

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) is a legislative mandate focused on improving the employment outcomes of secondary students with disabilities. WIOA requires that funding from the State/Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System be used to ensure that state vocational rehabilitation agencies (e.g., Illinois Department of Human Services [IDHS]) in collaboration with schools provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities who qualify, or could potentially qualify, for vocational rehabilitation services. Under WIOA, teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors are required to engage students in five required pre-ETS: (a) job exploration counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs, (d) workplace readiness training to develop social skills and

independent living, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. This research brief will focus on instruction in *self-advocacy*.

What is Instruction in Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy is defined as the ability to understand and communicate one’s needs, interests, and views to others in an effective manner. It also involves the ability to make informed decisions. Students learn to become self-advocates by acquiring self-advocacy skills in four critical areas: (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of rights, (c) communication, and (d) leadership (Test et al., 2005). The language used to discuss self-advocacy is sometimes synonymous with the term self-determination: a set of behaviors an individual engages in to make vital changes within their life (Burke et al., 2020; Test et al., 2005). Table 1 provides a list of sample self-advocacy skills.

Table 1
Sample Self-Advocacy Skills

Knowledge of Self	Knowledge of Rights	Communication	Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengths Preferences Goals Dreams Interests Support needs Characteristics of one’s disability Responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal rights Community rights Consumer rights Steps to redress violations Steps to advocate for change Knowledge of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assertiveness Negotiation Articulation Body language Use of assistive technology Listening Persuasion Compromise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of group’s rights Advocating for others or causes Political action Team dynamics and roles Knowledge of resources

Note. Table based on Test et al. (2005).

Research on Self-Advocacy

When students with disabilities develop self-advocacy and self-determination during high school, they are more likely to experience education, employment, and independent living success after high school (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Research promoting self-advocacy skills has also been associated with other outcomes, such as students' (a) knowledge of rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (Wood et al., 2010); (b) participation within their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings (Test et al., 2005); and (c) development of disability self-awareness (Mazzotti, et al., 2018). In addition to these positive outcomes, instruction in self-advocacy is rated by educators as one of the most important pre-ETS in the transition to work for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2020). Instruction in self-advocacy can be accomplished by providing frequent opportunities for students to practice skills that will make them self-advocates (e.g., providing opportunities for them to make choices; Abery & Karapetyan). By instructing students to become self-advocates, educators foster independence and decrease the need for students to depend on others. For students with more extensive support needs, educators should also systematically foster opportunities for students to communicate needs and wants across modalities (e.g., verbal and nonverbal language; Morningstar, 2017). Educators may also consider using facilitated methods of instruction when providing self-advocacy instruction, such as person-centered planning (e.g., goal setting) or direct instruction (e.g., the use of curricula that promote self-advocacy; Test et al., 2005).

Guidelines for Practice

To teach self-advocacy and self-determination skills to students with disabilities, educators need to know practices that promote self-advocacy and self-determination and methods for incorporating them into daily instruction (Carter et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2015). For example, teachers should consider using free curricula, supported by research, to teach self-advocacy and self-determination to students with disabilities (e.g., *Whose Future Is It Anyway?*; NTACTION, 2021). Practitioners can also embed self-advocacy and self-determina-

tion instruction into (a) IEP and transition planning processes, (b) classroom activities and assessments requiring students to advocate for IEP accommodations, and (c) classroom instruction aligned with state standards (Carter et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2015; Test et al., 2005). It is also critical educators consider and understand how a student's culture and family may impact the student's self-advocacy and self-determination (Suk et al., 2020).

Additional Resources

ME! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness & Self-Advocacy

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy

Resources: Instruction in Self-Advocacy

www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/resources/resources-instruction-self-advocacy

Whose Future Is It Anyway Curriculum

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway

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This research brief was developed by the Illinois Center for Transition and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through a contract with the Illinois State Board of Education. Information presented may not reflect the position or policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.

