

Self-determination has been 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, Alverson, et al., 2015). Students with disabilities who are self-determined are more likely to experience post-school success (Mazzotti et al., 2021). The positive impact self-determination skills have upon school performance and positive postsecondary outcomes prompted the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition to recommend educators assess and teach critical self-determination skills (Field et al., 1998). Quality self-determination instruction begins with quality self-determination assessment. To ensure students with disabilities are developing self-determination skills, it is important to have effective assessments to measure growth and support needs over time (Shogren et al., 2021).

What is Self-Determination Assessment?

Self-determination assessments measure a variety of skill areas. These areas may include autonomy, choosing and expressing goals, taking action to achieve goals, self-regulation, self-direction, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. Assessments are completed by the student, family members, and other Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members, and then discussed and utilized to make data-based decisions for a student’s transition to adult life (Carter et al., 2009).

What the Research Says

Overtime, multiple self-determination assessments have been developed specifically for students with disabilities. Each of these assessments measures slightly different aspects of self-determination, yet all have evidence of validity with one or more population.

- The *ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment* examines student self-determination skills and opportunities at school to exhibit self-determination skills. The assessment contains three sections: choosing goals, expressing goals, and taking action. Results can be used to compare a student’s current level of self-determination with their opportunity for demonstrating self-determination (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995). The *ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment* was validated with over 300 students in middle and high school with mild to moderate disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities) from four states (Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment, n.d.).
- The *AIR Self-Determination Scale* assesses a student’s level of self-determination, detects strengths and areas for growth, and identifies goals for a student’s IEP. The assessment was validated with 95 middle and high school students with autism spectrum disorders ranging in age from 13 to 21 years old. Results showed the *AIR Self-Determination Scale* had evidence to support its use for students with autism spectrum disorders (Chou et al., 2017).
- The *Arc’s Self-Determination Scale-Adolescent Version* assesses self-determination across four areas: autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1995). The assessment was validated with students with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and autism spectrum disorders (Wehmeyer, 1996; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2014).
- The *Self-Determination Inventory* examines the skill areas of volitional action (i.e., autonomy, self-initiation), agentic action (e.g., self-direction), and action-control beliefs (e.g., psychological empowerment, self-realization; Shogren et al., 2020). This assessment has evidence to support its use with students ages 13 to 22 with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, other

health impairments) and without disabilities (Shogren et al., 2020). The *Self-Determination Inventory* was also validated with 2,338 adolescents with disabilities and 2,352 adolescents without disabilities across racial and ethnic backgrounds (i.e., White, Black, Hispanic, Other) and urbanicity (i.e., urban, semiurban, rural) in 39 states (Shogren et al., 2020).

Guidelines for Practice

When selecting self-determination assessments, it is critical to consider the format (e.g., pencil-paper, online) and accessibility of the assessment (Rowe, Mazzotti, et al., 2015). To engage students in the process, provide them a choice in the assessment they complete as well as the format they use to complete the assessment. When completed, review the results with students, and provide students an opportunity to summarize the results of their assessment at their next IEP meeting.

When conducting self-determination assessments, consider using multiple assessments over time. Repeated assessment, involving input from multiple people (e.g., student, parent/guardian, family, teachers), will help to create a complete picture of the student's self-determination strengths, preferences, interests, and needs (Rowe, Mazzotti, et al., 2015). Use the results of the assessments to determine instructional priorities, transition services, and community experiences to help students achieve their postschool goals.

Additional Resources

ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools/choicemaker-self-determination-assessment

AIR Self-Determination Scale

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools/air-self-determination-assessment

ARC Self-Determination Scale and Procedural Guidelines

thearc.org/wp-content/uploads/forchapters/The%20Arc%27s%20Self-Determination%20Scale%20-%20Adolescent%20version%20REV2013.pdf

beachcenter.lsi.ku.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Procedural%20Guidelines%20to%20Adolescent%20Version%20of%20The%20Arc's%20Self-Determina....pdf

Self-Determination Inventory System

selfdetermination.ku.edu/homepage/assessments/

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