower dropout rates if students are vested in their “education” to be employable. Last, more information is needed concerning the impact of

schools implementing Trauma-Informed Care training in their schools, and that impact on behavior, graduation rates, and employment sustainability.

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SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

My career in education at every turn in the road has not been planned. Every opportunity has presented itself without indepth forethought and I decided to open every door of which opportunity knocked. While in school at Rockhurst University for my initial degree in Psychology, with an intent to apply to their Occupational Therapy program, I found myself tutoring many of my fellow students. Several of them had mentioned that my ability to explain content came naturally to me. At some point, I decided not to apply for the OT program and my direction became to become certified to teach. During that time, a cohort was gathering to work towards a Master's in Administration, 7-12. I was not interested, but the opportunity presented itself to further my education. Upon finishing my Master's and 7 months pregnant, a job opened in the building I was working in and one of the assistant principals at the time encouraged me to apply for some experience in interviews and I got the job. During that time, I knew I needed to begin my advanced degree to keep practicing administration and my mentor suggested I go for my doctorate, that the opportunities that might present themselves would be greater than if I had my Specialist. So I began to research and decided upon the University of Missouri's program based upon the recommendation of Dr. Jason Morton. During the time of my application, I was offered the job of the Director of Secondary Education without applying. Life circumstances created a challenging environment for me and I had to turn down my spot offered for the cohort before my own. Round two of an offer to attend MU presented itself and I began my journey.

I had two environments provided for my learning experience: my cohort through the University of Central Missouri – Lee's Summit and my larger cohort during the summer portion on the MU campus for two years.

My experience with my larger cohort during the summers was amazing. The freedom of going back in time and the only care I had during that time was to just show up and learn. The

content of these summers provided me insight as a leader about how to look at leadership styles, organizational analysis, research, program evaluation, data analysis, and everything in between that impacts PreK-post-secondary education. The assignments given, the colleagues I had to work with, and the different methods of teaching styles and expectations wrapped into one experience pushed me to think on a level that I never knew I could. It allowed me to express and have my opinions respected by educational professionals from all over the state, to write at a level that I sometimes do not even recognize as my work, and genuinely enjoy the experience of learning and collaboration that helped me excel as a leader. I never was recognized as a “smart” kid and in this environment, I felt like I was able to be empowered by the conversations I was having and the response and respect of these professionals. The networking that this experience provided is invaluable. I now know that if I have any questions or need help in any area, I now have a large network of professionals that I can reach out to for help.

My experience with my smaller cohort with Dr. Martin allowed for all of the summer course information to be applied and discussed in a deeper and more intimate level of understanding. Dr. Martin constantly was challenging how we saw things in one light to teach us to take off any blinders to be open to multiple understandings and views and when we got there, she would push us even harder. But always in a manner with respect and understanding that we were going to become better leaders in education. My greatest fear of attending this program was my lack of ability to write. I was terrified to show what I felt was one of my biggest weaknesses in my profession. After sharing with her my concern, she was encouraging at every opportunity to share with me that I was making progress and boosting my confidence. The best part about this small cohort was that we went through so many difficulties along the way that we became family. This is a group that I know I can fail with, learn with, and feel supported, and

never worry about being judged. We learned how to support each other in our teamwork by knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses. This experience has assisted me in being better support for my administrative team at work.

The journey of the dissertation became an even more powerful learning experience. While I have gathered data and analyzed it through my various positions in public schools, I never imagined the impact the data gathering within my dissertation would have on me as an educator. The focus of my dissertation on programs for ED students was a passion of mine. I have always had a soft spot in my heart for those students who are often looked over in schools. By gathering data from twenty-two passionate educators, with a like-minded focus on these students, I gain a wealth of knowledge on how to enhance our ED program at my school. While the process of the dissertation seems overwhelming at times, I knew that the benefits would outweigh the challenges, and it has, while also increasing my skills as a researcher.

