

# SELF-DETERMINATION



# SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination is a concept that emphasizes the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives through the choices they make. Students who have acquired effective self-determination skills are more likely to have a successful transition to adulthood.

Self-determination is the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination and to successful transition.

## **Why is self-determination so important for students with disabilities?**

Self-determination is important for all people; especially students with disabilities. The skills included in self-determination; such as goal-setting, problem-solving, and decision-making, enable students to assume responsibility for the choices they make for their life. People with disabilities have emphasized that having more control over their lives, instead of having someone else make the decisions for and about them, increases their self-esteem and self-worth (Ward, 1996). Research shows that students with disabilities who leave school with enhanced self-determination skills are at least twice as likely as their peers who have not learned to be self-determined to be employed one year after graduation. Three years after graduation, they are more likely to have obtained jobs with benefits and are more likely to be living somewhere other than the family home (Wehmeyer and Palmer, 2003).

The development of self-determination which emphasizes choice, control, and personally meaningful success is essential to transition planning. In order to become a self-determined adult, an individual must acquire certain skills. These include:

- ability to assess ones skills and abilities
- awareness of the disability
  - impact on life
  - needed accommodations in education
  - needed accommodations for future activities
- knowledge of civil rights
- knowledge of legal rights
  - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
  - American with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- communication skills needed to
  - advocate appropriately in employment, educational institutions and community settings in order to meet individual needs

## Sources:

Ward, M.J. (1996). Coming of age in the age of self-determination: A historical and personal perspective. In D.J. Sands & M.L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *Self-determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities* (pp. 1-16). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Wehmeyer, M.L., & Palmer, S. (2003). Adult outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities three years after high school: The impact of self-determination. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 38, p 131-44.

The previous sources may be of help to you as you consider the transitional needs of your student. While these sources are provided to assist you in your search, it is your responsibility to investigate them to determine their value and appropriateness for your situation and needs. These sources are provided as a sample of available resources and are for informational purposes only. **THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DOES NOT MONITOR, EVALUATE, OR ENDORSE THE CONTENT OR INFORMATION OF THESE RESOURCES. NONE OF THESE RESOURCES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THE ADVICE OR GUIDANCE OF THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.**

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-DETERMINED PEOPLE**

- awareness of personal preferences, interests, strengths, and limitations
- ability to differentiate between wants and needs
- ability to make choices based on preferences, interests, wants and needs
- ability to consider multiple options and to anticipate consequences for decisions
- ability to initiate and take action when needed
- ability to evaluate a situation based on the outcomes of previous decisions and to revise further decisions accordingly
- ability to set and work toward goals
- problem-solving skills
- pursue independence while recognizing interdependence with others
- self-advocacy skills
- ability to self-regulate behavior
- self-evaluation skills
- independent performance skills and ability to adapt to changes
- persistence
- effective use of communication skills
- ability to accept personal responsibility
- self-confidence
- pride
- creativity

Students need to be directly taught skills that lead them toward becoming self-determined individuals. Acquiring the characteristics that lead to self-determination is a developmental process that begins in early childhood and continues through adulthood.

### **School and Family-Based Interventions to Support the Development of Self-Determination**

#### **Early Childhood (Ages 2-5)**

- Provide opportunities to make structured decisions, such as, “Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?” Extend choices across areas such as food or clothing.
- Provide opportunities to generate choices that are both positive and negative, such as, “We have 10 more minutes. What could we do?” and “You spilled your milk. What could you do to clean it up?”
- Provide formative and constructive feedback on the consequences of choices made in the recent past, such as, “When you pushed hard on the pencil it broke. What might you want to do the next time?” and “When you used an angry tone, I didn’t do what you wanted. What could you do differently?”
- Provide opportunities for planning activities that are pending, such as, “You need to choose a dress to wear to the wedding,” or “Decide what kind of sandwich you want to take for lunch tomorrow.”
- Provide opportunities for self-evaluative task performance by comparing personal work to a model. Point out similarities, such as, “Look, you used nice colors too, just like this

one.” and “Do you see that you both drew the man from the side?”

