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Transitional Challenges for Students with Disabilities During a Period of Systemic Imbalance

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Abstract

The present study explored how student support service administrators responded to the observed transitional challenges of students with disabilities during a period of systemic imbalance. Administrators at four community colleges in Tennessee, responsible for the coordination of student disability services, participated in a multi-site case study. Analysis revealed students with disabilities had unrealized expectations of postsecondary education, sought the same individualized attention experienced in secondary school, and misunderstood administrative processes, especially those associated with securing accommodations, upon entering college. Although the transitional challenges were not unique, increased enrollments and an inadequate infrastructure added difficulty to administrators' ability to respond. Administrators sought opportunities for collaborative inclusion with stakeholders, internally and externally, to resolve the observed transitional challenges. Investigators suggest administrators initiate early transitional planning with students who complete a Promise scholarship application during their senior year of high school, utilize cross-trained temporary personnel during peak periods of inquiries, and project accommodation needs earlier to secure adequate resources and help students remain scholarship eligible.

Keywords: Tennessee Promise, organizational change, student disability services, community college

The transition from high school to postsecondary education can be problematic for students with disabilities (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Madaus, 2005; Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002). Federal legislation governing how students with disabilities (SWD) are supported in high school is fundamentally different from legislation governing how students with disabilities are supported in postsecondary education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) prescriptively mandates that students with disabilities in K-12 institutions be identified, evaluated, and provided services and accommodations as part of their right to a free and appropriate public education (Frieden, 2004). The burden of compliance is placed on school administration. A detailed Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed, in compliance with IDEA, to guide the services and support the student in order to guarantee the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision is met. The FAPE provision is designed to meet the unique education needs of the student with disabilities as adequately as the needs of students without disabilities. IDEA mandates that students who have IEPs be provided a Summary of Performance (SOP), as they exit secondary education

According to IDEA Section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII), students "no later than age 16" must identify whether postsecondary education is a transition goal beyond high school. The identified transition goal and necessary support are reflected in detail on the IEP. Once SWD leave high school, legislation governing their accommodations in postsecondary education reflects provisions associated with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 and ADAAA mandate reasonable accommodations be provided to individuals with disabilities enrolled at postsecondary education institutions, but neither are prescriptive about identifying, evaluating, and accommodating the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, much of the burden placed on administrators in the K-12 education environment is transferred to students with disabilities, once they elect to pursue a postsecondary education credential.

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Students at postsecondary education institutions must self-identify to a representative of the institution as having a disability, provide verification of the disability, and self-advocate to receive services and accommodations (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Foley, 2006; Gil, 2007; Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Despite transition planning before leaving high school, students, parents, and special education teachers are less familiar with provisional distinctions between IDEA and ADAAA and Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). As a result, students with disabilities are not adequately prepared for the transition to postsecondary education, specifically one for which they assume a new role in securing support services (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2010; Baer, Daviso III, McMahan, Queen, & Flexer, 2011; Landmark & Zhang, 2013; Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Students are hesitant to self-identify as having a disability, unable to articulate how the disability affects them in an educational setting, and unprepared to self-advocate for specific, reasonable accommodations after leaving high school (Cameto, Knokey, & Sanford, 2011; Newman, Wagner, , Cameto, Knokey,, & Shaver, 2010). Students receive fewer accommodations and services as a result.

The Association for Higher Education and Disability (2012) developed professional standards and performance indicators to assist postsecondary education institutions, specifically the Office for Students with Disabilities, with supporting the transitional challenges of SWD. The professional standards and performance indicators guide disability resource offices in ensuring SWD receive seamless access to the services, programs, and activities at postsecondary education institutions.

Enrollment Patterns

Students with disabilities comprised 11.1% of undergraduates in the 2011 - 2012 academic year (United States Department of Education, 2015). This is up from 10.9% in 2007-2008. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 60% of young adults with disabilities reported enrolling in a postsecondary education institution within eight years after leaving high school (Newman et al,, 2011). Community colleges were the preferred institutional type for SWD, representing 44% of those enrolled. Another 32% of SWD attended a vocational, business, or technical school during the same time frame.