I am a single parent that works full-time and has very few people in my family to assist due to age. My family would ask here and there about how my program was going, but I am not sure they fully understand the undertaking this has been. My local Lee's Summit cohort and Dr. Martin became my parent and siblings in this journey and I would have never finished if I did not have them as my team. This experience has been the educational highlight of my career and it will serve me well.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board University of Missouri-Columbia

FWA Number: 00002876

IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall

Columbia, MO 65211

573-882-3181

irb@missouri.edu

February 22, 2021

Principal Investigator: Shelley Brown (MU-Student)

Department: Educational Leadership-EDD

Your IRB Application to project entitled An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students with Emotional Disorders was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2045243
IRB Review Number	297046
Initial Application Approval Date	February 22, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	February 22, 2022
Level of Review	Expedited
Application Status	Approved
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Expedited Categories	45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Type of Consent	Written Consent
HIPAA Category	No HIPAA
Approved Documents	IRB Approved Consent Document #2 for edits recruitment_emails.docx interview_questions.docx

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. COVID-19 Specific Information

Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php

In addition, any restarting of in-person research activities must comply with the policies and guiding principles provided at research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php, including appropriate approvals for return to work authorization for individuals as well as human subject research projects.

- No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.

3. All unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of becoming aware of the problem. Unanticipated problems are defined as events that are unexpected, related or possibly related to the research, and suggests the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or recognized. If the unanticipated problem was a death, this is reportable to the IRB within 24 hours on the Death Report.
4. On-site deaths that are not unanticipated problems must be reported within 5 days of awareness on the Death Report, unless the study is such that you have no way of knowing a death has occurred, or an individual dies more than 30 days after s/he has stopped or completed all study procedures/interventions and required follow-up.
5. All deviations (non-compliance) must be reported to the IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of becoming aware of the deviation.
6. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk. All changes must be submitted on the Amendment Form.
7. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
8. The project-generated annual report must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the annual report.
9. Securely maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date or longer depending on the sponsor's record keeping requirements.
10. Utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Gatekeeper Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation

I, _____, grant permission for administrators and educators within our district's high school to be contacted to participate in the study, *An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students with Emotional Disorders* conducted by Shelley Brown, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect faculty choosing to participate:

- All participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point before the culmination of the study.
- All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
- All identities will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur with each director of special education, process coordinator, and selected special education teachers recommended by the district special education coordinator either in-person or via videoconference, lasting approximately one hour in length. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and coded to determine common themes across special education programs for students with emotional disorders.
- The information gathered should be beneficial to special education programs and further attempt to provide the necessary research for schools to use information as deemed helpful.
- There is no cost to the district to be a part of this study and may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for educators in your school district to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for Program Participation Form*, please return it to Shelley Brown as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Shelley Brown via email at sbrown4@bssd.net or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at bmartin@ucm.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is

a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for administrators and educators in my program to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

Contact Information:

Phone _____ (circle one) WORK HOME CELL

Please return to: Shelley Brown, 4108 SE Kyle Phillip Ct. Blue Springs, Mo 64014
Cell Phone: 816-315-2006 Email: sbrown4@bssd.net

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

NAME(S) OF RESEARCHER(S): SHELLEY BROWN

PROJECT IRB #: 2045243 MU

STUDY TITLE: An Examination of High School Programs to

Assist Students with Emotional Disorders

This research study is about identifying what implemented programs have been successfully in 9-12 high schools that are designed primarily to focus on students identified with emotional disorders. We are doing this study to to examine how these identified programs are making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

We invite you to take part in this research study, because you currently participate in a program that services students with emotional disorders. This consent form tells you why we are doing the study, and what will happen if you join the study.

Please take as much time as you need to read this consent form. You can discuss it with your family, friends, or anyone you choose. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask us to explain. Then you can decide if you want to take part in the study or not.

Research studies help us to answer questions that may improve our understanding of human behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and interactions. Taking part in a research study is voluntary. You are free to say yes or no. We will only include you in this study if you give us your permission first by signing this consent form.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to examine how these identified programs for students with emotional disorders are making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?

