STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO STUDENTS
OVERVIEW

- Developing self-advocacy as a skill set
- Understanding the importance of this skill set to successful transition planning
- Age Appropriate IEP participation
- IEP Facilitation (high school)
- Resources
Philosophy of Self Determination

- Believing you can control your own destiny.
- Combination of attitudes and abilities that lead people to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach these goals.
- Self-determination is about being in charge, but is not the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence.
- Means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one's life.
- Practicing self-determination also means one experiences the consequences of making choices.
Student Rights

➤ I have the rights to know what my disability is and how it affects my ability to learn, live independently and be a part of a lifelong learning system.

➤ I have the right to be provided information regarding assessment, services and Individualized Education Program (IEP) in a language and format that I understand.

➤ I have the right to participate in my IEP meetings.

➤ I have the right to determine my own goals for transition and decision making.

➤ I have the right to have individuals who understand me as well as my disability, serve on my IEP team.

➤ I have the right to accept or refuse services.

➤ I have the right to disagree with my IEP and to receive help in writing a complaint, requesting mediation or a due process hearing.
Student Responsibilities

- It is my responsibility to ask question, request help, seek self-advocacy training, and peer support so that I can learn about my disability and advocate for my needs.

- It is my responsibility to ask questions until I understand.

- It is my responsibility to attend all meetings and actively participate in planning for my adult life.

- It is my responsibility to invite people (i.e. friend, parent, grandparents, coach, teacher) I trust and who know me well.

- It is my responsibility to understand that refusing services may affect my school/work program, and I may not get those services back.

- It is my responsibility to follow through and be cooperative with any process that I request.
WIOA Pre-Employment Transition Services

Includes the category: Instruction in Self-Advocacy

“Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence.”

Source: [http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/instruction-self-advocacy](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/instruction-self-advocacy)
Realities of Adulthood

- At age 18, adult life begins
- At age 18, educational rights transfer to the student
- At age 18, youth can apply for credit, make their own financial and medical decisions, etc.
- After graduation, the IEP ends, thus school case management ends
Be a Natural Support

- Be creative and willing
- Learn and respect the persons interests, likes, and dislikes
- Enhance the quality and security of their life
- Nurture and support the individual
- Do not do “for” but do “with”
- Promote independence and personal growth
- Foster laughter, attention, and respect
- Support choices and be a safety net
- KNOW when to back away!
Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

What are we doing to help students begin to develop this skill set?

- **Practiced in the Home**
  Modeling of work ethic, financial planning, the right to fail
  Taking responsibility for doctor appointments, etc.

- **Practiced in school**
  Modeling of organizational skills
  Defining and modeling effective meetings
  Co-facilitating and co-writing own IEP
  Talking to general education teachers about required accommodations and modifications

- **Practiced in society**
  Participating in mentorship programs
  Participate in hobbies, volunteer opportunities and community organizations- develop friendships and connections for an additional support network
Understanding of Disability

- **We are well-intentioned**: Impulse to “protect” individual’s feelings often leads us to withhold information and do too much.

- **However**, understanding own disability, starting in school, leads to empowerment and ownership of self:
  - Reduce feelings of inferiority when it is just part of life—reduces stigma.
  - Only talking about the positive does not keep the student from thinking and worrying about the negative.
  - With disability education, student can explain his/her own needs and contributions.
  - This is a crucial component of self-advocacy to be effective.

**Source:** [https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED478553.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED478553.pdf)
Wonderful resource for helping students understand what self-determination, disclosure and disability means for them. These are highly personal and individualized decisions to make and this curriculum helps teach those personal decision making skills.
IEP MEETING: the ULTIMATE transition tool
IEP Participation from Students

- Understanding of self
  - Disability
  - Accommodations and Modifications
  - How and when to disclose and advocate
  - Transition goals and how to work toward them

- Confidence

- Tangential benefits
  - Parental buy-in and support
  - Other school staff buy-in and support (general ed and administration)
Age Appropriate Participation

Natural age progressions:

- Pre-school
- Elementary School (K-5)
- Middle School (6-8)
- High School

Varying levels of responsibility and participation at each level. Common elements include wording and conversation should be age appropriate (not just teacher-speak) and ensure that students are always part of decision making process.
What can student participation look like?

http://www.imdetermined.org/quick_links/modules/module_four

Source: Virginia Department of Education
The I’m Determined project
www.imdetermined.org
Pre-school Participation

- Likes and dislikes
- Friends, family, important people, pets
- Concerns
- Methods of participation: collage, PowerPoint, drawings

There are several ways to engage preschool students in an IEP meeting in developmentally appropriate ways. Most importantly, they are being introduced to the idea of talking about themselves to adults and having a conversation about school.

This plants the seed that the student has control and investment in their educational process and are not along for the ride.
Elementary School

- Likes and dislikes
- Friends, family, important people and pets
- What is student’s disability (in own words)
- What does he/she need to make school work for him/her?
- Favorite classes/subjects. Any concerns?
- **Methods of Participation:** collage, PowerPoint, All About Me book
- Elementary version of One-pager
One-pager

- This is a form that could begin to be introduced at the 5th grade level, but certainly in middle and high school.
- This is a student’s account of their own information for the purposes of informing others of what they need to know.