Approximately 28% of postsecondary students, considered by a secondary school to have a disability, disclosed their disability to the Office for Students with Disabilities (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2011). The underutilization of disability-related assistance was consistent across the postsecondary institutional types: 25% received assistance at a community college; 11% received assistance at a vocational, business, or technical school; and 24% received assistance at a four-year college or university (Newman et al., 2011). Ironically, SWD identified expense of postsecondary education as the primary reason for early departure, not lack of disability-related assistance.

Tennessee Promise

In 2014, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam and the state legislature approved a last-dollar scholarship and mentor program known as Tennessee Promise. Under Tennessee Promise, graduates of Tennessee's high schools could enroll, tuition free, in associate degree programs across the state starting Fall 2015 (Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation [TSAC], 2016). The signature legislation bolstered a broader statewide education initiative to award a greater percentage of residents with a postsecondary education credential, by curbing the financial burden of tuition. Haslam understood in order to increase the number of residents with a postsecondary education credential, participants needed a reprieve from the financial burden and open dialogue with a trained mentor. In addition to Tennessee Promise, five other states have enacted similar statewide legislation offering tuition subsidies to all high school graduates: Missouri, Nevada, New York, Oregon, and Rhode Island (Mulhere, 2017).

Students can apply the Tennessee Promise scholarship to one of 13 community colleges, 27 colleges of applied technology, or, in some cases, a four-year college or university that offers associate degree programs (TSAC, 2016). As a last-dollar scholarship, qualifying students first apply their financial aid, such as Pell Grant and HOPE Scholarship, a lottery-funded, merit-based scholarship program in Tennessee, before Tennessee Promise covers the remaining balance of their tuition (Semuels, 2015). To receive the scholarship, high school seniors must apply to the Tennessee Promise program, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), attend two mandatory meetings at a participating institution, apply and register for 12 credit hours or more at a participating institution, and complete eight hours of community service prior to the fall term immediately following their graduation from high school. Deadlines are associated with all eligibility criteria. To remain eligible for the Promise scholarship beyond the first semester, students must meet with an assigned mentor, attend mandatory Promise meetings, complete eight hours of community ser-

vice, maintain continuous, full-time enrollment status, and maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester enrolled at a participating institution.

In fall 2015, over 16,291 high school graduates took advantage of the new Tennessee Promise program, enrolling in community colleges and technology centers across the state (Tamburin, 2016a). Enrollment of first-time, full-time freshmen increased 24.7% at community colleges and 20% at technology centers (Tennessee Higher Education Commission [THEC], 2016). The number of high school graduates utilizing Promise increased in fall 2016 to 16,790 (THEC, 2017). The number of Promise scholarship recipients with a documented disability was not released to the public. Financial data does show the state has spent $25.3 million funding Promise since its implementation, with students receiving an average award of $1,090.

The level of student participation during the first two years of Promise invited systemic imbalance throughout postsecondary education in the state of Tennessee. Substantial increases in student enrollment, resulting from Promise, brought administrative challenges associated with infrastructure, personnel, processes, and communication (Tamburin, 2016b). The large-scale, unprecedented change to the entire statewide postsecondary education system has administrators of all institutional types searching for coherence. The actualized impact of the legislation has forced leaders at applied technology centers and community colleges to react quickly.

Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000) likened organizations, such as postsecondary education institutions, to complex systems. Complex systems are less responsive to changes occurring around it while existing in a state of equilibrium. However, chaos galvanizes a living system and evokes experimentation in an effort to find balance. Components of a living system reorganize and new processes emerge. Fullan (2001) recognized that disturbing the system is how effective leaders achieve desired outcomes, even if a clear solution is not evident. The challenge is to disturb the system in a way to still get the desired outcome.

