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## Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Students' Self-Advocacy Skills in Self-Contained Settings

Grayce Alexandra Rey  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Grayce Alexandra Rey

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Students' Self-Advocacy Skills in Self-Contained

Settings

by

Grayce Alexandra Rey

MA, Liberty University, 2013

BS, Saint Leo University, 2011

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2023

## Abstract

The problem of this basic qualitative study was that students served in self-contained classes had limited access to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process due to the rationed participation by parents and teachers (i.e., advocates), which may have been restraining students' ability to prepare for adult living expectations within their community. Students with severe disabilities (SWSD) often require more guidance and training to gain independence to ensure the highest quality of life (QOL). The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of advocates in promoting self-advocacy skills during the IEP process for their SWSD served in self-contained classrooms. Guided by the conceptual framework centered in self-determination theory, this study aimed to connect basic human needs and the perceptions of advocates that may have affected implementing self-advocacy skills into the IEP meeting process. The research questions focused on developing an understanding of advocates' perceptions of the student's role in the IEP and the impact of students' QOL. Ten volunteers, five teachers and five parents, selected from professional correspondence, were interviewed to gain their perceptions of implementing self-advocacy strategies throughout the IEP process to enhance QOL of SWSD. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, and the emergent themes were used to promote awareness for the utilization of training on the self-advocate strategies implemented by advocates. These themes included responsibility point-of-view, rejection of ableism, value of real-world experiences, and community acceptance for individual success. As a result of this study, SWSD may experience positive social change in the area of community acceptance, potentially redefining the expectations of social norms and improving QOL for transitioned SWSD in adulthood.

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## Dedication

To past generations of women who have worked the second and third shifts at the local plant; scrubbed floors to ceilings while their children sat on a blanket in the middle of the floor; rocked the babies to sleep while making dinner; ran a household while going to work and night school, cheering at every softball game, and teaching their children right from wrong; ran the world when no one was looking... to those women that made it possible for me to be smarter, to be stronger, to be successful.

To the future generations of women who will be unforgettable and unstoppable; will show the power of mind, body, and spirit; will better themselves each day through small and big acts of selflessness; will strive for independence; will run the world when everyone was looking...to those women that I hope to make it possible to be smarter, to be stronger, to be successful.

## Acknowledgments

To my family, thank you for doing the little things so that I could do something big. Your love, support, patience, and encouragement are limitless.

To my sons, you are my muse. I hope you see the importance of reaching for more.

To my chairs, I am grateful for the confidence, the early morning and late-night responses to repetitive questions, and the encouragement to continue.

To my volunteers and district personnel, thank you making me and my passion a priority.

To my students, it has been an honor to learn and grow with you as a professional, as a student, as a parent, and as a person.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) established by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is designed to support students with disabilities (SWD) make personal growth through their formative years into adulthood (2020). As part of the IEP, SWD and their advocates (i.e., parents, caregivers, and teachers) annually meet to discuss previous progress, goals and objectives, and accommodations/modifications to support their unique needs for success; these meetings provide students and advocates with options for implementing strategies that will assist students develop their academic, social, and adaptive skills (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2020). Moreover, with the Transition Plan contained in the IEP, SWD are supplied with opportunities to express needs and wants for adulthood when supported by advocates (United States Department of Education, 2020). The IEP is the common place for students and advocates to decide the best path for students' current and future achievements. According to Wehmeyer et al. (2018), IEP meetings are the starting point to build self-advocacy for adulthood. They stated that, "Among the most frequent means of promoting self-advocacy and enhance self-determination has been by promoting active involvement in planning for their transition to adulthood" (Wehmeyer et al., 2018, p. 58). Inopportunately, not all SWD experience IEP meetings collaboratively with advocates, especially when implementing self-advocacy skills.

As students reach the age of 16 or enroll in high school, SWD and their advocates begin preparing for adult living through the Transition Service Plan (U.S. Department of

Education, 2020). The Transition Service Plan is embedded into the IEP for additional collaboration and discussion for awareness of student needs for adult living with advocates, while taking SWD preferences into consideration during the decision-making process of an annual IEP meeting (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Although the abilities and preferences vary by student and their disability, the Transition Service Plan promotes voice and choice for all SWD to have the highest quality of life (QOL) when transitioning into adulthood.

Decision-making skills are necessary for expressing needs, wants, and preferences, in preparations for adulthood. For typically developing students and SWD, these skills may be described as having voice and choice, using communication, experiences, and knowledge as tools for sharing needs, wants, and preferences with advocates. However for students with severe disabilities (SWSD), voice and choice is described as having a relationship with advocates to determine the most appropriate results for success (Lawson & Parker, 2020). Reportedly, most students with an IEP, specifically those served in self-contained settings (i.e., 40% or more of daily academics outside of general curriculum classrooms) are not privy to their own academic and adaptive needs for improvement through the structure of an IEP meeting (Cavendish et al., 2017). Moreover, students reported that they have little or no knowledge of the IEP process or information regarding their disability (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Mueller & Vick, 2017). Furthermore, during IEP meetings advocates communicate with one another, avoiding the responsibility to involve the student in the decision-making process (Fogle et al., 2020).

Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement (ASPIRE) is a statewide Georgia initiative to improve self-advocacy for students with an IEP (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). With support from ASPIRE, students in high school are given opportunities in leadership through the decision-making process of an IEP meeting. Moreover, through the discussion and creation of the Transition Service Plan with student preferences and abilities in the forefront, self-determination and advocacy skills begin to develop for students transitioning into adulthood before the age of 16 (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2021). In the local setting, high school students served in the general curriculum through inclusion are provided options to express their voice and choice for their academic, social, and future goals through student-led IEPs, ASPIRE, and other self-advocacy strategies (Georgia Department of Education, 2019; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2021); yet, students served in self-contained classrooms (due to mild to severe disabilities) are excused from conveying their perspectives and wishes for their own QOL (MacLeod, 2017).

According to a community high school Exceptional Students department chair, SWSD served in self-contained classrooms are not active participants in the IEP process because they are not provided opportunities for student-led IEPs or voice and choice options; teachers of self-contained settings are not required nor expected to support student-led IEPs. Additionally, in parent resources and seminars to enhance knowledge about the Transition Service Plan, local administration state that the focus includes gaining medical, financial and job, or daily-living support; the importance for SWSD preferences for QOL are never mentioned (Friedman, 2019). Little is known about the

perceptions of parents and teachers that cause the limitations in the implementation of strategies for self-advocacy through student-led IEPs for SWSD transitions into adulthood due the inconsistency of student participation in the IEP process (Wehmeyer et al., 2018). With gained insight from advocates, dialogue, and continued research to benefit student self-advocacy and communication skills from high school to adulthood may foster greater opportunities for societal acceptance of individuals with disabilities (Friedman, 2019; Perryman et al., 2020). Observed through personal experiences and local interviews, the problem in the current study was that parent and teacher advocates of SWSD in a suburban high school in southeastern state served in self-contained classrooms were limiting student accessibility to the IEP process, which may have been restraining the students' ability to self-advocate for their progression towards becoming active adult members of the community (see Friedman, 2019).

### **Rationale**

Without the knowledge and preparedness for an IEP, students with intellectual disabilities, on the autism spectrum, or other significant disabilities resulting in their least restrictive environment placement in small group settings, are unable to voice their own perspectives for improvement, thus becoming spectators in the IEP meeting rather than a notable member with valuable suggestions (Cavendish et al., 2017). These failed opportunities are mirrored for young adults transitioning within the community, developing insecurities regarding the self-awareness of their abilities to make healthy decisions in real-world situations. According to a local transition program teacher, SWSD that attend career-based transitional programs often require significant interventions for

maintaining appropriate decision-making skills, including expressing their preferences for job placements; moreover, many SWSD are unaware of their needs described in the IEP or Transition Plan and unable to communicate needs to an employer. Likewise, some students have a sense of invincibility and are overconfident of their abilities as they enter daily community expectations because the dialogue of the requirements to maintain success never occurred with them (MacLeod, 2017; Nord et al., 2018). Local parents and high school teachers serving SWSD are unfamiliar with transition expectations, specifically voice and choice, and these advocates leave advocacy skills for specific job training to transition teachers or vocation rehabilitation (VR) counselors. Hence, if SWSD do not attend guided transition programs or have access to a VR counselor, the students will not have the extra practice to enhance their self-advocacy skills.

