

# Self Determination

## *The Driving Force Behind Successful Transition Planning*

*“No one has a greater stake in the outcome of transition planning than young adults with disabilities. They should be active, participating members of formal and informal transition activities and efforts.”*

*Martin Gould and Nancy McTaggart*

### Your students...

- Do they understand their disability?
- Do they know what accommodations are needed?
- Can they advocate for themselves in the classroom?
- Are they involved in planning their own future?
- Do they direct their own IEP?

If you answered “no” to any of the questions above, it may mean that your students lack the self determination skills necessary to effectively participate in the transition planning process. While we have done a much better job inviting students to their IEP meetings, we may not be preparing them to be active participants in those meetings. Student participation in the transition planning process does not occur naturally. It does not happen by accident. For students to be active, participating members in the transition planning process, they need to develop the skills that allow them to do so. To do so, students must learn to be self determined. Self determination will also be a great benefit as students leave school and venture out into the adult world.



### Belief Statements

- People with disabilities have the same rights as any other person.
- A child with a disability should be given numerous opportunities to make choices and experience the consequences of those choices.
- Learning to behave responsibly comes with support, practice, and mistakes.
- It is important to allow and encourage independence.

### What is “Self Determination?”

“Self Determination is a ten dollar word for choice...it is another word for freedom...a life filled with rising expectations, dignity, responsibility, and opportunity...a chance to live the American Dream.”

*Robert Williams*

Self Determination is the ability to define goals for oneself and to take the initiative to achieve those goals. Self Determination is achieved through self advocacy. Self advocacy training can encourage individuals with disabilities to confidently stand up, speak out and move from dependence to independence. For students with disabilities to advocate effectively, they must understand their specific disability; learn their strengths and areas of challenge; identify factors that are interfering with their performance, learning and employment; and develop compensations, accommodations, and coping skills to help them succeed. In addition, through careful guidance, these same students must learn how to apply this knowledge effectively when making decisions, negotiating, and speaking up on their own behalf.

*To be self determined, individuals must...*

- Assert their presence
- Make their needs known
- Evaluate progress towards meeting their goals
- Adjust their performance
- Create unique approaches to solving their problems

## What is “Self Determination?” (Continued)

*Self Advocacy allows students to...*

- Speak for themselves
- Make decisions for themselves
- Know their rights
- Know how and where to get help

*Self Determination efforts*

- Speak for themselves
- Make decisions for themselves
- Know their rights
- Know how and where to get help

*Self determined individuals know what they want and how to get it. People who are self determined take control and responsibility for their own lives...*

- From an awareness of personal needs, self determined individuals choose goals
- They pursue their goals
- They will create unique approaches to solve problems

## How do students become Self Determined?

The road to self determination begins with self advocacy.

“Self advocacy is learning to speak up and ask for what you need on your own behalf. Self advocacy means taking charge of your life. It means working toward being more independent. Self advocacy means you can stop being a victim. You don’t have to feel helpless. Developing self advocacy skills is learning how to put your best foot forward which builds self confidence. When you feel better about yourself you may be more willing to take risks with your life. Taking more risks means developing and expanding your potential. Taking charge of your life can mean going from feeling hopeless to hopeful.”

*Winelle Carpenter*

*There are several curriculums that teach the skills needed for self determination.*

*Some of them are:*

- “Becoming Your Own Expert” by Winelle Carpenter
- “Self Directed IEP” by Jim Martin and Laura Huber Marshall
- “Choosing Employment Goals” by Jim Martin and Laura Huber Marshall
- “It’s My Life” by New Hats, Inc.
- “Choose and Take Action” software by Jim Martin and Laura Huber Marshall

## How do students become Self Determined? (Continued)

*Whatever curriculum you choose, here are some suggestions that Winelle Carpenter offers for introducing the course into your school curriculum...*

- Select a title for the class. Some possibilities are “Self Advocacy Skills for Successful Transition”, “Empowering Individuals Through Self Advocacy Training”, or “Becoming Your Own Expert”.
- Use a letter or presentation to introduce the class to administrators and teachers. Explain the purpose and objectives and provide examples of ways to support students with disabilities who are attempting to develop self advocacy skills.
- In a similar letter or presentation for parents, describe the curriculum and tell them when it will be offered. Inform parents that meetings will be held throughout the course to help them learn about self advocacy and provide practical ideas and suggestions for supporting development of students’ self advocacy skills. Parents and special needs providers will be instrumental in making students aware of the advantages of taking this course.
- Locate an appropriate instructor who would be interested in teaching the curriculum. A team approach that would include at least one disability instructor paired with a social worker, counselor, or school psychologist is highly recommended.
- Arrange for the class to be offered as a one credit course, if possible.
- Become familiar with the curriculum before teaching.

