

# Self-Advocacy Skills and Self-Determination in Personalized Learning

## Considerations for Students

**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. To improve capacity for SA/SD, students (with the support of educators, family members, mentors, and coaches) must be offered opportunities to engage with educators to better understand the nature of their disabilities and practice these skills, and must advocate to be included in decisions that affect 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.

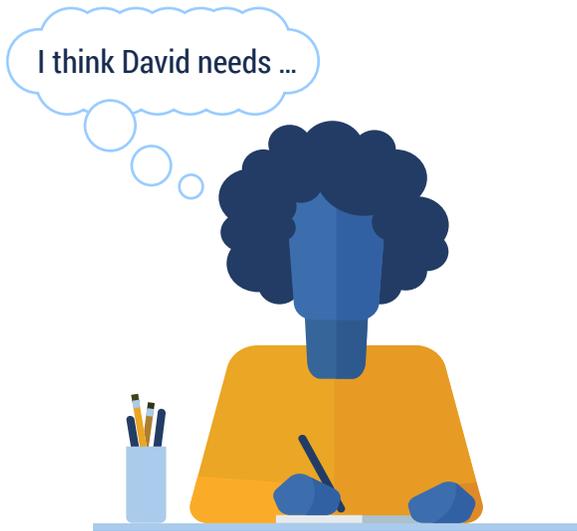
**Self-determination** is a dispositional characteristic that enables a person to act in service of freely chosen goals and make or cause things to happen in their own life.

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

“Understanding the way I think and being able to communicate that to different allies, like teachers, professors, coaches, and employers, has helped me discover which accommodations will allow me to be most successful. Understanding accommodations in the context of my own needs and strengths has made all the difference.”

— Carly Priest, *Eye to Eye Diplomat*,  
*College of the Holy Cross*

**Not Encouraging Student Self-Advocacy**



**Encouraging Self-Advocacy**



**TO HELP DEVELOP SA/SD...**

- 1. Learn more about your disability and the importance of SA/SD to your success.**  
*Example:* You can ask your teacher to support an independent study of your disability, including specific rights you have, the history of disability rights, or the specifics about your disability and what that means to your learning and success.
- 2. Participate in opportunities to practice SA/SD.** *Example:* You can take part in a hands-on learning project—such as service learning or an internship—in an area of interest outside of school, and use the project as an opportunity to practice SA/SD.
- 3. Reflect on any barriers to learning you've faced in your school's PL setting, and talk to your teacher or principal about addressing that challenge.** *Example:* You can ask your principal about the possibility of adopting a Universal Design for Learning framework at your school as part of its personalized learning strategy.
- 4. Assess how confident you feel about advocating for yourself in school.** *Example:* You can set up a meeting with your teacher to create a plan to advance, assess, and reflect on your attainment of self-advocacy skills.
- 5. Request to be a part of any meeting that will involve decisions about your learning and future.** *Example:* Ask to be engaged with and consulted; you may eventually lead your IEP meeting, transition meeting, or a meeting about developing a personalized learning plan.