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# Value Me: The Importance of Self-Determination Skills for Effective Transition Planning for Employment and Post-Secondary Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities

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Value Me: The Importance of Self-Determination Skills for Effective Transition Planning for  
Employment and Post-Secondary Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities

May 2019

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MERRIMACK COLLEGE

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IN

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CAPSTONE TITLE: VALUE ME: The Importance of Self-Determinations Skills for Effective  
Transition Planning for Individuals with Disabilities

AUTHOR: Kayla Remail

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To my mother, Shelley and grandmother, Geraldine, you've each worked tirelessly for me to reach my dreams and for that I cannot thank you enough. To my friends, regardless of where we are in our lives, your continued support has meant the world to me.

### Abstract

A critical component of educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities is the implementation of a transition plan. Transition plans are applied throughout the individuals' educational career to provide a positive and comfortable shift from school to postschool life whether that be continuing education or employment. These plans are part of a student's Individualize Education Plan and are a collaborative effort among faculty, staff, and support in the student's life. In order for these plans to be effective, students need to learn the skills of self-determination to take a leadership role in their transition plan, individualize education plan and throughout their life. Through a review of literature, a data analysis, and recommendations, this paper examines the importance of self-determination skills on individuals with disabilities. When these skills are taught in the classroom and applied throughout the student's life, it provides the student with better employment and postsecondary opportunities.

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## Introduction

Transitioning from high-school to post-school life is challenging for any young adult. For individuals with disabilities the challenges are often times more complicated and grueling. Access to services that were once readily available become harder to find and receive and educational barriers to employment and post-school opportunities are a continued concern. According to the National Organization of Disability “only 35% of people with disabilities reported full-time or part-time employment, compared with 78% of those who do not have disabilities” (Brooke, Revell & Wehman, 2009, p.58). Individuals with disabilities are more likely to drop out before completing high school which makes access to college almost unseen. As stated by Brooke et al. (2009), “people with disabilities remain twice as likely to drop out of high school” (p.58). As conducted in the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found roughly 45% of individuals with disabilities are enrolled in post-secondary programs compared to 53% of peers from the general population (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Transition plans become a crucial focal point for individuals with disabilities. Transitioning or a transition plan are terms used in education to describe the time a student with an individualized education plan or IEP, prepares for life after high school. The transition plan is part of the IEP which is discussed when the student turns 16 but some districts implement the transition plan earlier. The plan is a collaborative effort among the student, faculty, and parent. In the transition meeting, it is encouraged that the strengths of the student are identified, their postschool aspirations and what services are needed to help the student achieve their goals. In Kellems and Morningstar (2010), the Student Interview for Transition Planning is one example used in transition meetings to gauge questions administered to the student and responses of the students. This gives the

student, faculty and staff a basis to start constructing transition goals and how the student will go about attaining certain aspects of the transition plan.

**Student Interview for Transition Planning**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_

*Interests, Preferences, and Strengths:*

**POSTSECONDARY LIVING**  
 I plan to move away from home when I am \_\_\_\_\_ (age).  
 I plan to live in: \_\_\_\_\_ a large city \_\_\_\_\_ a small town \_\_\_\_\_ country (rural area)  
 If you have a particular place in mind, list it here: \_\_\_\_\_

Places I will go in my community:

_____ banks	_____ movie theaters	_____ public library
_____ restaurants	_____ work	_____ shopping malls
_____ friends' houses	_____ video rental store	_____ church
_____ grocery store	_____ parks/recreational spots	_____ golf courses
_____ discount stores	_____ community centers	_____ vote
_____ night spots	_____ employment agency	_____ other

When I live on my own, I plan to live in:

_____ An apartment	_____ A condominium	_____ Dormitory
_____ A mobile home	_____ A house	_____ Other _____

I want to live:

_____ Alone	_____ With my husband/wife
_____ With parents	_____ With one or more roommate(s)
_____ With someone to assist me	

To reach this goal, I will need to: \_\_\_\_\_

These are the skills which I currently demonstrate at home:

_____ Cleaning	_____ Cooking	_____ Grocery shopping
_____ Laundry	_____ Checking account	_____ Scheduling of appointments
_____ Debit card	_____ Savings account	_____ Taking medications
_____ Budgeting	_____ Clothes shopping	_____ Cell phone
_____ Home repairs	_____ Paying bills	_____ Video games
_____ Computer use	_____ Other _____	

When I live on my own, I plan to get around by:

_____ Driving my own car	_____ Riding my bike	_____ Walking
_____ Riding a motorcycle	_____ Riding with a relative	_____ Other
_____ Riding public transportation	_____ Riding with friends	

I currently have a: \_\_\_\_\_ Driver's Permit \_\_\_\_\_ Driver's License \_\_\_\_\_ Neither