During the school year of 2016–2017, 284 schools in a southeastern state were participating in ASPIRE for self-directed IEP and student-led IEP (Sánchez, 2018). According to a local high school student support facilitator, most local high schools participated in ASPIRE and other student-led IEP meetings, and the meetings were perceived to be effective because the involvement and knowledge of students served in general and self-contained settings was witnessed and advocates were collaborating with one another and student alike. The U.S. Department of Education website provides training for advocates and students, IEP meeting examples, and access to online resources to implement student-led IEPs effectively. Despite the growth and success observed by the student support facilitator, the initiative for ASPIRE and student-led IEPs meetings

become nonexistent for students in self-contained settings first, and now are obsolete for all students with an IEP in the local area.

Currently, supporting SWSD served in self-contained classrooms to have equal engagement in their IEP process compared to their peers served in general education classes is infrequent and limited in the availability of SWSD to be active participants. Due to the inability to communicate their own needs in the language their parents and teachers are conversing in, SWSD may experience decreased opportunities in adulthood, and this lack of opportunities may exclude young adults with disabilities from full-time employment, enrollment and participation in secondary education, and purposeful engagement with the community (Nord et al., 2018; Riesen & Jameson, 2018). This is consistent with the experiences of a local district coordinator for students served in self-contained setting who explained that IEPs are not always presented in a way that the student can understand (e.g., all of the jargon used); however, the students should be invited to participate and advocate for supplemental aids/services and accommodations to support their learning with observations of self-awareness.

Locally, there is a discrepancy between research-based practices documentation and implemented practices in the classroom. Current research supports student involvement in the IEP process for successful transition and improvement of self-advocacy skills, yet strategic implementation within the classroom routine by advocates is minimal or obsolete for student access (Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Consequently, the purpose of this qualitative project study was to investigate teacher and parent advocate

perspectives regarding the implementation of self-advocacy skills of SWSD through the IEP meeting process.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this subsection, I have defined frequent terms and phrases used throughout the study to benefit the reader's understanding:

*Advocates*: Parents, caregivers, and teachers who support individuals with disabilities navigate education, daily living skills, and transition services, typically through the IEP process (Goldman et al., 2020).

*Autism spectrum disorder*: Characteristics of an individual that may include barriers, such as limited language/communication skills, socially appropriate behaviors, cognitive functioning, and lack of social skills; these characteristics can vary in severity (Slade et al., 2018).

*Inclusive setting*: Students served in inclusive settings are capable of understanding and implementing content standards and maintaining age-appropriate relationships. Their adaptive skills are typically developing. These students are included in the general education classes with or without consistent special education teacher support. Inclusive settings support students both disabled and nondisabled with the same curriculum and standards. Students served in self-contained settings require significant supports and, even with maximum supports and accommodations/modifications, are unable to participate at the level required to be successful in an inclusive setting.

*IEP*: According to the U.S. Department of Education through the IDEA (2020), an IEP is a document written to develop, review, and revise a directive to fit the unique

needs of a SWD in order to reach individual goals determined by the students' academic, social, and adaptive (including behavior and physical) needs. This document is developed in an IEP meeting, which includes the student, parent (i.e., family) advocates, teacher advocates, various school staff, community members, and medical advisors to collaborate for the benefit of the student's specific needs. (IDEA, 2020).

*Intellectual disability:* Individuals who by the age of 18 years old have exhibited significant limitations in daily living and social skills due to deficiencies in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2021).

*Quality of life-* Although different to each individual, QOL allows individuals to not only have human basic rights but have success and happiness in their preferences of personal choices, including their occupation, recreation, community involvement, and relationships (Blaskowitz et al., 2020).

*Self-advocacy:* SWD intentionally controlling the outcomes for their QOL by aligning their choices and actions with goals through the opportunity of knowing their rights and responsibilities (Pennell, 2017). Self-advocacy requires SWD to reflect and make adaptations to their choices and actions, including asking for help from advocates (Brock et al., 2020). Additionally, self-advocacy is the steppingstone for self-determination, or the ability to make change in one's own life choices (Pennell, 2017; Wehmeyer et al., 2018).

*Self-contained classroom:* SWDs' needs are met outside of the general education classroom; the setting may include a separate class, small group, home based, and/or

hospital homebound (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). When referring to SWSD within this study, students are served in self-contained classrooms due to the severity of needs not by disability/diagnosis (i.e., exceptionality).

*Self-determination*: SWD having the ability and acceptance to share their preferences and make decisions for daily living, employment, and community involvement without influence from advocates. Self-determination also allows adults with disabilities legal privileges for decision making obtained by human civil rights (Pennell, 2017). Self-determination is the end result of building self-advocacy skills, which may also be referred to as *voice and choice*. (Sinclair et al., 2017).

*SWD*: Students with disabilities with an IEP whose needs are supported through an inclusive setting (i.e., general education curriculum). Students' academic, social, and adaptive skills can be supported through a general or special educator while participating in grade-appropriate standards.

*SWSD*: Students with significant deficits in academics, social/behavior, and adaptive skills. These SWD are supported through an alternative curriculum with a special educator in a self-contained classroom due to their cognitive, social/behavior, and adaptive abilities. Even with maximum supports, SWSD are unable to maintain safety, exhibit age-appropriate behaviors, or meet academic achievement standards compared to their typically developing peers.

*Transitions*: As SWSD develop into adults, new expectations for community involvement, daily living, and employment become vital for the longevity of their success. SWSD must train to be prepared to leave the security of school routines and

schedules and teacher and school staff. For SWSD, transitions are discussed through the Transition Plan of the IEP (Friedman, 2019).

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this qualitative study may help stakeholders engage in informed discussions about the gap in practice of providing students served in self-contained settings with opportunities to be active participants in the IEP process to promote self-advocacy skills. Locally, there is a discrepancy in promoting self-advocacy skills between SWSD and students with IEPs being served in inclusive settings (Davis & Cumming, 2019b). This divergence in skills restrains the ability of students served in self-contained special education classrooms to be productive adult members of their community, thus their potential to achieve a higher QOL through voice and choice is less than their peers (Nord et al., 2018). Having this mindset of ableism, which is a belief that students are unable to be productive based on the characteristics of their disability, results in prejudiced ideas of the decision-making and self-advocacy abilities of individuals with disabilities (Bruno, 2020; MacLeod, 2017). The perspectives of community members regarding the abilities of individuals with disabilities for adult living (e.g., working jobs and being involved in the community) are determined by the individuals' preparedness for behaving as productive adults, such as making appropriate decisions while in the community (Riesen & Jameson, 2018).

Students served in inclusive settings are offered the opportunity to be active participants in the IEP decision-making process through ASPIRE (a student-led IEP resource), teacher strategies, and advocate support (Georgia Department of Education,

2019). Students are encouraged to use voice and choice to discuss their preferences for transitioning and goal setting (Davis & Cumming, 2019a). Moreover, students are made aware of their strengths and areas of need (Collier et al., 2017). However, this awareness strategy is not typical for students served in self-contained classrooms due to the perceptions and experiences of advocates (Collier et al., 2017).

The results of this study may help school personnel foster communication with advocates for determining the most suitable strategies for offering supports for the self-advocacy and transitioning skills of students in self-contained settings in the region. With the findings of this study, students served in self-contained classrooms may be offered more available options for improving their self-advocacy, thus promoting a higher QOL through effective adult transitions, enhanced communication skills for community involvement, and less job-related obstacles from a lack of self-awareness (see Cavendish et al., 2017; Russo, 2019).

### **Research Questions**

Although previous qualitative data and research have focused on student participation to enhance self-advocacy to support adult transitioning during IEP meetings, a significant gap in resources exists regarding students served in inclusive settings opposed to self-contained settings (Kozleski, 2020). Findings from the literature review and local research indicate that advocates, specifically parents and teachers, control the IEP process without the consideration of the preferences of students served in self-contained settings (Fogle et al. 2020). I developed the following research questions to

determine the perceptions of advocates for SWD served in self-contained settings towards the implementation of self-advocacy strategies during an IEP meeting:

RQ1: What are advocates' (i.e., parents and teachers) perceptions of the role high school students served in self-contained settings participate in the current IEP process?

