

CEC's DCDT FAST FACTS: Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy

Prepared by the DCDT Publications Committee

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified 16 evidence-based predictors of post-school success for students with disabilities based on a systematic correlational literature review (Test et al., 2009). Findings indicated that students with higher levels of self-determination achieve better post-school outcomes in the areas of education and employment (Halpern et al., 1995; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Recently, Rowe et al. (2013) conducted a Delphi study to add specificity to the existing predictor definitions identified by Test et al. (2009) and operationally defined the predictors so local educators understand the components necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate secondary transition programs based on predictor research.

Self-determination/Self-Advocacy has been operationally defined as “the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one’s goals, and accept consequences of one’s actions” (Rowe et al., 2013).

Efforts to improve self-determination/self-advocacy skills should include the following essential program characteristics as identified by Rowe et al. 2013:

- Utilize a student driven IEP process to allow students to demonstrate self-awareness, goal setting, problem solving, and self-advocacy.
- Collaborate with general education teachers to embed choices into the general curriculum and daily lessons and provide opportunities for students to practice self-determination skills.
- Teach students to self-monitor self-determination skills (e.g., accommodations and modifications) and provide opportunities for students to practice the self-monitoring strategy. ***As you work with students, take into consideration the cultural nuances involved in teaching self-determination skills and providing opportunities to develop self-determination to students from CLD backgrounds.*
- Ensure all students, including those with significant disabilities, have a functional communication system to engage in choice making, problem-solving, goal setting, taking initiative to reach goals, and accepting consequences for one’s actions.
- Conduct age-appropriate transition assessments in order for students to learn about themselves, set goals, solve problems, use information, make decisions, and to identify long-range goals.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop self-awareness by engaging in honest and respectful discussions with students about their self-determination assessment responses.
- Provide direct instruction in self-determination using a structured curriculum or evidence-based instructional strategy, with guided practice in natural school and community-based settings.
- Foster the development of students’ leadership skills.
- Expect and support students to make many routine choices for themselves through the course of a school day.

- Work collaboratively with students to facilitate achievement of their goals by informing them of their options and the potential consequences of their choices.

Application for Teachers

- Evaluate self-determination/self-advocacy skill instruction and experiences for students to ensure essential program characteristics are included.
- Get familiar with resources on teaching self-determination skills. For example, self-determination lesson plan starters are available at <http://transitionta.org/effectivepractices>
- Get familiar with Web-Based 2.0 technology tools available to facilitate participation in the IEP process (e.g., Wordle, Toon Doo, Vokis) and investigate Apps available for teaching self-determination skills. A list of Web 2.0 Tools are available at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1HjvCXIVc4jcU1SSEdfSnV4b00>
- PowerPoint is another method for facilitating participation in the IEP process (http://www.vermiliontpc.com/iep/student_directed_iep.htm)
- Incorporate self-determination skills across the instructional day. Self-determination skill activities can be incorporated into other instructional activities (e.g., teach goal setting skills at the beginning of an academic or employment lesson). Goal attainment instruction should be a key part of all transition planning activities.
- Collaborate with families to understand cultural values that influence the expression of self-determined behavior – for example, some families may want to focus on goals related to family interdependence rather than student independence.

Application for Administrators

- Use the Predictor Self-Assessment to evaluate inclusion of self-determination/self-advocacy instruction located here: http://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/postsecondary/Predictor_Self-Assessment.final_08_10_15.pdf
- Research suggests that teachers often believe teaching self-determination skills is important, but do not feel confident in their knowledge of how to teach these skills. Additionally, research suggests teachers often feel there is limited administrative support for teaching self-determination (Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002). Reserve in-service time for professional development on self-determination skill instruction.
- Think about how promoting self-determination fits with other school initiatives – for example, teaching students to manage their own behavior can be a natural fit with positive behavior support.

Application for Families

- Create opportunities at home and in the community for self-determination skills. Support youth to choose between recreational activities, to be a part of setting family goals, or to begin to plan for their future with the input of the family.
- Ask teachers for information about what they are doing at school to promote self-determination skills.
- Talk about these skills with youth and discuss how they fit within your family.

Where to Go for Additional Information

Websites

Self-Determination Lesson Plan Starters

- <http://transitionta.org/effectivepractices>

Self-Determination Practice Descriptions

- <http://transitionta.org/effectivepractices>

Self-Determination Curricula and Other Resources

- [http://www.beachcenter.org/education and training/self-determination/default.aspx?JScript= 1](http://www.beachcenter.org/education_and_training/self-determination/default.aspx?JScript=1)
- National Gateway to Self-Determination: <http://ngsd.org/>

Self-Determination Assessments

- Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment: <http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools.html>
- Transition Coalition: http://transitioncoalition.org/tc-assessment-reviews/?cat_ID=48

Predictors of Post-School Success

- <http://transitionta.org/postschool>
- http://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/AlignEBPP_Resources_PSS_FINAL_2016.pdf

Books, Newsletters, and Research Articles

Agran, M., King-Sears, M., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Copeland, S. R. (2003). *Teachers' guides to inclusive practices: Student-directed learning strategies*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Halpern, A.S., Yovanoff, P., Doren, B. & Benz, M.R. (1995) Predicting participation in postsecondary education for school leavers with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 62, 151-164.

Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Fowler, C. H., Korterling, L. J., & Kohler, P. H. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32, 160-181.

Thoma, C. A., Nathanson, R., Baker, S. R., & Tamura, R. (2002). Self determination: What do special educators know and where do they learn it? *Remedial and Special Education*, 23, 242–247.

Rowe, D. A., Alverson, C. Y., Unruh, D., Fowler, C., Kellems, R., & Test, D. W. (2013). *Operationalizing evidence-based predictors in secondary transition: A Delphi study*. Manuscript in preparation.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., Hughes, C., Martin, J. E., Mithaug, D., & Palmer, S. (2007). *Promoting self-determination in students with developmental disabilities*. New York: Guilford.

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