- Ask directive questions so that the child compares his or her performance to a model, such as, “Are all of your toys in the basket, too?” or “I’ll know you’re ready for the story when you are sitting on your mat with your legs crossed, your hands on your knees, and your eyes on me.”

### **Early Elementary (Ages 6-8)**

- Provide opportunities to choose from among several different strategies for a task, such as, “Will you remember your spelling words better if you write them out, say them to yourself, or test yourself?” or “What is the easiest way for you to figure out what this word means?”
- Ask children to reconsider choices they’ve made in the recent past, and in light of those choices, understand subsequent consequences, such as, “This morning you decided to spend your lunch money on the comic. Now it’s lunchtime and you’re hungry. What decision do you wish you’d made?” or “I remember when you decided to leave your coat in your locker. What happened because you made that decision?”
- Encourage children to “think aloud” while you state the steps that they are taking to complete a task or solve a problem, such as, “Tell me what you’re thinking in your head while you try to figure out what the word means,” or “You’ve lost your house key. What are you thinking to yourself while you decide what to do?”
- Provide opportunities for students to talk about how they learn, such as, “Is it easier for you to tell me what you want by saying it or by writing it down?” or “Do you remember better if you study for a test all at once or a little bit on several different days?” Help students research their answers.
- Provide opportunities for students to systematically evaluate their work, such as, “Here’s a very neat paper, and here’s your paper. What are the differences between this paper and yours? How are they alike?”
- Help students set simple goals for themselves and check to see whether they are reaching them, such as, “You said you want to read two books this week. How much of a book have you read so far?” “Let’s color in your goal sheet so you can see how much you’ve done.”

### **Late Elementary (Ages 9-11)**

- Provide guidance in systematic analyses of decisions: writing the problem at the top of a sheet of paper, listing all possible choices, and sketching out the benefits and cost of each choice.
- Use the same systematic structure to analyze past decisions now that their consequences are evident, such as, “You were angry at Jo for teasing you, and so you punched her in the cheek. Now you have to sit out at recess for a week. What are some other things that you could have done instead? What might have happened then?”
- Provide opportunities for students to commit to personal or academic goals: writing the goal down and storing it in a safe place, revisiting the goal periodically to reflect progress toward it, listing optional steps to take toward the goal, and trying out the steps and reflecting on their success.
- Provide opportunities to systematically analyze adult perspectives, such as the point of view of the volleyball coach when a student is late to every game or the perspective of

the librarian when a student returns a book that is dirty and torn. Help the student guess what the adult is thinking and feeling and what might be done as a result.

- Provide opportunities for students to evaluate task performance in effectively ‘safe’ ways: identifying weaknesses and strengths in performance, reflecting ways to improve performance, trying out strategies to improve performance, and reevaluating performance to check for improvement. For example, “You got a lower grade than you wanted on your research paper. What steps did you take to make it a stronger paper? What steps did you leave out? What might you do now to make it even better?”

### **Secondary (Ages 12-18)**

- Provide opportunities for students to make decisions that have an important impact on their daily activities, such as academic goals, careers to explore, schedules to keep, diet and sleep habits, etc.
- Help students relate personal goals with daily decisions that they make, such as, “You made a point of going to bed early last night, and now I see you earned a 95% on today’s quiz. Going to bed on time seems to be helping you meet your goal of higher grades this semester.” or “You’ve set aside half of every paycheck and now you have \$625 in the bank. It won’t be long before you have enough to buy the computer you want.”
- Provide guidance in dividing students’ long-term goals into manageable short-term objectives. Guide students through planning activities to establish the appropriate steps necessary to progress toward these goals. For example, help a student break the goal of a higher math grade into smaller objectives of rechecking math homework before handing it in, practicing the math problems on nights before the test, and asking questions whenever something is not clear.
- Assist the student in realistically recognizing and accepting weaknesses in key skills. You might say, for example, “It’s hard for you to do your math problems without making mistakes in your math facts. What are some parts of math that you’re good at? What could you do to address your difficulty remembering math facts?”
- Assist students in requesting academic and social supports from teachers. For example, “You’d like Mrs. Green to let you have some extra time to complete the weekly quiz. How will you ask her for that?” or “You think you’d do better work if your boss would let you use a note pad to jot down the orders. What can you do to ask for that?”