RQ2: What are advocates' (i.e., parents and teachers) perceptions of the impact of implementing self-advocacy strategies to improve high school SWSD active participation in the IEP process?

RQ3: What are advocates' (i.e., parents and teachers) perceptions of self-advocacy skills obtained by SWSD for enhanced self-determination to ensure the highest QOL as an adult with severe disabilities?

### **Review of the Literature**

In progressive and current literature, researchers have described the benefits of promoting self-advocacy for SWD in preparation for adult transition. The literature has evolved through court rulings, federal expectations, and personal experiences, and proposed that the development of SWD achievement does not reside with academic growth alone (Calhoon et al. 2019). Student success after high school is focused on the adaptations and preparedness supported by the Transition Plan developed during the annual IEP meeting (Johnson et al., 2020). I begin this literature review with a discussion of the literature search strategy and conceptual framework before providing a progressive history of rights for SWD in education and the perspectives of implementing those rights for student achievement.

## **Literature Search Strategy**

I collected resources for this literature review through educational databases accessed through the Walden University Library, including EBSCO, Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest, and SAGE. The following keywords were used to search for scholarly journals and articles: *advocates, guardianship, IEPs, quality of life, self-contained, self-determination, student-led IEPs, transitions, and vocational*. Additional resources relating to special education court rulings, IDEA, laws, and policies were located through Google Scholar and other internet searches. I also applied information from books used within Walden University courses and research pertaining to adult transitioning and supporting individuals with disabilities to the process of generating topics and keywords. The results were categorized by keywords. The goal of this literature review was to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the process of supporting SWD served in self-contained classes with self-advocacy skills for adult transitioning.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The civil rights movement has evolved with the various changes in education; this dynamic evolution of knowledge and practice continue to overcome barriers of race, gender, age and disabilities. Similar to other movements fighting discrimination, progression for individuals with disabilities has been tedious and slow (Kozleski, 2020). Hence, the civil rights movement for individuals with disabilities continues to be relevant in current literature. For individuals with disabilities, there have been countless acts, laws, and allies fighting for the human rights of daily living, such as education, employment, community involvement, and living (Calhoon et al., 2019; Kozleski, 2020).

As laws for educating individuals with disabilities have developed, these human rights for daily living continue to be a determining factor for the QOL and driving force for implemented strategies for SWD (Russo, 2019).

Self-advocacy has been documented as the following steps for self-enlightenment: knowledge of self, rights, communication, and leadership (Test et al., 2005). It is imperative for individuals with disabilities to be aware of their needs and abilities to continue advocating for themselves; without an understanding of abilities and areas of need, individuals with disabilities are unable to make informed and realistic forward progress toward their highest QOL (Cuenca-Carlino et al., 2019). Once individuals with disabilities are able to recognize themselves, independent rights and needs/abilities can be addressed. However, addressing their needs is not always simple, and opportunities for communication and advocacy strategies are necessary to establish change for the growth of the individuals with disabilities (Pouliot et al., 2017). These strategies for advancement are not singular, so advocates for individuals with disabilities must take advantage of leadership roles to show the process for self-advocacy is embedded in civil and social rights movements (The Arc, 2021).

The conceptual framework for this study comprised self-determination theory (SDT), specifically for individuals with disabilities (Dispenza, 2021). QOL for SWSD are directly impacted by SDT and the current awareness of civil right leaders; they are finding the benefits and value of having AWD be active participants and leaders within their community (Fullana et al., 2019; Office for Civil Rights, 2020). In the SDT, individual motivation is related to three basic human needs: competence, relatedness, and

autonomy (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Competence, or one's ability to be useful and effective, supports the interest necessary for success through work (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). For SWSD, success in the workplace promotes pride and self-worth; yet, consistently, SWSD are underrepresented in the workplace due to the employers' perceptions of ableism and disablism (Dispenza, 2021). As social beings, humans are driven by connections with peers, and relationships are centered in empathy, praise, and acceptance (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Autonomy, or the freedom of an individual to make decisions for themselves, also grounds motivation (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Through autonomy, an individual determines their preferences for how to employ their usefulness and connections with others. When self-determination is overcome by the motivations of others, the need to become successful in job tasks and relationships becomes trivial. Advocates for SWSD are necessary to guide self-determination; however, when advocates overreach, SWSD are not provided opportunities to fulfill their own motivations for QOL (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018).

For SWSD, finding opportunities to show competence through societal contribution was unprecedented. In the 1950s, organizations, such as The Arc, promoted advocacy for individuals with intellectual/cognitive disabilities by protesting the incessant and overuse of institutionalization rather than education (Kozleski, 2020). It was not uncommon for society to perceive individuals with disabilities as lesser and incapable of contributing to their communities (Melloy & Murry, 2019). Yet, it was not until the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that resources for individuals with disabilities

resembled current practice. In this act, disabilities were defined as a natural occurrence in human experiences, thus they do not limit individual rights for self-determination, including but not limited to, making choices, being beneficially employed, and having experiences within the community (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2016).

A person's intrinsic motivations for connectedness are desired and achieved at various concentrations, yet are bound to their feelings of belonging (Together 4 Change, 2020). The People First Movement, originating in Sweden and migrating to the United States in 1974, provided a platform for individuals with disabilities to express themselves and share ideas and information while building relationships with others (Together 4 Change, 2020). This self-advocacy movement, initiated by the SDT, has become a staple in over 40 countries and has thousands of members while also promoting resources, literature reviews, and strategies to support individuals with disabilities (Together 4 Change, 2020).

When autonomy is governed by external motivations, the value of purposeful decisions declines to meet superficial conclusions; therefore, when advocates overextend their preferences for SWSD, the visible needs of SWSD are met, but the core of human needs reside within unique desires of an individual (Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). When the resources of The Arc (2021) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were combined, programs to supplement employment, housing, and financial support began to take shape. Nonetheless, in 1975, millions of students were either not receiving appropriate education for their needs, receiving their education in specialized schools, being removed from classes with same-aged peers based on their disabilities, or in ill-

fitting placements due to various factors including unavailability of programs and placements (Calhoon et al. 2019; Office for Civil Rights, 2020). Even with acts and laws in place, the mindset of education leaders did not place value in providing SWSD with the opportunity to grow their skills within the same design as their nondisabled peers, whether due to their perceptions as leaders or a lack of resources (Russo, 2019). In Section 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2016), the need to have statewide implementation of VR support with an emphasis on the gainful employment and opportunities for higher QOL through decision making and self-efficacy are described.

In 1979, a petition to prevent several individuals (including persons with disabilities) from discrimination was filed and ruled on in 1980, creating the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act of 1980 (Barczyk & Davis, 2009). However, this act is limited, with protections only acting not on behalf of an individual, only specific groups (i.e., specifically for individuals within a facility, such as an institution or nursing home; Barczyk & Davis, 2009; National Council on Disability, 2008). Four decades later, individuals continue to reference this act for stability through resources for adults with disabilities but are not fully supported to help in specific circumstances (Sherwood, 2021). Predictably, these actions to support various needs and unique circumstances are moving forward legally, yet not accepted or implemented in standard daily practice within societal norms (Sherwood, 2021).

According to previous researchers, self-determination developed through self-advocacy is a learned and necessary skill for individuals with disabilities to adapt to

societal expectations (Caldwell, 2011; Dispenza, 2021; Friedman et al., 2016; Pouliot et al., 2017; Test et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Currently, society deems individuals with severe disabilities incapable of sound decision making. As described by Dispenza (2021), individuals with disabilities are judged as “being helpless, like infants or children; with pity and sorrow; as living with unending suffering and tragedy; as dangerous threats to society; or as incompetent burdens who have no capacity to contribute to society” (p.673) This stigma of worthlessness by employers results in fewer opportunities for gainful employment, leadership roles, and beneficial community experiences (Dispenza, 2021; Emira et al., 2018). Without opportunities to be leaders in society, individuals with disabilities will continue to be underrepresented and advocates will continue to be necessary for expressing their perspectives (Emira et al., 2018).