Perna and Finney's (2014) research on college Promise programs acknowledged that in order for students to be successful in college, they need to have the required academic preparation, financial resources, and knowledge of support services. They found support for students depends on the resources and opportunities available at the respective institution for which the student is enrolled. However, variations in the resources available to students create structural differences in college opportunities and outcomes

(Perna, 2016). Little research exists on how best to implement Promise programs with pre-existing support services.

The present study explores how student support service administrators responded to observed transitional challenges of students with disabilities as a result of Tennessee Promise. The transitional challenges referenced are those experienced when a student matriculates from one educational setting to the next. The purpose of Tennessee Promise is to equip residents with a postsecondary education credential, especially individuals enduring financial hardship and prone to attrition. Further understanding of how institutions respond to the transitional challenges experienced by students with disabilities offers guidance for other administrators entering a period of systemic imbalance as a result of similar legislation.

Methods

Investigators used a qualitative, multi-site case study design to understand the change phenomenon. Audet and d'Amboise (2001) recommended the multisite case study technique for strategic scanning if cross-case comparisons are the desired result. In multisite case studies, investigators inquire about the organizational structure of a case as a part of the exploratory process. A familiarity with the organizational structure helps investigators understand how a phenomenon impacts a case. Following this approach, investigators of the current study conducted interviews, as well as reviewed websites and documents as part of the data collection process.

The institutional type chosen for purposeful sampling was community colleges. The actualized impact of the legislation was immediate for associate-degree granting institutions like community colleges as evidenced by the immediate, substantial enrollment increases (THEC, 2017). All community colleges used as cases were selected based on shared similarities. The community colleges were exclusively two-year undergraduate institutions, had a high traditional-aged student population, and considered to be medium size enrollment profile by the Carnegie Classification System. The similar profile was important to understanding the phenomenon because Tennessee Promise subsidizes first and second-year undergraduate students. The identities of the four participating institutions were protected and the following pseudonyms were employed: community college A, community college B, community college C, and community college D.

The investigators contacted five community college administrators, responsible for the coordination of student disability services (SDS), and asked each

to participate in the study; four of the five administrators agreed to participate. Student disability service administrators possess a familiarity for the organizational structure at the institution, can enact organizational change, and systematically interpret the impact of a phenomenon, such as Tennessee Promise.

Online documents and websites were reviewed for the four participating community colleges in advance of the interviews. The purpose of the document review was to learn about the institution, specifically its organizational structure and available disability services, as part of the exploration process. McMillian (2016) suggested the review of documents and websites offers investigators conducting a multi-site case study an enriched understanding for each case. Investigators accessed online documents like organizational charts, directory information, college and disability service mission statements, and student handbooks. Webpages pertinent to disability services and Tennessee Promise were also reviewed for each case. Investigators printed accessible materials and made observational notes. Notes were semi-structured, however both investigators commented on the ease or difficulty of locating and interpreting the information retrieved.

Interviews were conducted with four community college administrators, responsible for the coordination of SDS, at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year. Investigators desired to interview administrators after one year of change implementation took place. Investigators felt that community college administrators were in a unique position to observe the impact of Promise due to their direct service to students. As a direct service provider, administrators acutely observe and respond to observed transitional challenges of SWD who are Promise recipients. Through their response to these challenges, administrators can advise other practitioners facing similar legislation.

The two investigators used the same interview question protocol, and completed the interviews individually. Two broad questions were asked to all administrators, one inquiring about the organizational structure used to deliver student disability services and one inquiring about change or systemic imbalance influenced by the shared phenomenon, Tennessee Promise. Probe questions were planned to further capture data related to organizational structure, transitional challenges, and implemented changes. All interviews were conducted by phone. Investigators asked administrators the following questions:

- Describe the current student disability service operation at your institution.
- [Probe] What is the process for students seeking accommodations?
- [Probe] What accommodations are offered to students with disabilities at your institution?
- How has Tennessee (TN) Promise impacted SDS at your institution?
- [Probe] What changes have you implemented as a result of TN Promise?
- [Probe] What future changes do you anticipate making as a result of TN Promise?
- [Probe] Describe the process as to how your institution identified these needs for change.