To reach this goal, I will need to: \_\_\_\_\_

These plans are implemented so the period from school to post-school life is easier for individuals with disabilities. According to White and Weiner (2004), “83% of students in special education are unemployed at graduation transition” (p. 149). When creating transition plans often times individuals with disabilities are either not involved in the process or their future plans are not heard. Backed by

research from numerous individuals, self-determination skills are imperative for individuals to advocate for themselves throughout the transition process and beyond. As stated in Martin et. al (2003), “research has shown that the core component skills of self-determination are correlated with an improved quality of life for adults with disabilities” (Thoma & Getzel, 2005, p. 234). In order for transition plans to be effective, teachers and school districts must prioritize and implement self-determination skills throughout their daily curriculum so individuals with disabilities will have better postsecondary and employment outcomes.

**Problem Statement**

According to federal law, transition planning must start no later than age 16. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (2004), “states that transition



planning should begin at the earliest age appropriate and no later than age 16” (Kellems & Moringstar, 2010, p. 60). Only in the last 15 years, there has been “an increased focus on transition education and service,” despite amendments made to the IDEA (Kohler & Field, 2005, p.174). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was significant for individuals with disabilities receiving their educational rights. It was not until the 1990 amendment that transition services were defined and gave a foundation for teachers implementing transition plans for students in school districts. The 1990 amendment defined transition services as:

*A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or, community participation (Poppen & Alverson, 2018, p. 68).*

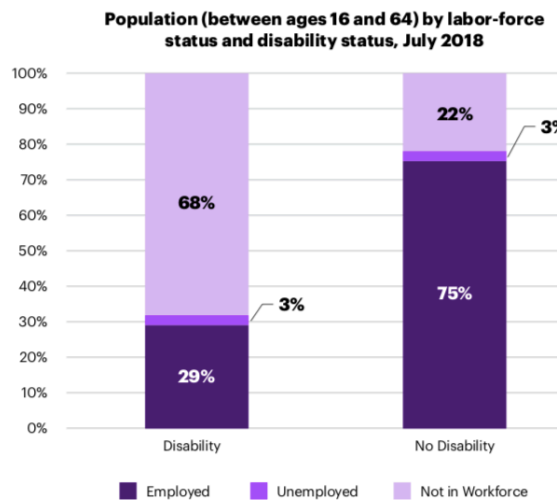
Furthermore, the 1997 amendment specified the age in which transition services should start for individuals with disabilities (Kohler & Field, 2005). This was a big win not only for legislators but for educators too since, it was “the first time, federal policy communicated that the content of a student’s education should be focused on his or her postschool aspirations” (Kohler & Field, 2005, p.174). This led to IDEA requiring students to be involved in the transition planning process. Although transition plans are implemented to be helpful, individuals with disabilities need the right skills to help create effective transition plans. Students need to be activities participates in their IEP meetings when creating transition plans. The goals should reflect goals the student wants and should not reflect the faculty or parents view. Self-determination skills are skills that will give students the confidence and support need to become a leader in their IEP/transition plan.

Moreover, despite efforts made by the school and policies implemented through the Department of Education rates to post-secondary and employment outcomes continue to be lower than their able-bodied peers. According to the Accenture and based off of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the Figure 1: A Wide Employment Gap graph represents the unemployment rate among individuals with a disability versus individuals without a disability. The graph clearly shows a mere 29% of individuals with a disability employed opposed to 75% of individuals without a disability employed (Accenture, 2018). Meaning, 65% of individuals with a disability remain unemployed in contrast to only 22% of individuals without a disability unemployed (Accenture, 2018). This graph demonstrates a wide employment gap between individuals with a disability versus their able-bodied peers.

**Figure 1**

**Figure 1: A Wide Employment Gap**

Persons with disabilities are much less likely to be employed.



Source: Accenture analysis based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2018

Furthermore, the outcomes to postsecondary options are limited as well. According to the Department of Education (2011), in Figure 2 focusing on the “ever enrolled in a” research; there is a discrepancy between enrollment of individuals with disabilities in comparison of young