About 24 people will take part in this study. This study includes 4 schools and from each school, the research intends to include the Director of Special Education, the Process Coordinator, the Transition specialist, two special education teachers, and one regular education teacher that supports students with emotional disorder.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you agree, you will come to an online interview between myself and you and do the following:

1. *Answer approximately 17 questions that all participants will be asked and recorded.*
2. *Give any other volunteered information that you feel would be helpful to this study.*
3. *While your name is known by myself and whomever recommended your for this study, your name will not be shared in the final dissertation to be written.*

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

You will be in the study for a total of 1 hours total.

CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

Yes, you can stop being in the study at any time without giving a reason. Just tell the researcher or study staff right away if you wish to stop taking part.

Also, the researcher may decide to take you off this study at any time, even if you want to stay in the study. The researcher will tell you the reason why you need to stop being in the study. These reasons may be:

You are not involved with assisting students with emotional disorders in a school setting.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. However, the information we learn from you during this study may help us better understand/learn more about how to better assist students with emotional disorders persist to graduation and be best prepared for employment sustainability.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS FROM BEING IN THIS STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks by participating in this study. Participants may skip any question they do not want to answer and may stop the interview at any time.

WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DON'T TAKE PART?

Instead of being in this study, your choices may include:

You are welcome to notify the researcher that you would like to not take part.

WILL INFORMATION ABOUT ME BE KEPT PRIVATE?

The information we collect about you will be stored in the researcher's electronic/computer or paper files. Computer files are protected with a password and the computer is in a locked office that only study team members can open. Paper files are kept in a locked drawer in a locked office that only study team members can open.

We will give your records a code number and they will not contain your name or other information that could identify you. The code number that connects your name to your information will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information that may identify you may not be given to anyone who is not working on this study without your written consent, or if required by law.

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information from this study is kept private, but we cannot guarantee total privacy. We may give out your personal information if the law requires it. If we publish the results of this study or present them at scientific meetings, we will not use your name or other personal information.

The information we collect from you for this study will not be used or shared with other investigators for future research studies. This applies even if we remove all information that could identify you from your information.

You must permit us to use the audio recordings we take of you during the study. You will be able to listen to them before you give your permission for us to use them.

WILL I BE PAID FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study but you will be entered into a drawing along with 24 other participants, to possibly receive one of 4- \$50 Amazon gift cards.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A STUDY PARTICIPANT?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you have the right to change your mind and drop out of the study at any time. Whatever your decision, there will be no penalty to you in any way.

We will tell you about any new information discovered during this study that might affect your health, welfare, or change your mind about taking part.

WHO CAN I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

If you have more questions about this study at any time, you can call Shelley Brown at 816-315-2006.

You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you:

- Have any questions about your rights as a study participant;
- Want to report any problems or complaints; or
- Feel under any pressure to take part or stay in this study.
- The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights of participants are protected. Their phone number is 573- 882-3181.

If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 888-280-5002 (a free call), or emailing MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu. You may also contact Dr. Barbara Martin, MU Advisor to this project, at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

We will give you a copy of this consent form. Please keep it where you can find it easily. It will help you to remember what we discussed today.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Consent to Participate in Research

By signing my name below, I confirm the following:

- I have read/had read to me this entire consent form.
- All of my questions were answered to my satisfaction.
- The study's purpose, procedures/activities, potential risks and possible benefits were explained to me.
- I voluntarily agree to take part in this research study. I have been told that I can stop at any time.

Subject's Signature	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)*	Date

**A witness is required when a participant is competent to provide consent but is blind, or cannot read or write.*

Appendix D

Employee Interview Protocol

Participant:	
Position:	
Date/Time:	