In this study, I focused on providing details regarding self-determination, with a concentration in the self-advocacy skills of students served in self-contained settings, by gaining teacher and parent perspectives of student participation before, during, and after IEP meetings to establish a platform for enhancing student competence, relatedness, and autonomy through transition services for adulthood.

### **Impact of the IEP**

The civil rights movement to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities is gaining awareness and support. Several organizations are developing, recreating themselves, and contributing to new societal expectations. Hence, in 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), later becoming IDEA in 1990, which began the momentum for public, appropriate

education for SWD. EAHCA was passed to provide a meaningful, more than satisfying a standard, for all students (Johnson et al., 2020; Kozleski, 2020; Yell & Bateman, 2020). The key phrase of “basic floor of opportunity” implies SWSD did not need to have exceptional education, only enough to maintain mediocre success compared to peers; therefore, neither accommodations to maximize potential nor student preferences were considered to be of importance (Whitted, 2020).

Years previously, SWD were placed in facilities to meet their needs because it was perceived that teachers were neither responsible nor capable of educating students with diverse academic, social, emotional, and/or medical needs, and this opportunity to have access to resources outside of specialized facilities already seemed adequate in meeting student needs (Johnson et al., 2020; Kozleski, 2020). Through the IDEA, students were provided free, appropriate, public education (FAPE), thus promising public schools financial support to meet the needs of SWD; however, current financial support for SWD is less than promised when signing the Act (Hitch, 2019). FAPE was provided to schools supporting any individual with special needs at no cost to the student or family, established requirements to meet state standards of appropriate education through each grade level (i.e., preschool, elementary, and secondary), and combined these expectations with the students’ IEPs (Kozleski, 2020; Mueller et al., 2019). However, IEP goals were designed to meet the academic needs of students, not the child as a whole; hence, the IEP did not focus on the preferences of the student, only the basic needs of the student for academic achievement.

In the several debates and rulings of the *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*, the parents refused to agree and sign the IEP of their daughter, Amy, who became deaf due a childhood disease because the IEP did not include sign language interpreters (Hammel, 2018). It was argued by the school district that Amy was successful with accommodations and services provided (Yell & Bateman, 2020). The Rowley family felt Amy was not able to reach her full potential because she was not offered services that would maximize her learning (Hammel, 2018). After several appeals and becoming the first case for special education to reach the Supreme Court, it was ruled that due to Amy's academic success (she was in the top of her class in achievement), the school district was providing her with appropriate education with accompanying services to support her needs as a deaf student (Yell & Bateman, 2020).

Although Amy was not cognitively impaired, her experiences paved the way for other due process appeals to ensure FAPE for all students with an IEP (Dieterich et al., 2019). The Rowley Standard became the model for determining FAPE through the services provided in an IEP (Prince et al., 2018). Neither Amy's choices nor preferences were in the forefront of this debate, the Rowley Standard became a test for advocates to compare FAPE and did not provide momentum for student progression towards adult success. Amy was a child with a typically developing intellect, yet because she was deemed disabled, her preferences and path for success were determined by advocates, which created the narrative that SWD are incapable of making informed decisions.

Because IEPs continue to be the driving force behind the determination of FAPE, families of SWD question the definition of “appropriate” in relation to their education and services provided (Fisher et al., 2020). According to the EAHCA, schools were not required to provide services that ensured students meet their maximum potential; instead, services only needed to provide meaningful benefit for the student (Dieterich et al., 2019). However, in subsequent cases, such as *Timothy W. v. Rochester School District* (1989), it was determined that meaningful benefit for the students was not confined to the typical academic development (Dieterich et al., 2019; Zirkel, 2017). Additionally, in the most recent ruling of *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, “appropriate” and “meaningful” are more clearly defined, especially for students with more severe disabilities (Yell & Bateman, 2020; Zirkel, 2017). Moreover, student situations and characteristics of disabilities are considered for the creation and setting of reasonable IEP goals (Goran, 2020). These rulings regarding the provision of FAPE include academic and nonacademic achievements to reach meaningful benefit, and such needs are necessary for the daily living skills that are imperative for academic success (Prince et al. 2018). Yet, with these rulings, continued gaps in student success regarding adult living skills and community involvement remain an area to be addressed for students and their advocates.

Cases like *Rowley* and *Andrew* (*Bobby R.*, *Fry*, *Kirby*, *Van Duyn*, etc.) that have been relevant to special education, specifically encompassing and IEP and FAPE, have been ruled radically different; the courts (circuits) vary in their implementation and interpretations, allowing for degrees of variations of the expectations (Zirkel, 2017). Due

to these misalignments, advocates and education leaders are occupied with fighting for more than basic education. Typically, this fight is not with the participation of the student nor their point of view in the circumstances. These standards are based on the opinions of advocates, school staff, and judicial systems, not the perspective of the SWD (Hitch, 2019).

### **IEP Perspectives**

The IEP was designed to be the roadmap of FAPE for SWD (Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017; Slade et al., 2018); in creation, the IEP process was simple collaboration between parents and teachers about the current progress of the student and the methods to continue basic progress (Fogle et al., 2020; Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017). These intentions were to give parents and teachers the opportunity to build a plan that benefited the academics of SWD (Mueller & Vick, 2019). However, in reality, parents and teachers experiences the IEP process vastly different. Special education teachers are overworked with extensive duties compared to teachers serving student in general curriculum, and enter the profession underprepared for supporting parents and students through the IEP process (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). These expectations placed on these teachers for a large turnover rate (Beck & DeSutter, 2020; Wong et al., 2017); hence, new special education teachers (SET) are beginning the profession without traditional schooling and “less than full certified” (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). Due to the lack of preparation and unskilled teachers supporting their students’ needs, parents are skeptical and more likely to pursue due process hearings (Mueller et al., 2019). Parents are limited in providing input, and feel the decisions made about their student in the IEP meeting is

predetermined (Kurth et al., 2020). Collaboration between the two advocates is greatly lacking, eliminating opportunities for SWD to be participants (Fogle et al. 2020).

### **Teacher Preparedness**

Teachers enter the profession with aspirations to support students and their families; for special education teachers, the expectation for family connections are even higher due to the needs of their students and the IEP process (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). According to the IDEA, parent involvement is a necessity for appropriate and successful IEP of SWD. Yet, preservice educators often do not receive training of how to engage with families (Accardo & Xin, 2017; Mueller et al., 2019; Strassfeld, 2019). Special education teachers are taught the importance of making connections to ensure SWD are being provided FAPE, in addition to cultural awareness, belief systems, and socioeconomic status variations (Accardo & Xin, 2017; Mueller et al., 2019). However, preservice teachers often report they are unable to have authentic experiences communicating with parents prior to employment (Mueller et al., 2019; Strassfeld, 2019). Teachers are given opportunities to connect with students during student teaching but are not included in the IEP process due to confidentiality for witnessing parent-teacher collaboration (Accardo & Xin, 2017). Without the preparation for meaningful relationships with parents, novice teachers place priorities on writing and presenting the IEP without parent collaboration (Fogle et al., 2020; Mueller et al., 2019); SET stronghold parents during the IEP meetings (Mueller & Vick, 2019; Mueller et al., 2019).

The expectations and duties of a SET intensify beyond collaborating with parents. SET is the least desired within the educational profession due to an abundance of

responsibilities, including but not limited to: writing and conducting IEP meetings, data collection, behavior management, maintaining larger caseloads, transitions for community involvement (Beck & DeSutter, 2020; Mason-Williams et al., 2020). SET are also expected to be student and parent advocates (teaching students and parents how to advocate for meaningful educational goals) while representing the school as an IEP facilitator (maintaining IEP protocols, conflict resolution; Burke et al., 2018; Mueller & Vick, 2019). Not only are SET needing to adhere to the needs of SWD and their parents but also provide services under FAPE to at-risk students (Calhoon et al., 2019). Although teachers serving SWD in self-contained classrooms have restricted access to general education settings, it becomes the responsibility of the SET to educate and provide resources for general education teachers and students for inclusion with SWD (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). Additionally, compared to general education peers, SET do not have predictable schedules for planning, collaborating with other teachers in and out of the special education field, nor consistent professional development (PD; Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Olson & Roberts, 2020). Thus, SET has a national average turnover rate of 23%, with two thirds being intentional resignations (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).