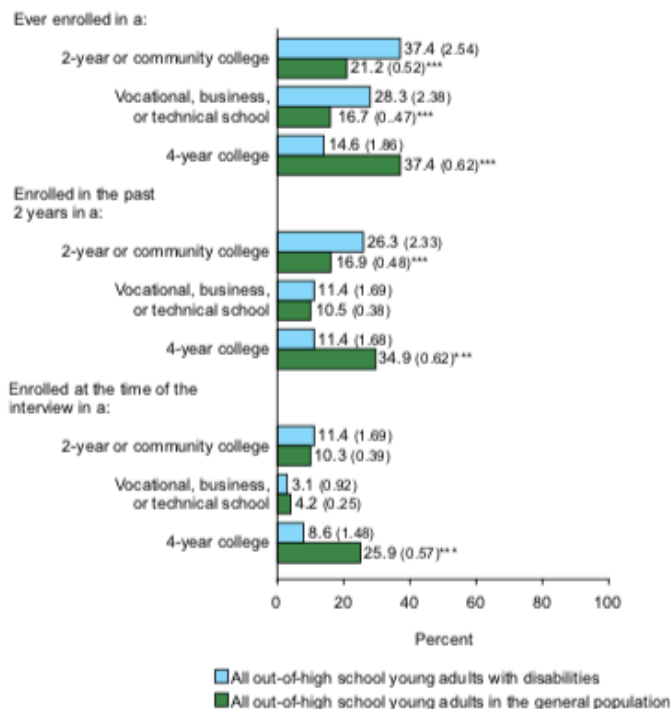
adults in the general population. Those with disabilities are enrolled in a 2-year or community college, or a vocational, business or technical school (Department of Education, 2011).

However, the enrollment for a 4-year college by individuals with disabilities was 14.6% compared to 37.4% of young adults in the general population (Department of Education, 2011).

Which begs the questions; why is the discrepancy so large among those with disabilities and without disabilities attaining a 4-year college education?

Post-school attainment whether it be college or employment should be meaningful to the

Figure 2. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population, by school type



\*\*\*  $p < .001$  for difference between young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population.  
 NOTE: Young adults who had enrolled in more than one type of postsecondary school were included in each type of school they had attended. Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 6 years. NLTSS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 3,610 young adults with disabilities.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTSS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) 2001 youth survey, responses for 19- to 23-year-olds.

individual and there should be planning and thought that goes into making these life decisions. Individuals with disabilities need support navigating their post-school outcomes. The purpose of transition plans is to help students create a plan for their future after high school graduation. However, teachers and school districts don't prioritize

transitioning/transition plans which makes navigating post-school challenging. According to Thoma and Getzel (2005) only about 6 hours is dedicated to transition planning per month. Each school has their own way of creating transition plans as well. Furthermore, Butrymowicz and

Mader (2017) conducted “interviews with more than 100 parents, students, advocates and experts across the country painted a picture of special education landscape where transition planning and services are largely neglected” (p. 4). Transition plans need to be intentional and students should be taking a leadership role in their IEP/transition plans. However, students need the tools and skills to advocate for themselves. Students need to be taught how to take a leadership role and be an advocate for themselves. One way of doing so, is the use of self-determination skills. As stated by Neubert and Leconte, “it is important that youth learn self-determination skills as early as possible – so they can play prominent and leading roles in crafting their postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals” (Neubert & Leconte, 2013, p. 73).

Self-determination skills are imperative to effective transition plans. According to Thoma and Getzel (2005), “self-determination has been identified by numerous researchers as a critical component of effective transition planning for students with disabilities.” (p. 234). Self-determination skills are directly linked to a better quality of life, employment outcomes, and overall happiness for adults with disabilities. However, these skills need to be taught throughout a student’s educational career. Once the students are taught these skills, they are better able to advocate for themselves, learn to overcome failure, and problem-solve without assistance. The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education found self-determination skills to be a key practice in transition plans (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). However, the study found that few educators conducted activities to help build self-determination skills. These skills must be harnessed in secondary school and built upon throughout the student’s education so, the student can contribute to the transition planning process. These skills are essential to having a voice during transition, post-secondary outcomes, and future employment. According to Wehmeyer (1995), “defined self-determination skills as an inherent human right to respect, to human

dignity, and to choice” (p. 157). Essentially stating that self-determination skills are basic human rights that are rooted in self-advocacy, assertiveness, and problem solving.

Wehmeyer (1995) stated the following:

Self-determination emerges when children and adolescents perceive themselves as effective, worthy individuals who can engage in actions that have an impact on outcomes related to their lives. Students become self-determined by learning specific skills, such as problem-solving, learning to identify consequences, and identifying alternatives.  
(p.158)

When Wehmeyer (1995) concluded his study, he found “problem-solving skills, learning about oneself (and one’s disability), goal setting, and self-management” were key components of self-determination skills (p.161). The earlier these skills are taught the higher success rate for individuals with disabilities have for employment and better life-long success (Wehmeyer, 1995).

<b>Exhibit 2-3 STUDENTS' POST-HIGH-SCHOOL GOALS</b>		
	Percentage with Goal	Standard Error
<b>Postsecondary education/training</b>		
Attend a 2- or 4-year college	46.8	2.3
Attend a postsecondary vocational training program	39.7	2.3
<b>Employment</b>		
Obtain competitive employment	53.2	2.3
Obtain supported employment	8.2	1.3
Obtain sheltered employment	4.8	1.0
<b>Other</b>		
Live independently	49.6	2.3
Maximize functional independence	20.1	1.9
Enhance social/interpersonal relationships and satisfaction	25.3	2.0
Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student’s school program survey. Note: Includes only students with transition planning.		

