



## **CEC's DCDT FAST FACTS: Self-Determination**

Prepared by the DCDT Publications Committee

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified 17 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). There are a number of actions that teachers, schools and families can take to promote student self-determination that have the potential to impact post-school outcomes.

When working to promote self-determination there are three important elements for teachers and parents to consider:

- *Teaching* students skills associated with self-determination
- Creating *opportunities* for students to practice these skills
- Providing appropriate *supports and accommodations*

Several skills have been identified that contribute to self-determined behavior. Several sources (Agran et al., 2003; Wehmeyer et al., 2007) provide strategies for teaching these skills. These skills include:

- Choice Making
- Decision Making
- Problem Solving
- Goal Setting
- Self-Advocacy and Leadership
- Self-Management and Self-Regulation
- Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge

After students have learned these skills, they need multiple, repeated opportunities to apply the skills. The good news is that there are opportunities for students to practice these skills in every environment in which they live, learn, work, and play. Think creatively about how to embed these skills across environments. For example, at school students can learn about goal attainment and then apply goal attainment skills to achieve their transition goals across school, home, work, and community environments.

All students will need individualized supports and accommodations to express self-determined behavior. Some students might benefit from technology that allows them to express their choices or manage their behavior (e.g., a scheduler or timer on an iPhone or iPad). Other students might set their own goal, but might need support in the process of implementing an action plan to achieve their goal. And, each student is going to have a different goal for the future, depending on cultural values. Just like instruction or support in any area, promoting self-determination will have to be individualized for each student

### **Application for Teachers**

- Get familiar with resources on teaching self-determination skills. For example, self-determination lesson plan starters are available at <http://www.nsttac.org/content/lesson-plan-starters> .
- 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. PowerPoint is another method for facilitating participation in the IEP process ([http://www.vermiliontpc.com/iep/student\\_directed\\_iep.htm](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**

- 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://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd\\_lesson\\_plans.asp](http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd_lesson_plans.asp)
- <http://nsttac.appstate.edu/content/lesson-plan-starters>

Self-Determination Practice Descriptions

- <http://nsttac.appstate.edu/content/practice-descriptions>

Self-Determination Curricula

- [http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd\\_curricula.asp](http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd_curricula.asp)

#### 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)

#### Self-Determination Assessments

- <http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow.html?p=38&z=3&rd=1>

#### Predictors of Post-School Success

- <http://nstattac.appstate.edu/content/nstattacdcdt-fact-sheets>

### **Books 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., Kortering, 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.
- 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.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A follow-up study of youth with mental retardation or learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 245-255.

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