The first priority, when introducing any self advocacy curriculum, is to establish an atmosphere of trust and group cohesion. Many of the lessons encourage students to share and learn from their classmates. Don’t force students to participate. Simply hearing other students describe their personal feelings and experiences will help validate feelings and thoughts students may have but are fearful to express.

## Self Determination Constructs

### *Self Awareness*

- Identify needs
- Identify interests
- Identify and understand strengths
- Identify and understand limitations

### *Self Advocacy*

- Assertively states wants and needs
- Assertively states rights
- Determine needed support
- Pursue needed support
- Obtain and evaluate needed support
- Conduct own affairs

### *Self Confidence*

- Expects to obtain goal

### *Decision Making*

- Assess situation demands
- Set goals
- Set standards
- Identify information to make decisions
- Consider past solutions for new situations
- Generate new, creative solutions
- Consider options
- Choose best option
- Develop plan

### *Independent performance*

- Initiate tasks on time
- Complete tasks on time
- Use self-management strategies
- Perform tasks to standard
- Follow through on own plan

### *Self Evaluation*

- Monitor task performance
- Compare performance to standard
- Evaluate effectiveness of self-management strategies
- Determine if plan completed and goal met

### *Adjustment*

- Change goals
- Change standards
- Change strategies to improve performance
- Change support
- Persistently adjust
- Use environmental feedback to aid adjustment

## Self Determination Constructs

### *(Continued)*

*Students are encouraged to advocate for themselves when we:*

- Involve them and their family members in the design and implementation of the IEP/Transition planning meetings.
- Teach them how to actually plan, participate in, and run their IEP/Transition planning objectives in the first person (I will...)
- Listen without judgment and ask “what happened” in non-confrontational tones.
- Encourage them to self evaluate.
- Allow them to make mistakes when appropriate.
- Teach them about the areas of transition and help them to determine current skills, decide on future goals, and design plans to attain those goals.
- Help them
  - Increase self knowledge and understanding about their disability
  - Identify what is interfering with their performance in academic learning and employment
  - Develop compensations, accommodations, and assistive technology that will enable them to succeed
  - Learn how to transfer this knowledge effectively when speaking up on their own behalf
- Allow them to practice, rehearse, and role play ways to express preferences, suggest alternatives, negotiate, ask for accommodations, and problem solve.
- Prepare them by teaching skills that can be used in work, living, and leisure activities outside of the school.
- Cite their accomplishments and compliment their strengths.
- Encourage family members to allow students to practice making choices and to follow through on decisions.
- Provide mentors and role models.
- Have them participate in retreats and summer workshops.
- Encourage them to take risks.

## Self Determination and Transition

The primary intent of the requirements for including and addressing transition services through the IEP process is to improve the quality of life for young adults with disabilities.

Transition service recognizes that education can improve the post-school outcomes of students with disabilities as well as, do a better job of preparing students and families for the challenges and complexities of the adult world and service provider systems.

### *IDEA and Self Determination*

- IDEA requires that transition activities be based upon student interests
- The IEP must include a statement of long term outcomes
- IDEA requires that students be invited to their own IEP transition meetings
- The IEP must include a statement of long term student outcomes

### *Four basic transition skills relevant to all students with disabilities*

- The ability to assess themselves, including their skills and abilities, and the needs associated with their disabilities.
- Awareness of the accommodations they need because of their disabilities.
- Knowledge of their civil rights to these accommodations through legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- The self advocacy skills necessary to express their needs in the workplace, in educational institutions, and in community settings.

“Self determined people are empowered to take control over their own lives. They make choices based on personal preferences, set goals, and take action to achieve their goals.”

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*Taken, with permission, from the South Dakota Department of Education and Cultural Affairs' website. <http://www.state.sd.us/deca/>*