**Figure 1**

Figure 1 from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (2004) is a strong representation of individuals with disabilities post-high school goals. As shown in exhibit 2-3, the majority of students have a goal to attend either a 2- or 4-year college or a postsecondary vocational training program. Furthermore, the majority of students have a

goal to obtain competitive employment. Only about 15% of students have the goal of obtaining

supported or sheltered employment. This demonstrates a discrepancy among what individuals with disabilities want to attain and what they do attain. By preparing students and implementing the proper skills and foundations for students, there is no reason their goals cannot be met. More emphasis needs to be placed on transition planning and what more can be done to make sure individual with disabilities are heard throughout the transition process and beyond.

Transition plans are essential to better life-long outcomes for individuals with disabilities. However, in order to create effective transition plans, individuals with disabilities need to have a strong foundation in self-determination skills. These skills are important in self-advocating not only throughout their educational journey but in their future employment. These skills can be fostered by special educators by various curriculums. Individuals with disabilities should have access to the same employment and post-secondary outcomes as abled-bodied individuals and self-determination skills are essential to life-long success and happiness.

### Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to demonstrate the vital role self-determination skills contribute to effective transition plan for individuals with disabilities in order to create meaningful transition goals to obtain employment or postsecondary opportunities.

### **Self-Determination**

#### *Theory*

Self-determination is and continues to be a crucial component of effective transition plans for individuals with disabilities by researchers. Wehmeyer (1992) defined self-determination as “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life free to make choices and decisions about one’s quality of life free from undue influence or interference” (p. 302). As stated in Thoma and Getzel (2005) several studies, Martin et al. (2003); Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, and Herman (1999 &

2002); Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998); Wehmeyer and Schalock, (2001), have found that self-determination skills directly correlate to a better quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Wehmeyer (1992) discussed 12 essential components of self-determination which include:

- choice making
- decision-making
- problem-solving
- goal setting and attainment
- independence
- risk-taking and safety skills
- self-observation
- evaluation and reinforcement skills
- self-instruction
- self-advocacy and leadership skills
- positive attributes of efficacy and outcome expectancy
- self-awareness and self-knowledge

These skills directly relate to competitive employment outcomes, post-secondary access, community involvement, and independence.

As Wehmeyer (1995) continued his research in self-determination, he concluded that a self-determination curriculum needed four specific domains; self-awareness, self-confidence, choice/decision making, and goal attainment behaviors. One curriculum that strongly implemented these four domains was the Life Centered Career Education from The Arc. The LCCE was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which promoted self-determination for individuals with disabilities. The LCCE curriculum each of the four domains coincides with a

LCCE competency. Each competency has a series of sub-competency lessons. This curriculum allows the “teacher the means to determine student knowledge, performance, and perceptual levels for each of the self-determination competencies and sub-competencies and to individualize instruction according to these levels” (Wehmeyer, 1995, p. 162). In practice when teaching self-confidence, the educator would give the students tasks to express their feelings, accept and give praise and accepts and give criticism. Educators play a role in the implementation or lack thereof of self-determination skills in the classroom. Opportunities for self-determination skills can often be missed because of the focus on the academic curriculum. The education system emphasizes a curriculum geared towards standardized testing which makes it difficult to be intentional about implementing self-determination skills when that is not a priority.

In 1998, the Self-Determination Synthesis Project was funded to promote self-determination for students with disabilities. The purpose of this project “was to improve, expand, and accelerate the use of this knowledge by the professionals who serve children and youth with disabilities; parents who rear, education, and support their children with disabilities and students with disabilities” (Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004, p.8). The SDSP found that IEPs should increase student involvement and leadership within the IEP. Wood et al. (2004) felt IEPs should include self-determination in the form of goals or objects and stressed that students initiate their own IEP and transition goals. Although research has promoted the necessity of self-determination skills there is miscommunication about the degree in which these skills are used within the goals and classroom instruction (Wood et. al., 2004). The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education or SPeNSE, is a large-scale study funded by the U.S. Department of Education determined “teaching self-determination as one of the key practices in facilitating transition” (Thoma & Getzel, 2005, p. 234). According to the U.S. Department of



Education (2002) as stated in Thoma and Getzel (2005), about 6 hours a month is devoted to teaching self-determination skills in transition planning. Educators are crucial to promoting self-determination in the classroom. As stated in Wood et al. (2004), Wehmeyer, Argan, and Hughes found in 2004 “ 22% of secondary level teachers who reported writing self-determination goals in IEPs for all of their students, while 47% included one or more self-determination goals for some students, and 31% did not include them at all” (p. 9). Teachers and districts need to recognize the importance self-determination skills play for individuals with disabilities in order to foster these skills in the classroom. Furthermore, the SPeNSE found that teachers do not create activities to foster self-determination in their transition plans (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). Educators must be intentional about promoting and creating an environment to promote self-determination skill within the classroom.