Considering the shortage of SET, many school systems may hire individuals without a special education degree or certification, often referred to as not highly qualified educators (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). Prior to the extensive requirements for IEP and FAPE, SET were looked at as experts in their field of providing superb education to SWD, but it has been diluted as a result of limited unpreparedness (Calhoon et al.

2019). SWD are denied individual opportunities to improve progressively because teachers are limited in their time caused by an overloaded caseload of SWD, and the inability to connect with professional peers (Beck & DeSutter, 2020). These teachers are learning the hardships of teaching, and maintaining the workload expected for SWD, without the collegiate training and knowledge of education pedagogy; the lacking in service years and experiences are noticeable by parents and SWD (Slade et al., 2018). Furthermore, administration, too, are unprepared to support SET in self-contained settings due to limited understanding of the best practices in these specialized rooms (Ruppar et al., 2017). With these restrictions, evaluators are unsure of the necessary skills and conditions that may alter the needs of students; thus, SET once more are without guidance for stimulating student and parent involvement (Ruppar et al., 2017). Hence, without adequate training, consistent turnover, and strenuous workload, SET are unprepared for the complexities of IEP meetings.

### **Parent Knowledge**

A lack of knowledge is not singular to SET, parent advocates can have similar deficits. Although parents are aware of student medical and personal needs, it is common for the teacher to have a better understanding of academic and transition abilities and areas of need; combined, teachers and parents should be experts in students' needs (Fogle et al., 2020; Ruppar et al., 2017). Parents rely on teachers for involvement and knowledge of changes in practices and laws; however, this dual responsibility to parents and student require SET to be well versed in the evolution of best practices and court rulings (Strassfeld, 2019). Parents' roles in the IEP are nonnegotiable and it is the expectation for

teachers to be diligent in placing value in parent input (Fisher et al. 2020; Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017). Parents are expected to be equals in the ability of making informed and appropriate decisions for their SWD, including adaptations such as language support to be involved (Autin et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2020). According to a survey after the Endrew ruling, many parents are unaware of the resources to file complaints, make inquiries nor support their child through the IEP meeting (Autin et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2020). According to Strassfeld (2019), mandates such as FAPE are in place to be the cornerstone of guiding schools and teachers to involve parents in the IEP process to meet the needs of SWSD. When parents, teachers, and students are equally represented and knowledgeable of current practices, the success of the student become long term (Strassfeld, 2019).

Aside from legal knowledge, in many instances parent contributions to IEPs are undervalued due to the perception from educators that parents lack familiarity in educational procedures (Fogle et al., 2020). This assumption may be derived from the reoccurring complaint of SET using professional jargon within the meetings (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Fogle et al., 2020; Mueller et al., 2019). The use of professional terminology alienates parents and students from being equal participants because these terms are not provided or communicated with parents (Connor & Cavendish, 2018). Besides feeling limited in the conversation, parents also are excluded from providing their input for student success. Many parents report not contributing to the IEP because the case manager (creator and often the facilitator of the IEP) has already completed the document prior to the meeting (Slade et al., 2018). From the parents' experiences, the IEP

meeting is designed for teachers to provide details on their SWD progress, and for the parent to comply with attendance mandates of signing off on the necessary paperwork to finalize the IEP process until the next annual review (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

Perception in lack of investment of parent input from educators does not give parents incentives to be available for IEP meetings; moreover, some teachers may relate parent meeting anxiety to indifference of student IEP goals and objectives (Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017). Parental involvement is a legal requirement for effective IEPs, yet educators do not promote welcoming and collaborative space for parents, many parents are apprehensive to share recommendation for their student to their teachers (Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017; Slade et al., 2018). To help make IEP more compatible for advocates, resources for improved knowledge and develop such as IEP training, communication workshops, and decision making principles are available to parents; however, these resources are not mandated by the government and are often awarded through a proposed grant (Strassfeld, 2019). It is common for parents that are effective advocates seek training and resources without the support of the school, which often leads to parents looking for educational family advocates to support parents during IEP meetings (Burke et al., 2018). Unfortunately, attending an IEP meeting with additional advocates is often perceived by school personnel as an intimidation tactic to demand services and supports for students, rather than an educational/legally informed mediator for decision making with the students' needs in the forefront (Burke et al., 2018). Without this intimidation, parents, especially those of diversity, are influenced to agree with the conclusions proposed by the SET (Cavendish & Connor, 2018a).

## **Transition Plan**

According to the IDEA, by their 16th birthday, students with an IEP must have a transition plan included in their IEP to make plans for effective postsecondary living: this includes outlines for training/higher education, employment, adult living skills, etc.

(Harrison et al., 2017; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2017). Due to the personal preferences and abilities of the student, the transition plan requires students to be present while discussed, however it is not required that the student participates (Johnson et al., 2020). In many cases, student participation is determined by attendance not by the active role a student partakes (Johnson et al., 2020). Moreover, students served in self-contained settings are not only limited in their active role during IEP meetings but have the lowest attendance compared to peers with disabilities served in general curriculum settings (Johnson et al., 2020). Even when students, and their parents, are included in the meeting it is reported very few receive the opportunity to provide input for transition goals (Harrison et al., 2017). Unfortunately, for SWD that have been offered options for participation, their preferences were deemed unrealistic or unattainable by their advocates (Harrison et al., 2017).

Like IEPs, the transition plan must have meaningful and attainable goals for SWD. In a study by Harrison et al. (2017), various IEPs were analyzed, and it was noted employment with training goals are missing; thus, demonstrating a lack in planning with students and their advocates. For a successful and meaningful transition plan, specifically for SWD served in self-contained settings, collaboration with knowledgeable advocates deem most valuable. Unfortunately, SET nor parents, again, are not prepared; for many

transitional components, vocational rehabilitation counselors are typically the means for extensive knowledge, yet they are not the facilitator for IEP/transition plan meetings due to lack of knowledge by the case manager to invite vocational rehabilitation counselors (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2017). Continuously, there is a lack of knowledge of resources, communication between advocates and their SWD, and inexperience with supporting SWD for adult living- overall, transitions for SWSD are lagging behind their peers (Schillaci et al., 2021).

### **Effective IEP Meetings**

The IEP process continues to be a working progress between teachers and parents. Teachers are overworked and undertrained to adequately provide collaboration with families, resulting in parents becoming uninvolved and dissatisfied with the IEP process for their SWD (Beck & DeSutter, 2020). Parent advocates are more satisfied with the IEP process and school relationships when teachers are experienced with IEPs and the students they serve; these teachers have training and professional development to feel comfortable engaging fully with parents (Slade et al., 2018). There has been some development and research to provide IEP meeting suggestions to give teachers a guideline and equalize parent involvement. The suggestions share ideas such as, creating an IEP agenda, providing a draft of the IEP, gaining parental insight through surveys or preview meetings, all prior to the meeting (Beck & DeSutter, 2020). Moreover, during the IEP meeting, facilitators are used to guide through the IEP, mediating the involvement and conflicts between teachers and parents (Beck & DeSutter, 2020). With awareness and creating solutions for teachers and parents during meetings, the IEP

process is evolving and becoming inclusive and equalized between teachers and parents (Jones & Peterson-Ahmad, 2017). With relationships stabilizing for effective meetings, students with less severe disabilities and are served in the general curriculum, are sharing the meeting space with their advocates through student-led IEPs (Howard et al., 2020).

### **Student-Led IEP Meetings**

As students reach the age and need for transitions plans, attendance of students is required, however their participation is often overlooked (Biegun et al., 2020). The lack of discussion or involvement in the process is apparent when students are fearful of attending the meetings; students often think they are in trouble when present at IEP meetings (Connor & Cavendish, 2018). Student-led IEPs not only allow for student involvement but provide students the opportunity to guide the meeting with their own perspectives (Howard et al., 2020). Students show awareness of their successes and areas of need, voice and choice in the plans for adult transitioning, and the accommodations that are useful with the guidance of advocates (Burke et al., 2018; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2018). When advocates begin to campaign for student needs, rather than the student doing so for themselves, advocates gain the positive outcomes because the advocate then becomes the focus (Burke et al., 2018). With the support and collaboration with their advocates, SWSD develop self-determination skills which results in lasting success as adults (Accardo & Xin, 2017; Howard et al., 2020).