Investigators manually transcribed interview recordings on password-protected computers. The typed transcriptions were stored on a shared cloud drive. Each investigator checked for response consistencies once interviews were transcribed. Administrators were contacted by individual investigators if an inconsistency was found, and further clarification was sought. Following clarification protocol, each investigator offered one another a peer research review to scrutinize perceived interpretations. The investigators shared with one another interview transcriptions, inclusive of digitally marked codes and larger themes, and observation notes derived from website and document reviews. Thematic analysis was applied by differentiating low and high-level codes, largely derived from frequencies and co-occurrence, on the transcriptions until larger themes were developed (Carspecken, 1996; Guest & MacQueen, 2012).

Results

Investigators identified three themes resulting from the multi-site case study. First, the four community college cases had organizational and procedural similarities. Second, the impact of Promise led to substantial enrollment increases and the awareness of an inadequate infrastructure. Enrollment increases and the inadequate infrastructure introduced challenges for both students and SDS administrators. Third, administrators responded similarly to new challenges by renewing collaborative partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. These themes were broadly categorized by procedures and services, impact of Promise, and changes implemented.

Procedures and Services

Administrators with student disability services (SDS) shared organizational and procedural similarities at the four community colleges. The number of

SWD served with reasonable accommodations ranged from 75 to 200, depending on the institution. Each community college had at least two staff responsible for serving the support needs of students; staff at two institutions provided services to students beyond the delivery of SDS. SDS staff at community colleges B, C, and D supported students with accommodations at four or more satellite locations.

The comprehensive intake procedure for providing students with reasonable accommodations was identical at all four community colleges. Students first contact the SDS office either through self-inquiry or a referral. Next, students complete enrollment intake and confidentiality forms. Disability diagnosis documentation, no older than five years, was submitted next by all students seeking an accommodation through the SDS office. The student and SDS staff next meet to discuss available accommodations, the individualized educational support plan, and shared expectations. The administrator at community college A said, "My job is to help students overcome barriers and learn on an equal playing field. These individualized meetings with our students allows us to stress the same expectations for all students." The administrator at community college C said parents and students are sometimes "shocked" to learn the same accommodations and individualized attention available in high school cannot be offered at college. After the meeting, SDS staff finalize the educational support plan and secure resources listed in the plan. Emails are sent by an SDS representative to instructors at the beginning of each semester requesting reasonable accommodations be made for individual students enrolled in a particular section.

All community colleges shared similar accommodation services. Services to accommodate testing and note transcription were the most requested at all four institutions. Other common accommodations included low distraction testing environments, recording devices, and sign language interpretation.

Impact of Promise

Each administrator acknowledged Tennessee Promise presented challenges for both students and disability services at their respective institutions, with exception to community college D. The community college D administrator observed a less impactful transition in 2015-2016 because a similar last-dollar scholarship and mentor program, known as TnAchieves, was implemented in the college's service region during the 2013-2014 academic year. The same challenges described by administrators at community colleges A, B, and C were experienced by the community college D administrator two years

earlier. The community college D administrator felt "comfortable" with the actualized impact of Promise in 2015-2016, and was sought by other SDS administrators throughout the state for advice on forecasting anticipated changes.