### *Application*

Educators and those in the individual’s life must encourage generalization of self-determination skills and behavior, honor the choices and decisions the student makes, and support the goals that the student sets (Wood et al. 2004). There are several popular educational approaches special educators can use to foster self-determination skills. The first approach, as stated previous, is the Life Centered Career Education curriculum or LCCE, which was federally funded and created by The Arc. This curriculum promotes self-determination skills. The Life Centered Career Education curriculum contains 22 competencies in three categories: daily living skills, personal social skills, and occupational guidance and preparation and is rooted in four domains: self-awareness, self-confidence, choice, and goal attainment (Wehmeyer, 1995). The LCCE curriculum is flexible and allows educators the opportunity to personalize it to each student individually. Another option is implementing a function curriculum. This curriculum’s

foundation is focused on teaching basic needs versus academic needs. For example, this curriculum teaches daily living, vocational, and community access skills which specifically addresses employment, economic, and independent living outcomes. This curriculum can benefit all students since its' foundation is embodies what all individuals need to contribute to society. Students taught using the functional curriculum “were found to have better post-secondary outcomes, higher average hourly wages, higher average weekly wages; higher maintenance of employment; and more likely to be determined eligible for rehabilitation services” (Bouck, 2009, p. 8). Another less academic curriculum is Steps to Self-Determination which is an experiential curriculum. This curriculum has 5 main components: know yourself, value yourself, plan, act, experience outcomes and learn. This curriculum again is centered around self-determination and preparing students to participate in their transition plans. Each curriculum is rooted in specific components essential to fostering self-determination skills for individuals with disabilities. These curriculums give special educators the tools and resources to implement self-determination skills in the classroom and as early as possible.

**Figure 3**

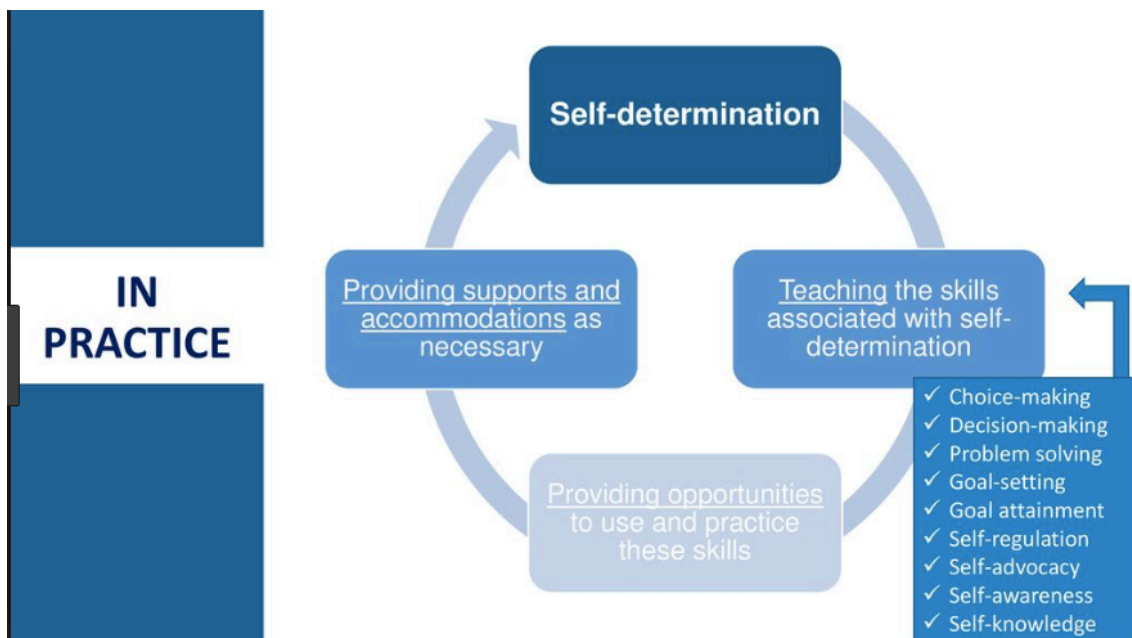


Figure 3 (Shogren, Raley, Burke, & Wehmeyer, 2019), represents the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* or SDLMI, which is a model of teaching that can be used to teach students “to become self-regulated problem-solvers, to self-direct instruction toward self-selected goals, and to gain enhanced self-determination” (Argan, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000, p. 352). This model provides educators a foundation of skills associated with self-determination. By teachers implementing this model students showed improvement effectiveness of students initiating and self-regulating their actions, enhanced practice for teachers, strengthened self-determination actions by students, and improved outcomes of academic achievement, employment and higher education (Shogren et al., 2019). The SDLMI has three phases; set a goal, take action, and adjust goal or plan (Shogren et al., 2019). The model is self-directed by the students setting the goals and the teachers are there for support. With this model, students are active participant in planning their learning and can better advocate for themselves later in life. These skills can “assist students in gaining more control over their education” (Grogoudas, 2014, p. 409).