**Note:** From Sands, D.J., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Self-determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H Brookes, pp 8-9. Reprinted with permission.

# A Teacher's Guide: 20 Ways to Promote Self-Determination in Students

By Jeanne Holverstott

- 1. Find out what motivates your student.** Whatever this reinforcer may be – bugs, trains, dogs, etc.—and no matter how un-motivating it may appear to you, embrace it and hold on tight. Always be willing to re-evaluate what motivates your students as it may change often.
- 2. Prioritize student preferences and interests.** Prioritizing helps ensure that the student sees the value of the chosen activity or decision and strives to complete or attain it.
- 3. Make it meaningful and real.** When a purpose is not readily evident, humans hesitate to make the task a priority. Therefore, it is necessary to provide concrete, “real world” examples to grab your students’ interest and understanding.
- 4. Allow your students to be “causal agents”** (Wehmeyer 1996). Students act as causal agents in their lives when given the space to make choices and decisions without unnecessary interference (Wehmeyer 1996). In the classroom, causal agency can be as simple as allowing a student to choose between two independent work-time activities.
- 5. Instruct your students in how to make effective choices.** Making a choice is easy; making the appropriate choice is not as simple. By modeling the choice-making process and the positive results that can be achieved when an appropriate choice is made, the experience of making effective decisions can be shared and learned.
- 6. Embed choice into every part of the school day.** Not only will this maintain student interest, it will help students generalize the choice-making process across the school day. Making choices helps teach students that they can control their surroundings as well as their lives.
- 7. Give students an active role in deciding what they will learn.** Have a student captivated by dinosaurs? Turn it into a project for the whole class or simply make small changes to assignments to incorporate that preference.
- 8. Process emotions associated with the decision-making process.** Making decisions can be difficult at any age. Whether the choice involves sitting down next to an old friend, trying to meet someone new, or raising your hand for help, students make decisions from the moment they walk through the school doors. By recognizing the emotions that are connected with their decisions and encouraging students to actively and openly investigate them, educators open up an emotional dialogue that helps identify and attach meaning to particular emotions.
- 9. Enable students to emotionally self-regulate.** Prepare students for changes in routine and be in tune with their sensory needs. Although some students can ignore a noise, sit in

their seat quietly, or ignore a flickering light, these daily occurrences may need to be addressed for others. Compromises can be reached that maximize the quality of everyone's school day.

- 10. Allow your students to participate in goal setting.** In selecting a goal and putting the best strategies in motion, students engage in meaningful decision-making processes. Goals should be relevant to the individual. Everyday classroom examples include completing a certain number of math problems during independent work time, remaining seated during attendance, and appropriately raising one's hand.
- 11. Teach your students to self-monitor towards their goals.** Encouraging students to evaluate their progress serves as a litmus test for the effectiveness of their chosen strategy. That is, they can see for themselves if they are achieving their goal and brainstorm alternate strategies if they are not. In doing so, they are promoting their own independence.
- 12. Resist the temptation to make students earn a reward; make it available no matter what.** Teachers often say, "If you do five more problems, you can have..." To some, knowing that the reward is at the end of the tunnel is motivating. However, for many students with disabilities, this is not the case; in fact such comments may cause anxiety. Instead, most of these students will work just as diligently and more willingly if the reward is permanent; rather than a constant unknown.
- 13. Build strategies into interventions to promote self-determination.** Visual supports and sensory accommodations are just a few of the myriad strategies teachers can use to enable students to function more independently and purposefully.
- 14. Learn with your students.** Not a concept to be memorized but an awareness to be mastered, self-determination is a life-long process. By engaging in this process with the students, educators share, grow, and learn from and with their students.
- 15. To be co-learners, listen actively to your students.** Listening is an important skill students need to succeed in school, but they are not the only ones that need to listen. Being heard is an empowering feeling, especially when the listener is a teacher who has the ability to make changes for the student.
- 16. Remember that behavior is communicative, no matter how unconventional it may seem.** Look for and recognize the underlying meaning of behavior, and help your students (especially those with autism) acquire more conventional and acceptable forms to communicate rather than ignore or eradicate inappropriate behavior.
- 17. Build on pre-existing skills rather than targeting deficits.** By focusing on strengths, teachers help students maintain their self-worth and causal agency within their learning environment and in their lives.
- 18. Enlist peers to help support student in becoming self-determined.** Select a peer to model self-determined behavior or let students choose a peer who will learn and practice the skills.