Community college A, B, and C administrators acknowledged the Tennessee Promise scholarship impacted SDS operations the first year of implementation. All administrators observed an increase in the number of general inquiries regarding disability services and the number of participants. Community college B and C administrators observed a "significant increase" in the number of SWD served by SDS. Both commented that the number of telephone calls and in-person appointments were unprecedented during the months of July and August. The community college A and C administrators continued by acknowledging student inquiries did not necessarily matriculate to SDS participants. The community college A administrator said, "Incoming students would pursue accommodations to the point where they were accountable for paperwork. Either the intake form or diagnosis documentation would not be returned, and we would stop hearing from the student." Community college D administrator acknowledged observing the same practice two years earlier and suggested, "Students with disabilities enter college expecting SDS staff to provide the same level of care [as experienced in high school]. Parents and students seem shocked to learn they are responsible for verifying service eligibility."

Community colleges B and C experienced substantial enrollment increases of first-time freshmen in fall 2015, so SDS administrators anticipated more participants that fall semester. SDS offices at community colleges B and C more than doubled the number of students served with an accommodation. Despite the projected increase in SDS participants, both administrators acknowledged inadequate resources were available initially to arrange the requested accommodations. The community college C administrator said, "Classroom and testing spaces were unavailable, and the distance between our main campus and satellite campuses compounded the challenge." The SDS office at community college A noticed a slight increase in participants, but anticipated more the second year of Promise. The administrator at community college D observed a substantial increase in SDS participants the first year of TnAchieves; the number of SDS participants has continued to increase annually since 2013.

All four SDS administrators found Promise recipients "needy." When probed about the context of needy, administrators shared Promise recipients ex-

pected staff availability and accommodations to reflect secondary schools. The community college C administrator said, "Tennessee Promise has brought us a different type of student. I am more involved with students, parents, and faculty as a result of Promise than ever before." Community college A and D administrators continued by making the comparison between traditional-aged Promise SWD and the non-traditional SWD, when probed about the context of "needy." Both administrators shared non-traditional students communicate with the SDS office twice a semester, at the beginning to confirm accommodations and near-the-end to register for the next term. Traditional-aged Promise recipients struggled to differentiate IDEA and ADAAA provisions and adjust to the academic rigor and social dispositions expected at the collegiate level. The community college A administrator said Promise recipients consistently dropped by unannounced and requested accommodations by saying, "Momma said I have to come by here." The community college D administrator said, "The neediness of Promise recipients is a learned behavior prior to arriving here. These students were never taught self-advocacy and self-determination skills in K-12. Promise has magnified the problem by conveying a message of entitlement." Community college B, C, and D administrators noticed staff spending comparatively more time with Promise recipients and parents explaining the process to secure accommodations and the limitations of educational accommodations. All three administrators commented on the necessity for staff to remain knowledgeable of other services available to SWD. "Knowledge of services outside the scope of SDS was a must for our staff. The number of accommodation inquiries was overwhelming at times. Making referrals is an important service we provide," according to the community college B administrator.

SDS staff at community colleges A, B, and C assumed an unanticipated role as eligibility advisors for Tennessee Promise. The three administrators observed SWD had difficulty completing the eligibility criteria for the Tennessee Promise scholarship. High school seniors must apply for the Tennessee Promise scholarship, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), attend two mandatory meetings at a participating institution, apply and register full-time at a participating institution, and complete eight hours of community service prior to the fall term immediately following their graduation from high school. Deadlines are associated with all eligibility criteria. To remain eligible for the Promise scholarship beyond the first semester, students must meet with an assigned mentor, attend mandatory Promise meetings, complete eight hours of community service, maintain continuous, full-time enrollment status, and maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester enrolled at a participating institution. Although Promise recipients received multiple notifications, administrators at community colleges A, B, and C observed SWD struggled to maintain full-time enrollment, attend mandatory meetings, and complete eight hours of community service. When probed for reasons why criteria was problematic, administrators shared SWD are often reliant on others for transportation, fail to realize the academic rigor of college before enrolling, and community service partners lack accessibility accommodations. The community college D administrator observed similar challenges when TnAchieves was implemented in 2013.