Questions	Research Questions Addressed:
Introduction: 2 minutes	
<p>[Researcher]: Good (morning, afternoon, evening). Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Shelley Brown. Do you mind if I record this interview using Voice Recorder on my phone?</p> <p>I am a doctoral student in the University of Missouri's Cooperative EdD program working with the University of Central Missouri. The purpose of this study is to identify important aspects of Special Education services assisting students identified with Emotional Disorders in Missouri in their persistence to graduate and be college/career ready post-high school. This information will allow me to make recommendations of key areas that all programs should offer to best support students with ED to be most successful after high school. To do this, I will be asking you some questions. If at any time, you would like to expand on an idea to talk more about it or go back to the previous discussion that you have more information you would like to share, please do so. If you would like to take a break, please let me know. My goal is for this to be a comfortable conversation about the programs and services you offer. Do you have any questions for me at this point?</p>	
Opening Questions: 4 minutes	
1. What is your current role in the district?	Learn about participant
2. How long have you worked in Special Education?	Learn about participant
3. How often do you work with students who meet eligibility as Emotionally Disturbed?	Learn about participant
Key Questions: 25-30 minutes	
4. Do you have programs, services, or supports specially designed to address significant social, emotional, behavioral concerns?	Q1
5. If yes, how is does it differ from the social, emotional, behavioral, programs, services, and supports available for students who are identified in other categories, such as Learning Disabilities, Visually Impaired, etc. If no, what services and supports would you recommend for students with significant social, emotional behavioral concerns?	Q1

6. How is your special education department in the building organized to meet the needs of the various students in your building?	Q3
7. Who designed the program? District leaders? Teachers? Teams?	Q3
8. What programs, services, and supports are available to students with an emotional disturbance that assist students with either graduating with their cohort or graduating after their cohort?	Q1, Q2, Q6
9. What are the most helpful aspects of special education in your building that help assist students with ED to be successful after high school?	Q2, Q3
10. What parts of your special education offerings are you asked to implement that you do not feel are useful to your students in their preparation to graduate and maintain stability after high school?	Q4
11. What parts of your special education supports are you asked to implement that you feel are beneficial to your students in their preparation to graduate and maintain stability after high school?	Q4
12. What aspects of your special education offerings/supports do you feel are missing?	Q4
13. How do you feel that your training, whether through college or your employer has benefited you and how?	Q5
14. What additional training do you feel would be helpful for you to assist your students with ED progress towards graduation and post-graduation employment?	Q5
15. What additional training do you feel would be beneficial for regular education staff to help assist students with ED progress towards graduation and post-graduation employment??	Q5
16. How are the supports for social, emotional, behavioral student success measured within your school? Probe: What are the evaluation tools used to measure success?	Q6
Ending Question	
17. Is there any information about your supports for identified as needing socially, emotionally, behaviorally that you feel is important for me to know for this study?	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 Q5 Q6
Closing: 1 minute	
Those are all of the questions that I have for you at this time. Thank you for your information to help with this study. I appreciate your time.	

APPENDIX E

SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL/EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PROTOCOL UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Project Title: An Examination of High School Programs to Assist Students with Emotional Disorders

IRB Number: **2045243 MU**

Version Number: 1

Version Date: 2/11/2021

Principal Investigator: Shelley Brown

Funding Source: N/A

I. Research Objectives/Background

1. Describe the purpose, specific aims, or objectives. State the hypothesis to be tested or the research questions that will guide the study.

The overarching focus of this study is to identify what implemented programs have been successfully in 9-12 high schools that are designed primarily to focus on students identified with emotional disorders. The goal is to understand if the programs are decreasing this graduation gap and examine what if any barriers exist concerning graduation and post-graduation experiences. Wagner and Newman (2012) noted while some special education programs are seeing a gradual decrease in this educational gap needed is further inquiry. Specifically, a secondary focus of the study is to examine how these identified programs are making a difference for the student's persistence to graduate, additionally if, and how these programs are providing support towards employment sustainability.

Research Questions

This study has the potential to identify a framework for which school districts could use to build a program within their special education departments that would provide proven techniques and avoid barriers found by other schools. Therefore, the researcher would like to answer these questions concerning the study:

7. What are the characteristics of high school programs that assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance to attain graduation within 4 years?
8. How are Emotional Disturbance programs narrowing the graduation gap percentage between those diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance and regular education students?
9. What are the perceived barriers to the implementation of a program to assist students identified with Emotional Disturbance?
10. What mental health supports are provided within Emotional Disturbance programs that assist students?
11. What do the stakeholders perceive are the factors affecting a student identified as Emotional Disturbance and facilitates change in behavior through the lens of Social

Cognitive Theory (the student's need to learn, the environment provided by the school, and the student's ability to adapt to the school environment)?