**19. Accept and value every student.** This may seem like the most basic concept underlying the desire to teach, but we often knowingly and unknowingly group students in many ways. Recognizing the unique personality and learning style of each student shows each individual and the class as a whole that you value the meaning of diversity. In doing so, students see themselves from a different, positive perspective that hopefully influences their own self-worth and self-esteem.

**20. Finally, if you work on any of these suggestions, students will learn the knowledge and skills they need to become self-determined in their lives.** Promoting self-determination in students opens up a world of possibilities.

Holverstott, Jeanne. "20 Ways to Promote Self-Determination in Students." Intervention in School and Clinic September 2005: 39-41.

## TRANSFER OF RIGHTS

IDEA has outlined procedures for the transfer of educational rights from the parent to the student when the student reaches the age of majority (Age 18 under Georgia law). IDEA requires that the student and the parent be notified about the pending transfer of rights one year prior to reaching the age of majority in order to give the family time to consider their options and make decisions regarding the determination of competency. Under Georgia law, unless there has been a court proceeding declaring otherwise, all individuals are considered competent at the age of 18 and all legal rights transfer to the individual. This includes IDEA rights. A court decision on guardianship may take away all rights from a student or list specific rights that have been taken away, including educational rights. The parents retain all rights to notice once the student reaches 18 years of age, including notice of meetings, notice of evaluations, or changes in services or placement, notice of graduation, or any other required notices. The parents will still be invited to attend the meeting as a person with knowledge or expertise of the student's past and current performance. However, the student is the decision maker unless rights have been severed. The IEP must contain a statement that the parent and the student have been notified that rights will transfer at least one year prior to the transfer of rights.

Once the rights transfer, the student becomes the person responsible for educational decision-making under IDEA. It is good practice to also document that rights have been transferred. **For additional legal and legislative mandates affecting transition, refer to Appendix A.**

## Age of Majority: Preparing Your Child for Making Good Choices

Parents want their children to have the skills they need to succeed as adults. While this is important for every young person, youth with disabilities often face extra challenges. That's why they need to be actively involved in setting their high school goals and planning for their transition to adulthood well before they reach the age of majority.

Reaching the age of majority can be an exciting time for most students. Transferring rights to young adults who are unable to make informed decisions or take responsibility for their choices, however, carries many risks. *Will students decide to drop out of high school or accept a quick*

*diploma and become ineligible for much-needed transition services?* Many of the decisions young adults make affect their quality of life after high school.

## **Helping Your Child Prepare for the Age of Majority**

As parents, we can begin to help our children prepare for adulthood by looking at the role we play in their lives. *Do we try too hard to sway our children's decisions? Do we tend to speak for our children instead of letting them speak for themselves? Can we separate our own desires from our children's wishes?* It can be hard to let go of our parental role when we love our children and worry about their future. But we may need to step back and look at our own actions. Our role is to help our children to become comfortable making their own decisions and capable of making good choices. Children develop decision-making skills over time. Young children can practice these skills within the family. Older children can take increasing responsibility for the decisions that affect their lives.

**Age of majority** is the legal age established under state law at which an individual is no longer a minor and, as a young adult, has the right and responsibility to make certain legal choices that adults make.

Rights that transfer in Georgia at age 18:

In states that transfer educational rights at the age of majority, all of the educational rights provided to the parents transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of majority. These educational rights may include the right to. . .