Changes Implemented

The actualized impact of Tennessee Promise presented institutions and students with a number of transitional challenges. SDS administrators at the four community colleges responded similarly to the transitional challenges. Administrators sought opportunities for collaborative outreach with stakeholders and the need to effectively communicate collegiate expectations earlier to prospective SWD. The product of each response reflected the unique nuances of the institution. The broad initiatives were advised by colleagues at sister institutions who had experienced similar challenges in 2009 with KnoxAchieves and 2013 with TnAchieves. The community college D administrator said, "for two years, we worked to accommodate the needs of our office and the students we served [as a result as TnAchieves]. Last year [2015-2016] we were in a position to share those challenges as well as promising practices." The community college D administrator continued by saying,

> The state legislature, THEC [Tennessee Higher Education Commission], and TBR [Tennessee Board of Regents] made accessibility to education a priority with initiatives like Promise. This renewed focus on accessibility has helped SDS directors secure a position at the decision-making table.

SDS administrators embraced a renewed sense of inclusion with other internal administrative units, such as enrollment management, public relations, and information technology, governance groups, such as faculty senate and administrative council, and ad-hoc committees, such as the Promise planning and new-student transitions teams. Opportunities to serve internally in various administrative capacities, led to open dialogue and the exchange of ideas with

stakeholders. The political capital developed with institutional stakeholders inspired a culture of innovation and the concerns of SDS were acknowledged throughout planning phases. Community college A, B and D administrators shared that recruiters and orientation leaders were actively referring new students to SDS early in the recruitment process. The community college B administrator shared faculty were more responsive to requests for academic accommodations. Community colleges B and D shared information technology staff consulted with SDS staff about website modifications to better accommodate SDS students.

Outreach to external collaborators, such as guidance counselors, special education teachers and parents, was another response to transitional challenges the four administrators shared. All four administrators shared that students struggled to overcome misunderstandings about ADAAA and realize the academic and behavioral expectations of college. The community college A administrator said, "We need to reach student misunderstanding at the source." Examples include participating in local high schools' college nights, serve on IEP committees for college-bound SWD, contribute short announcements for high schools' senior newsletter, and schedule appointments with guidance counselors and special education teachers to communicate SDS enrollment procedures, differences in IDEA and ADAAA accommodations, and academic and behavioral expectations of students.

The collaborative outreach efforts helped administrators at the four community colleges identify why misunderstandings existed and the appropriate message needed to educate SWD. SDS staff at all four community colleges developed documents and webpages to better assist SWD transition to college. Administrators acknowledged transitional challenges the first year of Promise implementation was the impetus for new and revised document development. The documents were designed to educate SWD on procedures, deadlines, accommodations, and expectations associated with SDS and Tennessee Promise. Frequently asked questions and responses, enrollment management calendars, and expectation overviews were examples of documents and webpages created. The administrators published documents and webpages online. The online content was referenced regularly to students and stakeholders by SDS staff. The documents were collaborative in nature. For example, guidance counselors and special education instructors helped generate frequently asked questions to rectify misunderstandings between IDEA and ADAAA. The enrollment management and transitions teams shared the institutional enrollment and payment calendar for the academic year. The calendar was later adapted to include dates pertinent to SDS events and procedures. Faculty and staff feedback was solicited to create a series of academic and technology competencies and behavioral dispositions for first-time freshmen. The expectations were later shared with students, parents, guidance counselors, and special education instructors. The webmaster helped identify high traffic webpages where the online content could exist.

Administrators acknowledged if frequently asked questions and expectations were addressed early in the transition to college, then students could navigate predictable administrative pitfalls and staff would commit less time to readdressing familiar inquiries. Community college A administrator noticed, "promise students were encouraged to attend by their parents, regardless of the student's developmental preparation stage entering college." Community college D administrator similarly stated,

> We want students to attend who wouldn't otherwise attend, which is the purpose of Promise. However, not everyone is developmentally prepared for college. There are needy students with no understanding for environment and expectations, academic rigor, lack of respect for professors, and lack self-accountability. We hope to educate students and parents on the expectations before they arrive.

