



SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN PERSONALIZED LEARNING




CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS



SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN PERSONALIZED LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Personalized learning systems (PLS) offer 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. School counselors play an important role in helping students develop, practice, and exercise these capacities.

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.

SA/SD ARE EMBEDDED IN THE ASCA MINDSETS & BEHAVIORS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS: K–12 COLLEGE- AND CAREER- READINESS STANDARDS FOR EVERY STUDENT

While all school professionals play a role in supporting student development of self-advocacy skills and self-determination, the field of school counseling embraces these ideas and incorporates them into its best practices. In particular, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) Mindsets & Behaviors are centered on three domains—**academic**, **career**, and **social/emotional**—that rely on students building

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Helping students develop essential self-advocacy skills and self-determination supports their academic, career, and social/emotional development and prepares them for a successful transition to opportunities beyond high school.

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a foundation of self-determination and self-advocacy skills. The standards that school counselors aim to help students achieve include standards relating to:

- **Mindset:** The attitudes and beliefs students have about themselves in relation to their academics; and
- **Behavior:** Outward signs that a student is engaged in learning, including tactics to aid student learning, self-management and persistence, and social interactions with peers and adults.

SPECIFIC ASCA MINDSETS AND BEHAVIORS THAT CONNECT WITH SA/SD

When self-advocacy skills and self-determination capacities are developed, students have:

- Self-confidence in their ability to succeed (M 2)
- An understanding that postsecondary education and lifelong learning are necessary for long-term career success (M 4)
- A belief in using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes (M 5)
- A positive attitude toward work and learning (M 6)

When self-advocacy skills and self-determination capacities are developed, students can:

- Demonstrate critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions (B-LS 1)
- Apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning (B-LS 4)
- Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals (B-LS 7)
- Actively engage in challenging coursework (B-LS 8)
- Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals (B-SMS 5)
- Demonstrate ability to overcome barriers to learning (B-SMS 6)
- Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities (B-SMS 10)
- Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert themselves (B-SS 8)

SPECIFIC ASCA SCHOOL COUNSELING COMPETENCIES THAT RELATE TO STUDENT SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS AND SELF-DETERMINATION

School counselors should have an understanding of:

- Human development theories and developmental issues affecting student success (II-A-5)

- Leadership principles, including sources of power and authority and formal and informal leadership (III-A-1)
- Ways to use student data to demonstrate a need for systemic change in areas such as course enrollment patterns; equity and access; and achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps (III-B-3c)
- Principles of working with various student populations based on characteristics such as ethnic and racial background, English language proficiency, special needs, religion, gender, and income (IV-A-7)
- Strategies to implement individual student planning, such as strategies for appraisal, advisement, goal-setting, decision-making, social skills, transition, or postsecondary planning (IV-B-2b)

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

1. **Establish a comprehensive school counseling program as part of the foundation for PLS implementation, and ensure that implementation is inclusive to the needs of a variety of learners.** *Example:* Ensure that all students have access to information about career development and postsecondary education opportunities and that students with disabilities are empowered to act in a self-determined manner in taking advantage of these opportunities.
2. **Learn more about the needs of students with disabilities and how you can leverage PLS structures to support student SA/SD.** *Example:* Participate in a professional learning opportunity on supporting the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success for students with disabilities.
3. **Work with other educators to identify out-of-school experiences that reinforce students' personalized learning plans and IEP goals.** *Example:* Work with teachers to support students' career development goals by helping identify rigorous student internships that can fulfill academic credits.
4. **Help measure student progress around SA/SD in PLS.** *Example:* Participate in classroom behavior observations, and use those observations as a foundation to meet with and advise teachers on best practices in supporting students with disabilities as they develop SA/SD and other ASCA Mindsets.
5. **Ensure that students are engaged in decisions relating to their goals and lives.** *Example:* Advocate for and facilitate student involvement in the development of personalized learning plans, IEPs, and transition plans, and help empower students to develop the capacity to facilitate these meetings as they get older.