

Self-determination drives the transition education process. “The process of assessing and teaching self-determination skills, then providing opportunities for students to use their learned self-determination skills, represents the engine driving secondary transition education” (Martin et al., 2020, p. 53). The Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition (CEC DCDT) strongly believes self-determination instruction needs to be implemented as a transition service. Self-determination instruction should support transition-age youth to attain their annual goals, which in turn, are necessary to achieve students’ postsecondary goals (Field, et al., 1998).

## What are Essential Self-Determination Skills?

Field et al. (1998) consider self-determination as the skills and knowledge that enable students to set goals based on understanding their strengths and limits. Self-determination skills may perhaps be best defined by describing what a self-determined person does. Self-determined people make choices, set goals, develop plans to attain their goals, take action to implement the plans, solve problems, evaluate progress, and adjust the plan or strategies as needed to attain goals (Rowe, Alverson, et al., 2015).

## What the Research Says

Self-determination can be embedded within core content instruction aligned with state standards (Rowe, Mazzotti, et al., 2015). For example, the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* (SDLMI) contains three parts: set a goal, make a plan, and adjust your goal. The SDLMI can be used in conjunction with Illinois Learning Standards (e.g., SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions [one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led] with diverse partners

on grades 11-12 topics, text, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively; Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). In addition, research encourages teaching self-determination within Multitiered Systems of Supports (MTSS). MTSS involves providing instruction at three tiers to promote student success. Tier 1 is provided to all students, Tier 2 includes small group instruction for students who need more support than Tier 1, and Tier 3 provides intensive individualized instruction for students that extends beyond what they receive in Tier 1 or 2. Shogren et al. (2016) identified several ways in which self-determination instruction can be implemented within an MTSS framework. They suggest teaching skills like self-advocacy and choice making at Tier 1. At Tier 2, they advise teaching the same skills as Tier 1 but in small groups and documenting student growth using self-determination assessment and progress monitoring. At Tier 3, they recommend using individualized self-determination curricula (e.g., *ChoiceMaker*, *Whose Future is it Anyway?*).

## Guidelines for Practice

To teach students needed self-determination skills, the CEC DCDT believes assessment, specific lesson materials, and the educational environment need to provide opportunities for students to learn and practice self-determination skills (Field et al., 1998). DCDT suggests educators teach students skills and provide them with opportunities to:

- actively participate in the transition assessment process and learn to understand their interests, strengths, needs, and how their disability impacts them
- learn skills needed to actively engage in their IEP meetings and receive opportunities to actively engage in these meetings
- learn essential goal setting and goal attainment skills

## Additional Resources

Numerous lesson packages exist to teach students self-determination skills. Educators may download most of these at no cost and almost all have one or more research studies supporting their effectiveness.

### Me! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy

This lesson package teaches disability awareness in relation to each person's strengths and needs. Based upon an understanding of a person's strengths and needs, the lessons systematically teach students self-advocacy skills. Educators may download this lesson package from the website at no-cost.

[www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy](http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy)

### ChoiceMaker Lesson Packages

Teachers use the ChoiceMaker curriculum and its numerous lesson packages to teach essential student self-determination skills. The lesson packages include the Self-Directed IEP, Choosing Employment Goals, Choosing Personal Goals, Choosing Educational Goals, and Take Action: Making Goals Happen. These may be downloaded at no-cost from this website.

[www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/choicemaker-curriculum](http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/choicemaker-curriculum)

[www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/choicemaker-curriculum/choicemaker-self-determination-materials](http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/choicemaker-curriculum/choicemaker-self-determination-materials)

### Self-Directed Transition Planning (SDTP)

Educators use the SDTP lessons to teach their students the knowledge needed to actively participate in their transition-focused IEP meetings. Teachers deliver the lessons using PowerPoint files and a detailed Teacher's Guide provides step-by-step instructional suggestions. It may be downloaded at no-cost from this website.

[www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/student-directed-transition-planning](http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/student-directed-transition-planning)

### Whose Future Is It Anyway?

This lesson package teaches students overall self-determination skills and prepares students to actively participate in their IEP meetings. This lesson package may be downloaded at the following website at no-cost.

[www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway](http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway)

### Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)

Educators use the SDLMI three-step process to enable students to attain their goals. Across each phase students answer four questions. Educators may download the instructional packet at no cost at this website.

[selfdetermination.ku.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Teachers-Guide-2019-Updated-Logos.pdf](http://selfdetermination.ku.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Teachers-Guide-2019-Updated-Logos.pdf)

### Steps to Self-Determination

This commercially available lesson package assists students to define goals important to them and what they need to do to attain these goals. The lessons assist students in learning about themselves and how to obtain support from others to help attain goals. This lesson package is available for a fee from the publisher.

[www.proedinc.com/Products/11810/steps-to-self-determination-a-curriculum-to-help-adolescents-learn-to-achieve-their-goalssecond-edition.aspx](http://www.proedinc.com/Products/11810/steps-to-self-determination-a-curriculum-to-help-adolescents-learn-to-achieve-their-goalssecond-edition.aspx)

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