## **Transition**

### *History*

Transition services have been evident in special education since 1990 (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, in 2004 transition planning was mandated for all students who receive an Individualized Education Plan or IEP, in K-12 education. The main purpose for the transition is to facilitate the student’s move from school to employment or post-secondary options. Only in the past 15 years has IDEA gained an increased focus on transitioning. The National Council on Disability “indicated that individuals with disabilities continue to lag far behind individuals without disabilities in employment and

other aspects of community engagement” (Kohler & Field, 2005, p. 174). Kohler and Field (2003) noted “the importance of student’s playing a central role in planning and preparing for postschool outcomes” (p.175).

When IDEA was amended in 1997, it required students with disabilities be involved with their transition plan, giving them a seat at the table (Kohler & Field, 2005). The Office of Special Education is one agency that federally funds transition programs across the United States. Studies have found the more individuals are involved in vocational education, work experience, or interagency collaboration the more likely they will be involved in the community and have better life outcomes. According to Kohler and Field (2005), “the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) findings indicated that in general vocational education, work experience, tutoring, extracurricular group activities, and parental support positively contributed to school performance and postschool outcomes” (p. 175). Studies continued to find that if students with disabilities were setting their own goals; they were more likely to follow through and attain those goals. Along with goal attainment, individuals with disabilities actively involved with their education received a higher wage than those students who were not.

#### *Transition-Focused Education*

In 1998, Kohler referred to his research as transition-focused education and stated,

*This perspective views transition planning not as an add-on activity for students with disabilities once they reach age 14 or 16 but rather as a fundamental basis of education that guides the development of all educational programs. Transition-focused education is directed toward adult outcomes and consists of academic, career, and extracurricular instruction and transition approaches and services, depending on the local context and students’ learning and support needs. The*

*concepts of transition focused education represents a shift from disabilities-focused education, deficit-driven programs to an education that service-delivery approach based on abilities, options, and self-determination (Kohler & Field, 2005, p. 176).*

It is best for the student when transition services are available, they are provided in the general education setting. Accommodations and modifications for individuals with disabilities are required in the classroom however, these individuals are not provided job development, training, and continued support which are a necessity. Furthermore, services for adult outcomes are typically restricted or limited post-graduation.

Creating transition plans can be challenging when all school districts have different standards for what should and should not be implemented within the plan. There is no set mandate or reference for transition or transition plans in IDEA (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). Kohler and Field (2005) found five essential components to effective transition planning; student-focused planning, student development, interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement, and program structure (Kohler & Field, 2005). These five components are important to transition focused education. These components emphasized students' interests, applying self-determination skills, involving collaboration among the transition team, family voice and efficiency of the transition plan.

*Transition-focused education is directed towards adult outcomes and consists of academic, career, and extracurricular instruction and activities, delivered through a variety of instructional and transition approaches and services, depending on the local context and students' learning and support needs. (Kohler & Field, 2005, p. 176).*

Kohler and Field (2005) stated “effective transition practices emphasized the development of practical life skills that are geared toward the goals and aspirations of individual students” (p. 180). Instead of focusing on the student’s disability, transition focused education focuses on the student’s ability and self-determination skills.

In addition to the above components, experts have found an accurate and thoughtful assessment of a student’s abilities and interests, measurable goals related to the student’s postsecondary aspirations, and appropriate support and services to achieve goals are best transition planning practices (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2017). As stated previously, transition plans should be driven by the student. Thus, the use of “I” statements demonstrates the students’ role and participation in the transition process (Wood et al., 2004). According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 from the U.S Department of Education, Figure 4 shows a large percentage about 84% of students participate little or moderately in their transition role and do not ask for what they need well (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Only 16.4% of students participating in transition are leaders in their planning and ask for what they need (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Ideally, all students should be encouraged to be active leaders and ask for what they need when transitioning is taking place. Teaching self-determination skills can give the students the tools they need to be active participates in their future aspirations.

Figure 4

**Exhibit 2-5  
STUDENTS' ROLE IN TRANSITION PLANNING, BY ABILITY TO ASK FOR WHAT THEY NEED**

	Students ask for what they need	
	Not well	Well
<b>Percentage who:</b>		
Do not attend planning meetings or participate in the planning process	9.0 (2.1)	3.2* (1.1)
Are present for planning but participate little	34.5 (3.5)	17.8*** (2.4)
Provide input in planning as moderately active participant	50.7 (3.7)	62.7* (3.0)
Are leaders in planning	5.6 (1.7)	16.4*** (2.3)

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.