- receive notice of and attend individual education program (IEP) meetings.
- consent to reevaluation.
- consent to change in placement.
- request mediation or a due process hearing to resolve a dispute about evaluation, identification, eligibility, IEP, placement, or other aspects of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

## **Teaching Young Children How to Make Decisions**

- Include your child in purchasing decisions. Does your child help select his or her own clothing and help with grocery shopping and meal planning?
- Discuss important decisions such as vacation plans and major purchases as a family. Routinely state your thoughts out loud so your children have a model for good decision making: “We are not ready to decide on that yet, let’s talk about it tomorrow after dinner;” or “Let’s gather more information before we buy this.”
- Practice with your child what he or she should do if lost.

## **Teaching Older Children How to Make Decisions**

- Encourage your child to participate in planning his or her IEP and even leading the IEP meeting.

- Role-play IEP meetings with your child ahead of time to help him or her clarify what he or she wants from the meeting. Practice how to step out of the meeting to discuss a decision in private. Ask your child if he or she wants to invite anyone to the meeting for support.

### **Additional Tips for Helping Your Child Make Informed Decisions**

- Help your child develop good working relationships with school personnel and other IEP team members so there is little disruption when he or she reaches the age of majority.
- Do not allow educators to pressure your child into making decisions he or she is not capable of handling.
- Avoid being overprotective. Do not interfere with your child's desires when it is not truly necessary.
- Stay involved even after you are no longer the primary participant in the development of your child's IEP. IDEA does not address parents' attendance at IEP meetings once a student has reached the age of majority. The school or student could, however, invite a parent to attend the meeting as an individual who is knowledgeable about the student's educational needs and abilities.

This publication on Age of Majority is a collaborative effort of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) and PACER Center.

May 2002

[www.ncset.org](http://www.ncset.org)

## **Developing Self Determination Skills**

Self Determination as defined in 1998 by Field, Martin, Miller, Ward and Wehmeyer is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal –directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations, together with a belief of oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society.

### **Benefits of developing self determination competencies**

- Students have more confidence.
- Students are empowered to share their interests and goals.
- Students become an active member of the IEP team.
- Students lead the development of their own IEPs.
- Students become peer mentors.

*According to an article published by the American Psychological Association at [psychologymatters.org](http://psychologymatters.org), Richard Ryan, PhD, and Edward Deci, PhD, researchers on Self-Determination Theory concluded that “Students experience competence when challenged and given prompt feedback. Students experience autonomy when they feel supported to explore, take imitative and develop and implement solutions for their problems. Students experience relatedness when they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these three needs are met, students are more intrinsically motivated and actively engaged in their learning... Numerous studies have found that students who are more involved in setting educational goals are more likely to reach their goals...Self-determination theory has identified ways to better motivate students to learn at all educational levels, including those with disabilities...Providing support for student self-determination in school settings is one way to enhance student learning and improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.”*

### **How to develop self determination and self advocacy skills**

There are many ways to help students with disabilities develop skills necessary for adulthood. Promoting Self-Determination in Youth with Disabilities Tips for Families and Professionals lists the following as a guide for students, parents, and professionals:

1. Promote Choice making
2. Encourage Exploration of Possibilities
3. Promote Reasonable Risk Taking
4. Encourage Problem Solving
5. Promote Self Advocacy
6. Facilitate Development of Self-Esteem
7. Develop Goal Setting and Planning
8. Help Youth Understand Their Disability

***Improving Secondary Education and Transition Services through Research. April 2003. Vol.2.Issue 1***

The development of self determination and self advocacy skills should be embedded in all areas of the curriculum. Some resources for more information on developing self determination and self- advocacy may be found at:

- Institute on Human Development and Disability – <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ihdd>
- Council for Exceptional Children – <http://www.cec.sped.org>