Although student-led IEPs are available to all SWD, it is not common practice for students served in general curriculum, and rarely used for SWSD served in self-contained settings (Howard et al., 2020). Teacher preparation for student-led IEPs is crucial;

without being skilled and experienced in the IEP process initially, teachers are limited in providing opportunities for student takeover (Olson & Roberts, 2020). This would require teachers to be confident in their understanding of the process in order to teach students techniques. Additionally, parents of SWD of more severe disabilities are not forthcoming and direct with their child about their disabilities; in many cases students are unaware of their disability, their needs, or plan for adulthood (Cavendish et al., 2017).

Student-led IEPs are not intended to give complete control to the student but rather opportunities to develop self-advocacy, communication, and appropriate decision-making skills for adult living (Howard et al., 2020). SWSD become relevant participants in the IEP process, able to voice preferences and make mistakes, while in a safe environment with their parent and teacher advocates (Mueller & Vick, 2019). Additionally, student-led IEPs do not require the student to be facilitate the meetings; teachers may use visual aids, agendas, assistive technology for communication, or guided prompting for modeling self-advocacy skills (Biegun et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2020). Overall, the intent of student-led IEPs is to encourage student voice and preferences for attainable goals, objectives, and transitions: student-led IEP ensure IEPs are student centered (Biegun et al., 2020). With continued counseling from advocates, SWSD will have developed self-advocacy skills and will have more opportunities for employment, community involvement, and healthy decisions without the overuse of guardians.

### **Guardianship**

The IEP team consists of parents, school staff, and students to create meaningful goals for academic, social, and adaptive skills as students transition into adulthood

(Flowers et al., 2018). For high school students severed in self-contained settings, the legal timeframe for adulthood is typically before aging out/graduation of high school. At the age of 18, students with disabilities gain the responsibility of advocating for their needs with the support of the IEP and Transition plan (Greene, 2018). Although they may have parental support, all rights for decision making transfer to the student- the student has the final judgement in a split decision with advocates; therefore, guardianship was established to support students and their advocates when students were deemed incompetent of sound decision making (Houseworth et al., 2019). However, many guardians are unaware of the commitment and expectations associated with gaining the rights of another adult person (Nord et al., 2018). Once guardians have control, all decisions are made for the AWD including but not limited to: employment, household, finances, and medical (Nord et al., 2018). When obtaining guardianship, advocates must agree to the expectations aligned with the state; guardian decisions are determined by need, benefit, and importance to the AWD. Unfortunately, guardianship is an all or nothing system, allowing advocates to be the sole decision maker without accountability to the AWD nor state. Moreover, it is uncommon for the state to question or follow up with advocates who have obtained guardianship to ensure the well-being and treatment of AWD.

Advocates, typically parents, can be appointed as legal guardians of an adult through lawful contract. Guardianship is often awarded based on medical needs and/or inability to conform to societal norm behaviors due to disability characteristics and is difficult to reverse as it is awarded to advocates for life (MacLeod, 2017; Zhang et al.,

2019). This overtaking of the adult often results in the adult with disabilities forgoing specific rights such as voting, medical treating, marriage, and obtaining a driver's license (Brady et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2017). AWD with advocate guardianship lose all abilities for decision making; all wants, and needs must be accepted and approved by the guardian. With such oppression, the development of independence and self-determination skills are terminated (MacLeod, 2017; Nord et al., 2018). AWD are segregated by the perception of ableism, excluding them from mainstream society (MacLeod, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019).

For many advocates, the decision for obtaining guardianship is overwhelming. It is understood the AWD requires guidance for decision making, however, few advocates are provided with information for supporting without obtaining guardianship (MacLeod, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). Moreover, when questions, educators of SWD are unknowledgeable of less controlling systems for supporting life choices of AWD, such as supported decision-making (Brady et al., 2019).

### **Quality of life**

Self-determination, or self-advocacy, directly effects students' QOL (Lingo et al., 2018, Schillaci et al., 2021). QOL refers to the happiness and success of a person, such as accomplishments in employment, positive relationships, community involvement, finances, and recreation; these are not reserved for non-disabled people. By theory, self-determination relies on involving students in the decision-making process to enhance positive outcomes within their environments (community, workplace, relationships; Cavendish et al., 2017). These skills should not be reserved for adulthood but grown

upon while supported by teacher and parent advocates, such through the IEP process, however, many SWSD have limited access to generalized community instruction due to a segregation determined by teachers and parents (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020). Thus, a snowball effect: QOL may not be reached due to a lack of self-determination skills, students are unable to acquire decision-making skills because the transition plan was not student centered by personal preferences, advocates are overwhelmed and untrained to promote advocacy skills in daily choices, all which lead to a surface level of involvement in the IEP process for SWSD (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020; Schillaci et al., 2021; Shogren et al., 2017). These linear consequences help determine the expectations of effective goalsetting for SWSD, such as guardianship, finances, and positive relationships which create a divide in equity for adults with severe disabilities (Kozleski, 2020; Schillaci et al., 2021).

### **Implications**

Effective preparation for transitions is needed to have the highest quality of life for SWSD; through the building of self-determination skills and self-advocacy, SWSD have opportunities to express their voice and choice of personal preferences for enhancing adulthood (Schillaci et al., 2021; Shogren et al., 2017). Parents and teachers have varied perspectives for the quality of efforts put forth to improve adult living of SWSD; few efforts for centering students in transition and self-advocacy are not given precedence, yet research denotes the positive impact for AWD to have meaningful relationships, gainful employment, and access to their community (Kozleski, 2020). Although research for SWSD is limited for student-led IEPs, results and discussions

indicate student-led IEPs provide SWSD opportunities to familiarize themselves with self-advocacy while in a safe environment of teacher/parent advocates (Ruble et al., 2019). Literature examines the knowledge of both teachers and parents of student self-advocacy, both revealing a deficiency in supporting SWSD with the necessary skills to develop adult transitions skills. Moreover, the perspectives as to the cause for these deficits are unclear and unspecified for advocates of SWSD.

Contingent on qualitative data, professional development and guided workshops were considered for project deliverables. Considering the literature showed a lack of knowledge and opportunities for collaborative learning for students' advocates, combined introductions and instruction can foster awareness of each perspectives, duties, and expectations for facilitating student advocacy through student-led objectives. Teachers and parents would operate equally in the process as intentionally designed for IEP and transition plans because trainings occur concurrently. Results and presented projects were designed to support advocates in promoting student self-advocacy in pursuit of enhancing SWSD QOL in adulthood.

### **Summary**

The civil rights movement for individuals with disabilities is gaining support and momentum in giving people with disabilities and their advocates more stability in society (Kozleski, 2020). In this chapter, the literature review was presented beginning with the history of advocacy for SWSD. Laws, court rulings, and new policies are continuously changing to give perspectives and voice to those who have not had the opportunity to share them. Yet, even with this awareness for change, the process is a gradual pace.

Teachers and parents continue to dispute the roles of advocacy, thus, missing the prospect of working collaboratively for the benefit of the student (Ruppar et al., 2017). Though these incongruities may not be the fault of these student advocates, the result remains desolate in the preparation of required skills for student success in their transition to adulthood. Without quality of time and efforts placed on the development of self-advocacy in SWSD, guardianship and loss of rights, including voice and choice, diminish SWSD QOL through their adulthood. In the following section, using qualitative research design and approach, perspectives of participants, teacher and parent advocates of student self-advocacy, are described. These descriptions include data collection, analysis, and limitations.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

#### **Qualitative Study Approach**

In the attempt to gain an understanding of advocate perspectives, I decided the qualitative method would best support the findings. Qualitative studies can be approached from various standpoints because the intent is to gain a perspective on how individuals view their individual experiences, and this is not realized with the use of other design methods (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Teacher paths to the profession of education vastly differ, and with these varied experiences their views are unique to each individual; similarly, parents with SWSD are diverse due to their experiences in home settings, resources, finances, family dynamics, and occupations. Use of a qualitative approach provides opportunities for an open-ended narrative and flexibility. Qualitative research focuses on the sharing of participants' personal experiences, and, often, interviews are used to collect data through observation, repeated themes, and detailed descriptions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative researchers often concentrate on making a difference by creating change through effective problem solving (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mihas, 2019). I collected qualitative data in this study with the goal of effecting positive social change through the creation of the project.