12. What evaluation tools are being used within school districts to measure the effectiveness of programs for students with ED?

2. Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the proposed research based on the existing literature and how it will add to existing knowledge.

Dismal statistics of students with emotional disorders (Barrat et al., 2014) and their possible futures concerning employment instability, lack of skills for successful independent living, and increased potential for incarceration (Wagner & Newman, 2012) is a significant concern for students identified with ED. Furthermore, due to the increasing numbers of students with mental illness (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2019), the number of students identified as ED is likely to increase. Likewise, with data revealing there is a significant gap between the graduation rates of regular education students and students diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance (NCES, 2016), more supports need to be in place to decrease this gap.

Additionally, there appears to be little research identifying successful programs or comparisons of programs for how to increase the graduation rate of this student population identified as ED. Furthermore, there is a need to identify effective characteristics of ED programs used in schools, and if they assist students with being able to obtain and consistently hold a job over time. In a landmark inquiry, Ju and Zhang (2010) identified that as the number of students diagnosed (or undiagnosed) in these areas increases, the importance of finding programs becomes more critical. Other research (Swank & Huber, 2013; Wagner, 1995; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992; Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008) has found that programs need to allow students to complete school and enter the workforce with skills that will continue to support their success such as finding and maintaining jobs, independent living, and positive self-care. Since the ED student is highly susceptible to these challenges, it becomes important to study ED programs in high school settings, and investigate how implemented these supports are in different high school contexts.

II. Recruitment Process

1. Describe the recruitment process.

The researcher will use network sampling as a part of purposeful sampling of participants. After permission is sought and received from the gatekeeper for each district, in this case the Director of Special Services. From this person, the Director can identify the process coordinator, the transition specialists and three teachers that work with students with Emotional Disorders. The researcher will then reach out to participants individually to request participation initially though email and follow up via teleconferencing if needed to answer any questions about the study.

2. Describe how and where recruitment will take place.

All recruitment will take place through the Director of Special Services and through contact by the researcher.

III. Consent Process

1. Describe the consent process; including who will be asked to consent and what type of consent will be obtained from each subject population, if there is more than one. Each participant will receive an email with a written consent form to be signed and returned to the researcher.

IV. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

1. List all inclusion and exclusion criteria.
Inclusion is that the participant be the Director of Special Services, process coordinator, transition specialist, special education teacher that assists students with emotional disorders, regular education teacher that assists students with emotional disorders. Exclusions would be that the staff member does not interact with students identified as having emotional disorders.
2. List any restrictions on participation and appropriate screening procedures to ensure that the restrictions are maintained.
If the staff member does not work with students identified as having emotional disorders, then they will be dismissed from the study.

V. Number of Subjects

1. Include the anticipated enrollment number in this study. Include a break-down in numbers if there is more than one subject population.
About 24 people will take part in this study. This study includes 4 schools and from each school, the research intends to include the Director of Special Education, the Process Coordinator, the Transition specialist, two special education teachers, and one regular education teacher that supports students with emotional disorder.
2. Include the statistical analysis or other justification for the number of subjects enrolled. The researcher believes that this should allow for a holistic account that will provide a well-rounded picture to emerge.

VI. Study Procedures/Study Design

1. Include a detailed description of the procedures and/or design to be followed (what will subjects be asked to do), and describe each intervention and/or interaction with the subjects and/or their data.
An initial email will be sent by the researcher to make contact and send the written consent. If they would like a follow up call to answer questions, the researcher will schedule. If the participant agrees, they will come to an online interview between myself and the participant via video conferencing and do the following: Answer

approximately 17 questions that all participants will be asked and recorded, give any other volunteered information that they feel would be helpful to this study, and know that while their name is known by myself and whomever recommended them for this study, their name will not be shared in the final dissertation to be written.