Resources and examples:

- *I’m Determined* template (PowerPoint slide with video option imbedded into the slide)
- MYT example/template. Can be modified or reworded as necessary
# One-pager of Who I Am

**Name:** jenny

**How to contact me:** my email address at school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Would Like You To Know</th>
<th>How I Learn Best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I like to play tennis and sing.</td>
<td>- I am not a good reader, so I need to hear the lecture from the teacher and talk with others about the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I have a younger brother and sister and I help take care of them while my mom works.</td>
<td>- I am a very strong oral learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I have a dog and three cats</td>
<td>- I also learn well from hands-on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I want to own my own nursery and landscaping business</td>
<td>- I cannot listen to a lecture or discussion and write good notes at the same time—my brain doesn’t work that way. It doesn’t mean I am being lazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My favorite subjects are PE, Ag Ed and choir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reading is hard for me, but I am getting better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications/Accommodations</th>
<th>What I Need From You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I need a copy of your PowerPoint or lecture notes ahead of time so I can refer to them or jot down notes as you are talking.</td>
<td>- I need you to understand that I have a learning disability in reading. This does not mean I am dumb—it means that my brain learns differently. I am smart and I have good ideas—I just need to have the text in audio form to go along with the visual form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I need to have text books in audio form. My reading comprehension goes way up when I am listening to the text rather than visually reading it.</td>
<td>- I need you to ask me if you have questions about me or what I need to learn well. Please don’t assume I am being lazy or can’t do something. I want to learn!</td>
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<td>- I need to have tests read to me.</td>
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## Timeline for Teaching Self-Advocacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Elementary Students</strong></th>
<th><strong>Middle School Students</strong></th>
<th><strong>High School Students</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Practice expressing needs and asking for help</td>
<td>- Begin writing and participating in IEPs</td>
<td>- Provide students with list of accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understanding accommodations and goals in IEPs</td>
<td>- Understand the disability and how it presents itself</td>
<td>- Have students set up meetings with ALL teachers to discuss needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Discuss learning styles and multiple intelligences for all students</td>
<td>- Listing accommodations needed in various classes</td>
<td>- Practice advocating for needs in an appropriate way (one-pager and direct conversations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Practice coping strategies for disability</td>
<td>- Explaining accommodations to teachers</td>
<td>- Teach laws of IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student input for IEP goals and accommodations</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Monitor own goals; academic and behavioral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be sure students are aware of accommodations</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop self-advocacy plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Present various sections of IEP in meeting</td>
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</table>
Middle School Participation

- Likes and dislikes
- Present level
- Goal development – what are personal goals and goals for school?
- **Methods of participation:** PowerPoint, goal sheets, helping with sections of IEP
- **One-pager**
  - disability definition (in own words)
  - facts about self (what should teachers know)
  - necessary accommodations and modifications
High School Participation

- Likes and dislikes
- Transition goals (career, hobbies, schooling, independent living and decision-making goals)
- Goals for high school: classes he/she wants to take, skills he/she wants to learn
- Modifications and accommodations; knowing what works and what doesn’t (and when)
- **Methods of participation**: PowerPoint, meeting facilitation
- **One-pager**: what is disability, facts about self, accommodations and modifications
Preparation

- Understanding what an IEP is: Student’s Guide to IEP (don’t be afraid to teach the law!)
- Understanding what the student’s disability is and what it means for and to the student (day to day life in school, at home, with friends, etc.)
- Develop an understanding of self-advocacy and what it means
- What are everyone’s rights and responsibilities
  - Student
  - Special education
  - General education
  - Parents
  - Administration
- Understanding how to work as a team without losing your voice
- Developing skills for facilitating or co-facilitating a meeting
Levels of Student Involvement at the Meeting

**Level 1:** Student presents information about or reads one section of the IEP.

**Level 2:** Student explains his or her disability, shares information in individual strengths and weaknesses (present levels of performance), and explains the accommodations needed. Student presents Level 1 information and may suggest new IEP goals that he/she helped develop.

**Level 3:** Students lead the IEP conference, including Level 1 and Level 2 responsibility, introductions and closing.

*How to Help Students Lead Their IEP Meetings (Mason et al)*
Ways to Make This Doable

- **Start small and grow:** Consider your first year as a pilot and expand from there.
- **Find your allies:** Who will share your enthusiasm and energy for the pilot. Find fellow teachers, parents and admin.
- **Who can help?** (MYT, resources, available templates)
- **Keys to success:**
  - Use understandable language and wording
  - Develop student buy in (advance instruction and support)
  - View IEP development as a partnership rather than a solo responsibility
  - Remember the long-term and life changing benefits.
Resources

- The I’m Determined Project (Virginia Dept. of Education): [www.imdetermined.org](http://www.imdetermined.org)
- Project 10 Transition Education Network: [http://project10.info/](http://project10.info/)
- Natural Supports: [https://www.dds.ca.gov/Publications/docs/Natural_Supports.pdf](https://www.dds.ca.gov/Publications/docs/Natural_Supports.pdf)
Contact:

- Tamara Warlick, North Central Independent Living Services
twarlick@ncils.org or 406-452-9834

- Mary Di Biase, Montana Youth Transitions/NCILS
mytmary@bresnan.net or 406-450-6198