#### **Participants**

The participants consisted of two groups: (a) high school teachers who serve SWSD in self-contained settings and had at least 3 years of teaching experience and (b) parents of high school SWSD who are placed in self-contained classrooms. Both groups

were not limited to one classification of disability or category of classroom because student placement is not dictated by disability due to FAPE. Considering participants have varied experiences based on classroom type (including class size), behaviors, and ableism associated with the severity of the disability, teacher participants represented the following classroom types: severe and profound intellectual disabilities (SID/PID), moderate intellectual disabilities (MOID), mild intellectual disabilities (MID), and autism (AUT). Similarly, parent participants had a student in these types of classrooms regardless of associated disability.

To recruit participants for this study, I contacted teachers and families within a single school district in suburban Georgia. A brief overview of the study and request for volunteers was sent via email to high school teachers serving self-contained classrooms. To maintain the confidentiality of students and their families, the invitation letter (via an email from an administrator or counselor) was sent to families in various program areas. Interested participants contacted me directly. The invitation letter contained a consent form and summary of the study was provided, and those willing to participate in the study consented via email. Their responses were kept in a private folder designated to maintain their confidentiality. There were 14 total interested participants; however, 10 participants consented to volunteer (i.e., five teachers and five parents). The populations of high school teachers with self-contained classrooms and parents of SWSD are relatively smaller when compared to overall high school populations. Moreover, I selected the high school for participation in this study based on the availability of self-contained programs because not all high schools serve a population of SWSD.

Once participants were selected and had the process of the study explained to them, they consented to participate in the study by signing waivers for informed consent before beginning their interview. Initially, the interviews were planned to be conducted virtually due to limitations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic restricting access to individuals, but interviews ended up being held virtually and through written submissions. With the participants' permission, I recorded the virtual interviews to allow for the opportunity to revisit the interviews for accuracy in data collection and analysis. For confidentiality purposes, the participants were allowed to turn off the camera feature once introductions were made and prior to the beginning of the recording. Teachers that chose to complete the interview via written submission were instructed to send me responses through a personal email platform to promote confidentiality from the school system server.

The names and identities of the participants were and will not be shared; however, a description of the area teachers serve, and the disability/disabilities of their students were recorded to compare and contrast the participants' perspectives. Teacher participants were not at risk for loss or judgement because I was not in a supervisory role over them but instead had a working relationship with them as a local colleague. Additionally, parent volunteers were not selected from current students being served by me; neither students nor their parents were at risk for prejudice or consequences because I did not hold a supervisory role or could affect success outcomes within the school, home, or community settings. Participants had knowledge of me professional because I work within the community studied. This awareness of being a part of the same community, in

conjunction with actively listening to their interview responses, demonstrated the unbiased and open-minded approach I took while gathering data without dissecting local cultures and societal norms within high schools. The interviews remained on topic because I kept the participants focused on sharing their perceptions of the matter under study.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to contacting potential participants for data collection, I applied for Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. After receiving this approval, I contacted the project site school district to apply to conduct research within the county. It was imperative that the study was not at the expense of the participants, and this included guaranteeing their personal rights, confidentiality, protection from harm, and that they were provided informed consent. In the initial email regarding informed consent, participants were provided with detailed information of the purpose of the study, their rights as participants (e.g., their ability to leave the study at any time), and how their identity would be protected. The Walden University IRB approval number is 08-19-22-0731997. Both the IRB and the school district approved the research before any data were collected.

Once selected and consent was provided, I scheduled a date and time for the interview or the completion of the written form for participants. The interviews were conducted individually through a virtual meeting. I presented the interview questions on the screen for the participants to view (see Appendix B). The open-ended interview questions addressed the research questions and were presented as the research questions

with each question being fragmented into specific questions for each advocate parent and teacher. These fragments represented the research question in answerable and understandable terms; again, providing opportunities for teachers and parents to focus on the content rather than scientific jargon. My intent was to limit misunderstandings of the questions asked and create an inviting environment. The references to the main research question were consistent between each interview. Moreover, I did not stray from the questions during virtual interviews to maintain consistency between virtual interviews and written submissions with the interview questions remaining the same in both formats. The virtual interviews were recorded to allow me to revisit the conversations for effective coding. I took notes in a reflective journal when observing the recordings because I wanted to give participants my direct and full attention during the interviews for their comfortability. I sent follow-up emails to written submission participants when necessary for clarification. Responses were categorized in tandem with follow-up questions to interpret reoccurring experiences and themes.

Prior to the interviews, I assembled a panel of experts to review the interview questions. Similar to an IEP meeting, various personnel were represented, including a SET, general education teacher, counselor, and administrator. This variety of personnel promoted clarity for teacher and parent participants through evaluating the questions to ensure they were unbiased and were not leading. Additionally, by assembling a team with varied responsibilities concerning teachers and parents alike, I ensured my research biases and personal experiences were not a factor in the selected interview questions.

I conducted the interviews at the participants' discretion. Considering the time constraints for both teachers and parents, the interview process needed to not be overwhelming to either party. Initially, volunteers were limited in their participation in virtual meetings; hence, the option for written submissions was added. This more than doubled the willingness of volunteers. Teachers have innumerable duties within the school day, and parents' evenings are spent with their SWSD; therefore, the possible times for interviews were flexible while being respectful of participants' time and daily demands. To protect my health and that of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were held virtually through Google Meet or an email platform. I recorded the interviews through the virtual meeting platform and then transcribed the interviews myself. I displayed an interview agenda with questions on the screen for participants to view, so they could anticipate the questions ahead; however, when necessary to engage for the participants for deeper meaning, clarifying and probing questions were posed. The recorded meeting was saved to an external hard drive rather than an online network/database to protect the participants' personal content and information. Participant information, written submissions, my reflective journal, and coded data were also kept on my external hard drive for confidentiality purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were complete, I began analyzing the data. In creating a preliminary impression of the data, I grouped the responses of open-ended questions for data analysis collectively by question using question-based coding. However, question-based coding does not allow the researcher to include themes developed or discussed

outside of the question (Lewins & Silver, 2007). From this point, I used a deductive approach to determine reoccurring patterns, differences, and relationships within the responses from teachers and parents with parallels to SDT (see Lewins & Silver, 2007). Initially, these groups were analyzed separately to find the occurrences between similar subjects (i.e., teachers with teachers and parents with parents). Themes emerged from reoccurring topics within each grouping. Then, I compared one collective group with the other group (i.e., compared teacher responses to parent responses).

Upon concluding data analysis, I conducted member checks to assure the accuracy of and credibility to the findings. Member checking is a valuable, and often expected tool in qualitative research (Motulsky, 2021). I provided the transcribed interview and/or written submissions with reflective notes within the margins to participants to review and provide feedback on. Their feedback was added to the reflective notes and denoted by a different colored font. Having both reflective notes represented created trustworthiness for the data collected and reinforced the validity of the participants' perceptions.

A potential threat to validity was the sample size of the participants. SWSD were a narrowed group for selection and having to choose participants from only the local setting that met the requirements of the study was a challenge. However, the sample size did not create discrepant cases because the requirements for recruiting participants were accessible, yet specific.