2. Describe the time commitment involved.
1 hour
3. Include whether the procedure/item listed is research-only (occurring only because they are a participant in the research) or routine care/activity (it would occur regardless of the research and you are requesting to collect that data to include in your data analysis).
Research-only
4. A table of events may be helpful in this section.
 - A. Contact Director of Special Services to explain study and collect names of potential participants.
 - B. Contact participants.
 - C. Interview participants.

VII. Potential Risks

1. Describe any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects and the steps to minimize risks.
There are no foreseeable risks by participating in this study. Participants may skip any question they do not want to answer and may stop the interview at any time.
2. Include the plan for reporting unanticipated problems or deviations to the IRB. This plan must include a five-day reporting requirement to the IRB once becoming aware of an event.

Researcher will contact the IRB within the 5 day requirement to notify them of any discrepancies.

VIII. Anticipated Benefits

1. Describe both direct and indirect benefits for either the individual or society.
There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. However, the information we learn from you during this study may help us better understand/learn more about how to better assist students with emotional disorders persist to graduation and be best prepared for employment sustainability.

IX. Compensation

1. Describe the amount, method, and timing of disbursement. This includes checks, cash, gifts, extra/course credit, etc.
Participants may chose to be entered into a drawing for one of four \$50 Amazon Gift cards.

X. Data Safety Monitoring Plan

Describe the plan to monitor the data, if necessary. A plan is required for treatment and/or intervention studies, sensitive data are being collected, or there is a possibility for subjects to experience adverse events, etc.

1. The plan should include when something needs to be reported
2. The frequency of the monitoring, such as points in time or after a specific number of participants are enrolled
3. Who will conduct the monitoring, such as a data board, medical monitor, investigator, independent physician; the specific data to be monitored
4. Procedures for analysis and interpretation of the data
5. Actions to be taken upon specific events or end points (early stopping rules)
6. Procedures for communication from the data monitor to this site.

The plan for the data is to report within the 5 day requirement to the IRB office if any type of behavior is reported that would be reportable to DFS or potentially harmful. The principle investigator will monitor all data collected, and the advisor. All data or information collected from the partipants for the interview will be recorded.

Transcriptions will be made by Otter.ie. Principle investigator will code all information to determine if patterns exist that are relevant to the study. If a participant chooses to stop the interview early, the principle investigator will ask if everything is ok with the participant and find out if the information already collected can be used or needs to be discarded. Participant can still choose to be a part of the drawing and there is not “penalty” for stopping early.

XI. Multiple Sites

1. Specify who is the lead site and describe the roles of each site in the study. Principle investigator is the only person conducting the interviews at each site and anazyling the data.
2. Indicate whether all required approvals are already in place or will be in place at each site prior to project implementation. If the study will utilize a reliance agreement or a single IRB, please describe which institution(s) will be relying on another IRB for review, and which institution will be responsible for the IRB oversight of the relying IRB(s).
Principle investigator is currently seeking permission from gatekeeper at each school to conduct the study at their site.
3. Describe the plan that is in place to manage information obtained from multiple sites that may be relevant to the protection of human subjects such as reporting unanticipated problems, protocol modifications, and interim results.

Any unanticipated problems will be reported to the IRB office within the 5 day requirement.

XII. References

Please see reference list uploaded to IRB application.

VITA

Shelley Brown currently resides in Blue Springs, Missouri. She is the daughter of Thomas and Sally Payne of Fairway, Kansas. She graduated from Lee's Summit High School in 1993. Shelley graduated in 1998 from Rockhurst University with a bachelors degree in Psychology and continued her education through Rockhurst to receive her certification to teach Mathematics, grades 9-12. She went on to earn her masters degree in Educational Leadership through William Woods University and hopes to complete her doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri in 2021.

Shelley's career in education spans 20 years in urban, rural, and suburban areas; 11 years in the mathematics classroom with experience from grades 7-12, 8 years as an assistant principal, grades 9-12, and two years as a director of secondary education. She has taught 7-12 mathematics in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, 6-8 mathematics in Raytown, Missouri, 9-12 mathematics in Fort Osage, Missouri. She has taught and moved into two different administrative roles through the Blue Springs School District since 2008. During these years, she has led several students, teacher, community, and leadership groups