Discussion

The study originally sought to understand how administrators responded to the observed transitional challenges of students with disabilities. The transitional challenges revealed in the study were not based on literary findings (Cameto, Knokey, & Sanford, 2011; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Landmark & Zhang, 2013). SDS administrators observed SWD struggled to differentiate between IDEA and ADAAA provisions, complete the comprehensive intake procedure, and realize SDS staff were unable to provide the same individualized care as secondary school providers.

Administrators were accustomed to guiding students through those transitional challenges. However, the actualized impact of Tennessee Promise was enrollment increases and an inadequate infrastructure introduced difficulties for SDS administrators in responding to those transitional challenges. Perna (2016) suggested college Promise programs may have a range of consequences for colleges, both intended and unintended.

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An increase in student enrollment at the four community colleges disrupted the existing system of practices and procedures, which made the response to transitional challenges more difficult. The number of Promise recipients doubled from the first-to-second year of the last-dollar scholarship program (THEC, 2017). Students who might have otherwise not pursued postsecondary education, elected to attend because of the tuition subsidy. As a result of the enrollment increase, all four administrators observed a greater number of traditional-aged students seeking accommodations. SDS offices at community colleges B and C more than doubled the number of students served with an accommodation as a result of Tennessee Promise. The traditional-aged population of Promise recipients were perceived to be "needy" by comparison. When probed about the context, administrators shared students demonstrated an elevated expectation of staff availability and comprehensive accommodations. An elevated expectation of service is not unique among students transitioning from secondary-to-postsecondary education environments (Shaw, Madaus, & Dukes, 2010). Rather, the number of "needy" students who possessed these expectations and transitional challenges made provisional support difficult.

An inadequate infrastructure also made responding to transitional challenges more difficult for administrators. All administrators anticipated an increase of SWD due to Promise, yet none were adequately prepared by way of personnel and spatial resources. The community college C administrator said, "Classroom and testing spaces were unavailable, and the distance between our main campus and satellite campuses compounded the challenge." Three-of-the-four community college administrators support the needs of SWD at multiple satellite locations. An inadequate number of personnel inhibits SDS administrators from serving SWD, who study at one of the satellite campuses, with support services beyond the reasonable accommodations such as academic counseling, needs-based referrals, and career services. The unavailability of personnel and the geographic distance between campuses existed before Promise was implemented. However, an increase in participating SWD has magnified the infrastructure burden.

An inadequate infrastructure is problematic for student scholarship eligibility, and ultimately retention-to-degree completion. Promise recipients must comply with eligibility criteria to maintain last-dollar tuition scholarship subsidies. All administrators assumed the unanticipated, unofficial role as Promise scholarship eligibility advisors for SWD recipients. The administrators observed SWD had difficulty completing the eligibility criteria for the Tennessee Promise scholarship. Two eligibility criteria potentially impacted by an inadequate infrastructure are (1) maintaining continuous, full-time enrollment status, and (2) maintaining a 2.0 GPA each semester enrolled at a participating institution. SWD who are unable to enroll in classes due to limited enrollment capacities and physical space may be unable to maintain continuous, full-time enrollment status. Students who did not receive distraction-reduced testing accommodations, or have a transcriptionist present during classroom lectures, due to space limitations, may struggle to maintain a 2.0 GPA.

Implications

The actualized impact of Tennessee Promise for SDS administrators is the increased enrollments and an inadequate infrastructure added a heightened degree of difficulty when responding to the transitional challenges of SWD. Community college SDS administrators in states with recently approved Promise legislation, or a state considering similar legislation, are encouraged to consider advanced preparations to structural and functional systems. These findings support the research done by Harnisch and Lebioda (2016), which found that increasing enrollment at community colleges from "free community college tuition" programs may diminish the college's ability to provide sufficient support services to all students.