Note: Includes only students with transition planning.

Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following levels: \*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.001.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Post-School Opportunities

*Employment*

Individuals with disabilities are at a significant disadvantage and experience challenges when entering employment post-school (Brooke et al., 2009). Employment rates for individuals with disabilities tend to be higher because postsecondary opportunities are not emphasized or discussed as an option for students (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2017). Individuals with disabilities leave school and enter day programs, workshops, or segregated institution (Hill, Kline, & Richards, 2018). These programs are not beneficial because they often pay subminimum wage and individuals with disabilities do not get the opportunity to be around their able-bodied peers (Hill et al., 2018). When schools do not implement effective transition plans and students turn to state and local education agencies. These agencies risk unnecessary segregation and failing to inform students of competitive employment (Hill et. al., 2018). Expectations in these environments are set low and prevocational tasks can lead to unequal, subservient relationship or lack the proper accommodations (Hill et al., 2018). An accommodation changes how a student

learns. For example, in work or in school and accommodation could look like breaking a large task into several small tasks in order for the individual to complete effectively complete the task. According to PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment, "accommodations rights are provided to adults with disabilities through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)" (PACER Center Inc., 2014).

Ideally, students with disabilities should have the opportunity to gain competitive employment. There are seven core indicators of quality competitive employment which are use of benefits planning, individualization of job goal, quality of competitive job, consistency of job status with that of co-workers, employment in an integrated job setting, quality of job-site supports and fading, and presence of ongoing support services for job retention and career development (Brooke et al., 2009). Teachers and other transition staff can use these skills to evaluate the employment services and in turn improve job outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Brooke et. al., 2009).

Career aspirations should be part of a meaningful conversation when planning transitions for students. LoBianco and Kleinert found "the strongest predictor of obtaining competitive employment was employment while in high school" (2013). Working in high school provides individuals with an understanding of working in the typical workforce. Furthermore, summer work opportunities can help individuals with disabilities gain experience and thus lead to employment post-school (LoBianco and Kleinert, 2013). These career experiences lead to a identifying their own interests, abilities, needs, and information to make choices about working (Hill et. al., 2018). There are several programs that allow for employment while in secondary school such as; Seamless Transition, The Guideposts for Success, Project SEARCH, and paid



internships (Hill et. al., 2018). These programs demonstrated career awareness, exploration, and development for students.

### *Post-Secondary Options*

Again in 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), “helped increase the accessibility of postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities” (Milsom and Sackett, 2018). In a study conducted by Milsom and Sackett (2018), regarding students with disabilities transferring from a 2- to 4-year institution; several themes arose: awareness, advocacy, and accommodations. Students lacked awareness and their need for awareness in regard to services. (Milsom and Scakett, 2018). Students are often times not aware of the disability services provided by higher institutions. Advocacy played a major role in their findings not only advocacy from the students but people around them advocating for them at the initiation. Lastly, attaining accommodations were either unavailable, unhelpful or negative (Milsom and Scakett, 2018). Services that were readily provided in high school are hard to navigate once the student enters postsecondary opportunities. According to the ADA, accommodations are provided but not automatically. The individuals’ disabilities must be disclosed to the school and/or employers and must provided required documentation. (PACER’s Center, Inc., 2014). In the study by Milsom and Sackett, students “had to locate information about the types of disability services and accommodations that were available to them and then figure out how to navigate the process of applying for and obtaining services” (2018, p. 28). Students who are better able to address their needs in an educational setting will have more success throughout 2- and 4- year institutions. Additionally, in order to request accommodations, students should be able to name their disability, know what supports and accommodations that have worked in the past

(PACER's Center, Inc., 2014). Self-determination skills can provide the support in order to be more self-aware and confident in asking for the proper accommodations.

Thoma and Getzel (2005) conducted a survey of post-secondary college students whom identified as having self-determination skills and self-disclosed as having a disability. During question one, students had to identify skills important to their post-secondary success. Thoma and Getzel (2005) found problem-solving, understanding one's disability, and goal setting were among the top skills for post-secondary success. Research question two asked students about how they learn the above skills identified. Thoma and Getzel (2005) found that students learned these skills by trial and error, support from peers, and their parents. These skills need to be prioritized both in and outside of the classroom. Lastly, the individuals in the study were asked about suggestions for high-school students transitioning. Thoma and Getzel (2005) found the results to be unanimous among the individuals as suggesting the age to begin, better training, and the role of parents. Thoma and Getzel (2005) concluded their findings by stating "their voices are critical to enhancing and expanding the knowledge and information on effective self-determination methods and strategies to prepare students with disabilities to meet the demands in the college environment (p. 240).