- Beach Center on Families and Disability -  
[http://www.beachcenter.org/education\\_and\\_training/self-determination/default.aspx](http://www.beachcenter.org/education_and_training/self-determination/default.aspx)
  - University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development Self-Determination Toolkit  
<http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/centerforhumandevlopment/selfdetermination/index.cfm>
  - Self Determination Across the Life Span (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).
  - Self Determination Learning Model (Wehmeyer et al., 2000)  
[http://www.beachcenter.org/wisdom\\_based\\_action/the\\_self-determined\\_learning\\_model\\_of\\_instruction/default.aspx](http://www.beachcenter.org/wisdom_based_action/the_self-determined_learning_model_of_instruction/default.aspx)
  - Student Lead IEP's: A Guide for Student Involvement (McGahee, Mason, Wallace & Jones, 2001); hard copies and downloadable pdf version available at  
<http://www.vermiliontpc.com/articles/Student-led%20IEP%20by%20McGahee.pdf>
- A Practical Guide for Teaching Self Determination (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998) <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED442207.pdf>
- I'm Determined <http://www.imdetermined.org/>
  - ASPIRE, Georgia Student Led IEP initiative <http://www.gaspdg.org/aspire>

### **Where to teach self determination skills**

Determine the “best fit” to start at your school or system. The ideal place to start would be during elementary school with continuing education in middle and high school. Some suggestions for classroom placement include:

- Language Arts/Health class
- Collaborative class
- Connection or exploratory classes
- Gifted classes
- Classes for students who are identified as at risk
- Career Preparatory Program
- Study Skills Class
- Family & Consumer Science
- Early Childhood Education

**Additional activities may include:**

- Local college students as volunteer instructors for a lesson or for the entire curriculum. Consider using students who can earn service learning hours from their college or university.
- Completion of a self discovery portfolio
- Self advocates as guest speakers
- Career tests
- Personality tests
- Role playing as a self advocate
- Scenarios that closely parallel the student's life

**Training**

It is very important that the instructor is trained in the values of self determination, the role of the student and the support person that will be assisting her, and potential modification in the classroom.

## **ASPIRE**

Georgia's ASPIRE, **Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement**, initiative supports the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills by teaching students to become active participants and leaders in the development of their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) thereby increasing their roles in making educational decisions based on their strengths, challenges, and desired goals.

ASPIRE is a student-led IEP initiative based on research that has shown when students lead their own IEP meetings, they become knowledgeable about their disabilities, can discuss their specific strengths and challenges, and identify and advocate for specific supports that they need to be successful in school, at home, and in the community. Students also develop increased self-confidence and self-advocacy skills which are essential in preparing them for the educational, career, and independent living decisions that they will need to make in adulthood.

### **~~STUDENT-DIRECTED IEP MEETINGS~~**

#### **The IEP**

Students frequently know best what they need and want. Not surprisingly, they are often their own best advocates. Student self-advocacy is especially important as Individualized Education Program teams make decisions about the student's future and transition to post-school activities. Increasingly, students are actively participating in their IEP meetings. Teachers and parents will need to coach and prepare students in order for them to develop the specific advocacy skills that are most relevant to IEP and transition planning. With adequate support from their teachers and families, students with disabilities can make significant contributions to their educational plans. They may assist in drafting their IEPs, present information about themselves at the IEP meetings, and actually lead the IEP meeting

#### **Student Participation**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) encourages the participation of students in their own IEP meetings. One of the requirements is that the public agency invites the child to his/her transition-related meetings at age 16 or before entry into the ninth grade. This provision encourages further involvement of the student in decisions regarding his/her own future and facilitates movement to post-school activities. Participation can begin as early as elementary school, however, students will need preparation in order to meaningfully participate in their IEP meetings. It is important for students to understand the IEP process, learn skills related to IEP development, and improve communication skills that will foster participation in the IEP meeting. Teaching students how to participate in their IEPs is one way of helping them become better self-advocates. They learn to apply self-determination, goal setting, and self-evaluation skills. When preparing students to lead their own IEPs, parents and teachers should capitalize on developing skills related to self-advocacy and self-determination. These skills include: making and

implementing choices based on personal needs, interests, and values and taking actions in one's own behalf. Students who learn to accept their disability, understand what skills they need to acquire, and know how to seek assistance are more successful in post secondary settings.