Administrators can anticipate an increase of service inquiries among traditional-aged SWD who are recipients of the scholarship. Advanced planning and temporary personnel support can help SDS administrators serve in a capacity most advantageous to supporting the transitional challenges of new SWD. Outreach to guidance counselors, special education teachers, SWD, and parents in advance of the transition is a common practice. However, the practice needs to be emphasized by all parties, as advised by Milsom and Hartley (2005), to reduce the number of last minute inquiries in July and August. SWD who have completed the Promise scholarship application need to visit with an SDS administrator the fall semester of their senior year. The visit would address the student goals, accommodation discrepancies, procedural time lines, and frequently asked questions.

Given the increase of student inquiries, temporary personnel can help manage the initial calls, visits, and emails concerning the comprehensive intake process (Tamburin, 2016b). Trained, temporary personnel would assist SWD through the initial process, allowing SDS administrators to engage once the student qualifies for service and is available to discuss accommodations, the individualized educational sup-

port plan, and shared expectations. All administrators shared that inquires did not necessarily manifest into participants. Administrators, who spend a disproportionate amount of time on inquiries, struggle to adequately meet the needs of those who have completed the process and eligible for accommodations, especially those studying at satellite campus locations.

Adequate spatial resources are a shared concern for any institution recently experiencing a surge in student enrollment. To avoid an inability to serve SWD with reasonable accommodations, SDS administrators must ensure the interests of the functional area are well represented among decision makers. Early class registration and accommodation processing of SWD will help SDS administrators project resource needs. The number of terminals in the testing center, sections of freshmen-level classes offered on campus, and parking spaces for students with physical disabilities are considerations helpful with reducing the transitional challenges of SWD.

Lastly, SDS administrators found the Promise scholarship eligibility criteria as potentially problematic for SWD. Projecting accommodation needs, as previously described, will help students maintain the enrolment status and GPA required of recipients. SDS administrators need to take proactive measures to ensure other eligibility criteria like attend mandatory meetings and complete semester community service hours are met as well. Administrators are encouraged to provide students with advance notice of mandatory meetings. Advance notice would help SWD secure transportation for the meetings. Administrators can identify community service placements that are accessible and accommodate for individuals with disabilities. A list of community service placement options can be shared with SWD Promise recipients early in their transition to college.

Future Research

The purpose of Promise is to confer a higher percentage of Tennesseans with a postsecondary education credential, through legislation promoting accessibility and affordability. Investigators suggest a study of the same phenomenon on student populations at technical and vocational schools. Students with disabilities enrolled at a rate of 34% to technical and vocational institutions, according to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Newman et al., 2011). The investigators would be intrigued to know if the same transitional challenges exist, and how administrators respond to those observed transitional challenges at a different institutional type.

Promise programs appear to have the potential to increase the percentage of citizens with a higher edu-

cation credential, especially for students from groups who have been largely underrepresented in higher education, including students with disabilities. With lawmakers in many other states considering similar proposals, future research should continue to look at the ways to mitigate the unintended consequences of the programs. In addition, future research should attempt to identify the best approaches for increasing higher education for particular groups of students.

Conclusion

The study sought to understand how administrators responded to the observed transitional challenges of students with disabilities. The transitional challenges revealed in the study were not unique to students with disabilities. However, the actualized impact of Tennessee Promise introduced difficulties for SDS administrators in responding to those transitional challenges. Administrators facing similar legislation are encouraged to initiate transitional planning with students earlier, utilize temporary personnel during peak periods of inquiry, and project anticipated needs to decision-makers in order to better serve the transitional challenges of Promise recipients. Perna (2016) suggested college Promise programs may have a range of consequences for institutions, both intended and unintended. Advanced preparations can help administrators facing similar legislation mitigate those consequences and better serve the transitional challenges of students.

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