### Recommendations

Much of the research provided has heavily weighed on the educational system to combat the issue of individuals with disabilities gaining employment and opportunities post-school. Individuals with disabilities go throughout their educational journey with the support and resources from a numerous number of individuals, from their teacher, to the occupational therapist for speech, to a counselor and even the principal at times. The educational systems support these individuals throughout their lives. Regardless of law, individuals with disabilities

deserve the right to post-school opportunities and with most these individuals need the support and resources throughout this process. The educational system should be held responsible to an extent to see these students through just as they do with their able-bodied peers. The rest of this paper will propose several small- and large-scale policies to combat these issues and help to bridge the gap between school and post-school opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

As stated in the above review of literature, self-determination skills are essentials for individuals with disabilities attaining post-school opportunities. With self-determination, students are able to better advocate for their needs, problem solve, and makes choices post-school. Therefore, school districts should be required to implement a self-determination curriculum. A self-determination curriculum not only benefits individuals with disabilities but can benefit all students. This curriculum should be implemented throughout the student's educational journey. Self-determination skills only have a positive impact on the outcomes of and individuals with a disability. Furthermore, teachers should be required to create measurable and age appropriate self-determination goals on the student's IEP. For example, a self-determination goal could look as follows; student will accept praise and/or criticism from peers or adults and utilize this to change social and behavioral outcomes. These self-determination goals should align with the students' needs and the curriculum provided by the district. Creating these goals isn't enough, teachers and other professionals in the student's life, must hold the student accountable. Therefore, the IEP should reference whether the student accomplished the self-determination goal or not, and an objective statement of how the goal was attained or how the teacher will provide continued practice. Implementing a self-determination curriculum early and holding teachers and students accountable for setting and achieving goals will help individuals attain post-school options.

The biggest asset a school has is the community the school is located. Therefore, the community is a resource for bridging the gap between the district and the student's post-school opportunities. Creating community conversations is a positive and practical solution. According to Carter and Bumble (2018), a community conversation is defined as "an asset-based approach for engaging a cross-section of diverse stakeholders in addressing an issue of importance to their local community" (p. 28). Commonly participants such as, individuals with disabilities, family members, employers, local officials, educators are invited to these meetings. The biggest part is determining stakeholders within the community. This approach cultivates a unity among stakeholders to address the issue at hand, promote efforts of change, sees the community as a resource, and encourages ideas from members of the community (Carter & Bumble, 2018). Carter and Bumble (2018) recognize "families, schools, employers, and agencies must work with one another-and in tandem with natural community partners-to promote the awareness, attitudes, expectations, and opportunities needed to move young people with IDD toward personally important community outcomes" (p. 28). Community conversations is an approach that will lead to smooth transition to employment and post-secondary options for individuals with disabilities. Community members are able to discuss the exact ways individuals are needed in their community and thus, creates a positive impact among the school and community. One study in California held seven community conversations within the state. These community conversations took place within secondary education, post-secondary education, and employment programs. By creating community conversations, "each of the programs achieved higher employment rates for young adults than what was being achieved at the state or national level for individuals with IDD" (Raynor, Hayward, Semeza & Stoffmacher, 2018, p. 205) As the research concluded,

Raynor et al. (2018) found building partnerships with employers, preparing youth for transition to work early and early preparation of self-determination skills were common themes.

Moreover, there needs to be an attitudinal change within society. A way to educate employers what individuals with disabilities can bring to the table. By including people with disabilities in the workforce companies gain access to roughly 10.7 million people (Getting to Equal, 2018). Furthermore, “the GDP could get a boost up to 25 billion if just 1 percent more of persons with disabilities joined the U.S. labor force” (Accenture, 2018, p. 4). Ideally having employers be more welcoming of people with disabilities can benefit all involved.

In addition to the recommendations put forth, state and federal recommendations should also be strongly considered. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has been amended throughout history. IDEA references transition services but has no mandate or reference to transition plan or goals (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). Leaving each school district to set standards and implementations on handling transition plans for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, some states do not have clear guidelines or policies regarding transition services (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). In order to prioritize individuals with disabilities to attaining employment and/or post-secondary options, the state must be held accountable.

## Conclusion

Self-determinations skills are an important factor when students are navigating postsecondary opportunities. Building advocacy, awareness, choice-making, and goal setting are crucial in order for students to advocate for themselves postschool. They allow students to take an active role in their transition plans. When students are moving on to employment and higher education, they are able to take initiative and ask for the accommodations needed to succeed. Self-determination skills must be intentional. Teachers and school districts have to prioritize

these skills. There are several curriculums provided throughout this text that can help teachers and districts when creating goals and objectives for individuals with disabilities. If self-determination skills are implemented intentionally, there is no reason individuals with disabilities can attain postschool opportunities at the same rate as their able-bodied peers.

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