

Self-Advocacy Skills and Self-Determination in Personalized Learning

Considerations for Families and Communities

Personalized learning (PL) offers students more decision-making authority over where, when, and how learning takes place and is demonstrated. For students with disabilities to succeed in personalized settings, they must learn, practice, and develop strong **self-advocacy skills and self-determination (SA/SD)**, which have been shown to improve educational and life outcomes. Families and communities can support students in the development of SA/SD by helping them understand themselves, explore their interests, and practice SA/SD, and by advocating for students' inclusion in meetings (such as IEP and transition meetings) where decisions are made about their education and lives.



DEFINING KEY TERMS

Personalized learning is a process in which students' learning experiences are tailored to their individual needs, skills, and interests, enabling them to take ownership of their learning.

Self-determination is a dispositional characteristic that enables a person to act in service of freely chosen goals and make or cause things to happen in their own life.

Self-advocacy skills include understanding yourself, your rights, and your needs, and communicating that understanding—leading to self-determination.

ADVICE FROM PARENTS:

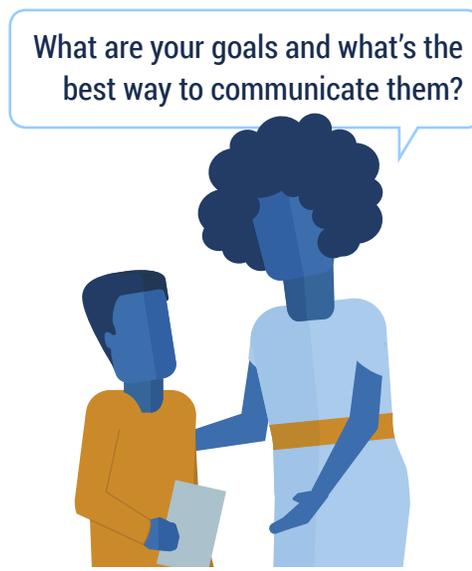
“Parents of children with disabilities—children like my daughter—strive day and night to secure the resources they need to grow and develop. But as she matures, we also must ensure that she is equipped and empowered to identify her own strengths, skills, and interests, and that she's able to self-advocate for learning opportunities that will help her determine her own path and achieve her dreams.”

— Karla Phillips, *Policy Director, Personalized Learning, ExcelinEd and parent of a child with a disability*

Not Encouraging Student Self-Advocacy



Encouraging Self-Advocacy



TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP SA/SD IN PLS, YOU CAN:

1. **Learn more about your child's disability, the importance of SA/SD to your child's success, and how you can work with educators to help your child practice SA/SD in a personalized setting.** *Example:* A parent of a student with a learning or attention issue can visit Understood.org to learn how their child experiences education and how parents can be better advocates for their child's needs.
2. **Leverage your professional and social networks to provide your child or a child you work with real-world opportunities to develop SA/SD around their areas of interest.** *Example:* A parent can take the child to work for a job-shadowing experience, helping the child understand how different people in the workplace advocate for themselves.
3. **Learn how to recognize whether your child (or a child you work with) is self-advocating or is in need of more support to develop these skills. You can work with the child and his teacher on setting goals to increase the child's skills and offering opportunities to practice them.** *Example:* A social worker at a community center could monitor progress over time and observe how well a child with a disability is advocating for herself, and then offer ways the child can improve her self-advocacy skills.
4. **Advocate for family, community, and student engagement in planning implementation of PL through the PTA, school boards, and school site councils.** *Example:* Speak during the public comment period of your school board meeting about the importance of SA/SD for students with disabilities, especially in personalized settings.