### **Approaches to success**

**It is important to start developing these practices during the elementary years in order to get students and parents involved and comfortable with the IEP process at an early age.**

**Begin teaching and practicing self-determination skills such as choice making, effective communication and goal setting as early as elementary school.**

**Allow students to identify and learn about their own disability and explore the accommodations that best assist them**

**Teach students what an IEP is designed to do and what happens in an IEP meeting to dispel any myths and preconceptions.**

**Utilize** person-centered planning and self-mapping. Person-centered planning assists the family in establishing desires for the future and developing the steps needed to ensure that their goals are achieved. Mapping is a part of person-centered planning which involves generating visual images of people who can serve as supports for the student within his/her natural community. This is an ideal way for teachers and parents to encourage self-determination at an early age in an ongoing process,

Determine, with student input, how the student can be actively involved in the IEP process and meeting then practice for that participation.

Increase the students level of participation as they advance through their school career.

### **Starting a Student-Directed IEP Program**

Before beginning a student directed IEP program, several steps should be taken:

- Involve administrators
- Ensure confidentiality
- Select students
- Involve parents
- Determine instructional goals
- Plan lessons
- Schedule time

### **Helping Students Understand IEPs**

Students should know why they have an IEP and what it contains. The students should have an understanding of the following information:

- Purpose of the IEP
- Rationale for participation
- Components of the IEP



## Helping Students Write Components of Their IEPs

Each student should participate in his/her own IEP to the greatest extent possible since students' ability to write their own IEPs varies widely.

- Students can provide input on their goals and desires for the future.
- Students can provide input on personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Students may be able to complete one or two sections of the IEP on their own for example:
  - Inviting participants
  - Listing appropriate accommodations
- Students may dictate their thoughts about a section.
- Students may provide input on appropriate accommodations.

Adapted from: *Student-led IEPs: A Guide for Student Involvement*, Council for Exceptional Children.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Gateway to Self-Determination (NGSD) <http://www.ngsd.org/everyone/what-self-determination>

NGSD Resource Guide for Families <http://ngsd.org/families/resource-guide-families>

NGSD Resource Guide for People with Disabilities <http://ngsd.org/people-disabilities/resource-guide-people-disabilities>

NGSD Resource Guide for Professionals <http://ngsd.org/professionals/resource-guide-professionals>

Transition Coalition <http://transitioncoalition.org/transition/index.php>

College & Career Readiness & Success Center <http://www.ccrscenter.org/>

Center for Self-Determination / <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/>

Self-advocacy Online <http://www.selfadvocacyonline.org/>

Kids as Self-Advocates <http://www.fvkasa.org/>

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)  
<http://www.ahead.org/publications>

Transition Toolkit: Enhancing Self Determination for Young Adults Who are Deaf-Blind  
<http://nationaldb.org/library/page/2297>

Self Advocacy manual for students with Learning Disabilities  
<http://www.ldpride.net/selfadvocacy.htm>

PACER Center: Self Determination <http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/self.asp>

PACER Center article: “How can my child be involved in the IEP process?”  
<http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c77.pdf>

NCSET: Self Determination for Middle and High School Students  
<http://ncset.org/topics/sdmhs/default.asp?topic=30>

NCSET: Self Determination for Post-Secondary Students  
<http://www.ncset.org/topics/sdpse/?topic=7>

ASPIRE, Georgia’s student led IEP initiative <http://www.gaspdg.org/aspire>

Promoting Causal Agency The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction  
[http://www.beachcenter.org/research/FullArticles/PDF/SD9A\\_Promoting%20Casual%20Agency.pdf](http://www.beachcenter.org/research/FullArticles/PDF/SD9A_Promoting%20Casual%20Agency.pdf)

I'm Determined <http://www.imdetermined.org/>

The previous sources may be of help to you as you consider the transitional needs of your student. While these sources are provided to assist you in your search, it is your responsibility to investigate them to determine their value and appropriateness for your situation and needs. These sources are provided as a sample of available resources and are for informational purposes only. **THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DOES NOT MONITOR, EVALUATE, OR ENDORSE THE CONTENT OR INFORMATION OF THESE RESOURCES. NONE OF THESE RESOURCES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THE ADVICE OR GUIDANCE OF THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.**