

ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities (SWD), compared to their non-disabled peers, are at a higher risk for high school dropout and academic failure following the middle to high school transition. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' understanding of the elements associated with the middle to high school experience for SWD. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this study explored the following research question: How do teachers make sense of their students' ecological transitions, inclusive pedagogy, and stakeholder involvement and its impact on the social emotional and academic development of students with disabilities transitioning from middle to high school? Using case study methodology, interviews were conducted with five Boston special education teachers who had experience in working with ninth grade SWD. The data analysis was conducted in three phases: (1) categorical aggregation with key terms, (2) direct interpretation of participants' experiences, and (3) categorical aggregation of key words in context. Research findings revealed four key themes that provided more insight on the middle to high school transition for SWD: the diverse learners, bridging the gap, educational stakeholder collaboration, and caregiver involvement. The findings also revealed a general understanding on meeting the needs of SWD and suggested participants' limited knowledge on students' ecological systems and how it impacted the academic and social emotional development of adolescent SWD. Future research in special education and the middle to high school transition must consider how the implementation of inclusive practices in school visions and professional practice through stakeholder collaboration can foster a community of continuity and support for SWD during this critical period of transition.

Keywords: middle to high school transition, special education, ecological systems theory, inclusive practices, stakeholder involvement

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