**Limitations**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some limitations impacted the interview process. Financial/equipment resources may also have contributed to the narrowing of parent participant sampling. Parents without access to the internet or corresponding technology devices may not have had the opportunity to be represented in the study because they may not have been able to meet virtually. Due to restrictions regarding in-person meetings, these participants may have been omitted from the interview process. However, this limitation supported the end results because this omission was occurring during IEP meetings as well and thus, unintentionally provided evidence of the exclusion of parents.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had social and timing impacts on this study. Participants may not have desired to be interviewed because they may have been restricted in their time due to more responsibilities placed on them in response to the pandemic. Moreover, considering some of the interviews occurred virtually and participants had the option to turn off their cameras for confidentiality and personal preferences, the participant was limited by their facial expressions and/or voice alone. I did not have the opportunity to experience their body language or the fluidity of face-to-face conversation. However, to help with audio and technical difficulties, I provided the participant with an agenda of questions. In the event of misunderstandings, the text box was also available in the virtual meetings to ensure participants had several modes to communicate their experiences.

## **Data Analysis Results**

I provided a comprehensive narrative of the data analysis process used to gain notable results and describe the participants' direct responses. Initially, the data of teacher and parents were coded by patterns independently, then compared to one another to create themes. Tables 1, 2, and 3 reflect the research questions posed with subheadings related to each main research question. Additionally, common key words/phrases from participants are listed for pattern recognition. Table 4 displays patterns to show similarities and differences.

### **Data Codes and Themes**

I coded the data from the transcribed interviews and written submissions. To develop codes, teacher and parent responses were compared homogeneously as independent groups, then the codes were compared to across groups to develop themes as a whole. Tables 1–3 include direct responses from teachers and parents that capture the groups' overall responses. Table 4 provides codes for these responses through key words/phrases individually for teachers and parents. Themes are summarized as a combination of teacher and parent responses.

**Table 1**

*Research Question 1: What are Advocates' (i.e., Parents and Teachers) Perceptions of the Role High School Students Served in Self-Contained Settings Participate in the Current IEP Process?*

Subheading	Responses
Teacher	Teacher
Role of student	T2: "Many times, the student did not attend and other times they just sit there and participate minimally." T5: "Students only observe during IEP meeting; they are more involved in the beginning stages." T3: "This does vary based on verbal skills."
Role of advocate	T4: "To me, we, the advocates ran the meeting. The student was present and may have been asked a few questions throughout, but the meeting was ran by the advocates." T1: "the advocate usually participated because there was a language barrier..." T5: "Teachers and parents do all the communicating; they are comparing behaviors at school and home. They give feedback for goals based on their own observations."
Roles differ per advocate preference	T2: "Students are often quiet in my experience throughout the meeting. The teachers and parent do all the talking." T3: "I would not expect my nonverbal students to be able to make introductions or share their own strengths and weaknesses." T4: "Depends on the students' ability and awareness. Teachers are responsible for communicating their student's disabilities but parents are not given that clearance to teachers."
Parent	Parent
Role of student	P2: "He listened to the people in the meeting. He was able to see that people are there for him and are working together to help him." P3: "She listened to the meeting and answered questions when asked." P5: "In (student's name) IEP meetings, she was present, and attempts were made to include her."
Role of advocate	P1: "The role of the Special Education Advocate is to make sure all available services that the student requires are being met. They have the knowledge of services that parents may not be aware of that the student can benefit." P2: "Finding out from teachers what need to be worked on at home. They (SWSD) need to work continuously, so the goals from school needs to be enforced at home." P4: "It is the job of the teacher to make sure teachers are on the same page for goals for the students, and to inform parents of progress in the school setting."
Roles differ per advocate preference	P2: "There are differences of school and home environment. The difference is based on who and what the expectations are for the student. Desires and abilities can change on the experiences of the students." P3: "It should be based on the individual, different levels and needs." P4: "The ideal plan would be a custom fit for each student during the IEP meeting."

**Table 2**

*Research Question 2: What are Advocates' (i.e., Parents and Teachers) Perceptions of the Impact Implementing Self-Advocacy Strategies to Improve High School SWSD Active Participation in the IEP Process?*

Subheading	Teacher responses
Define self-advocacy (SA)	<p>T1: "They (nonverbal students) might not be able to SAY exactly what they want to say but sometimes their actions can be used as self-advocacy."</p> <p>T2: "Self-advocacy for me would mean the student would be able to speak up and advocacy for their own needs."</p> <p>T5: "Independence in basic needs and communication needs."</p>
Used strategies for SA skills	<p>T1: "Asking questions and making sure they understand the goals and purpose of the IEP meeting."</p> <p>T2: "Discussions about being self-advocacy are often used with my students."</p> <p>T3: "I gave and will continue to give career interest surveys to help with transition goals and planning."</p> <p>T4: "Instead of giving them the answer, I try to guide them with questions to figure it out for themselves."</p>
SA skills active participation during IEP	<p>T2: "They know their needs more than anyone."</p> <p>T3: "Allowing student participation in the IEP process gives them a sense of responsibility, pride, and ownership in their education."</p> <p>T4: "If students are able to advocate for themselves then they are able to contribute to their IEP by expressing their like/dislikes and career goals."</p>
Comparison of implementing SA skills by teacher/parent	<p>T1: "I believe that everyone has a different strategy, but when everyone is on the same page then self-advocacy and goals are usually met."</p> <p>T3: "Both advocates share the responsibility of implementing the skills, but the teacher plays more of a role during the IEP development and meeting."</p> <p>T5: "Teachers vary greatly due to knowledge of the process and expectations in home and school settings; at school the expectations are higher, students are babied at home. The rules and expectations to be self-advocate do not transfer."</p>

Subheading	Parent responses
Define self-advocacy (SA)	<p>P2: "Using communication to tell needs and wants. That he has his own voice, not the voice of advocates."</p> <p>P3: "Students tell what they want and needs, especially outside of their parent because that is where they feel most comfortable."</p> <p>P5: "Again, I think self-advocacy begins with the student finding and using his/her own voice."</p>
Used strategies for SA skills	<p>P2: "Most of the time we use show and repeat, ask lots of questions, and have continuous conversation before, during, and after activities."</p> <p>P4: "Encouragement, pushing her to do what she needs to improve, practice, talking it through, and guided instructions."</p> <p>P5: "I often 'volunteer' us for projects and initiatives without consulting with her first, which is both embarrassing and irritating since some of them revolve around person-centered planning (PCP) and most recently Supported Decision-Making (SDM)."</p>
SA skills active participation during IEP	<p>P1: "After hearing the student's input and taking it into consideration the teachers, administrators, and with parents' goals, the IEP can then be implemented to fit the students' individual needs."</p> <p>P2: "Advantages: Express experiences from his point of view. Disadvantages: the meeting can be emotional and over stimulating, especially if he cannot get the words out."</p> <p>P5: "Similarly I must confess in her IEP meetings, encouraging self-advocacy skills in that arena was not given consideration."</p>
Comparison of implementing SA skills by teacher/parent	<p>P3: "Not much different, they (SWSD) should learn the same things in both home and school settings for improving independence."</p> <p>P4: "It (self-advocacy skills) should carry over, it should not stop in the classroom nor at home. Advocates need to be on the same page to help the student grow."</p> <p>P5: "Again I don't see that either set of advocates focused on self-advocacy in the IEP setting. I do believe that both family members and educators share responsibility, though the professional is ultimately responsible for leading the way."</p>

**Table 3**

*Research Question 3: What are Advocates' (i.e., Parents and Teachers) Perceptions of Self-Advocacy Skills Obtained by SWSD for Enhanced Self-Determination to Ensure the Highest Quality of Life as an Adult With Severe Disabilities Through the IEP Process?*

Subheading	Teacher responses
Define quality of life (QOL)	<p>T2: "The highest quality of life should center around the independency of the student."</p> <p>T4: "An individual who can do most functions independently."</p> <p>T1: "Meeting life plan goals and attending programs that still keep them social and stimulated, such as adult day program."</p> <p>T3: "The individual lives a life that has purpose and meaning to both them and their family. This may include holding a job in the community or having a job or jobs in the home in which they are able to help."</p>
SA promote transitioning adult	<p>T3: "The effects on the aspects mentioned (daily living skills) would most likely be determined by the individual's communication skills as well as their interests."</p> <p>T4: "For example, if the student has the ability to express his or her interests in a career then they would have the ability to pick a field of work that they would genuinely enjoy, just as any typical person would."</p> <p>T5: "Self-advocacy would promote productive communication and allow for students to adapt to their environment."</p>
What SA skills needed for adult success	<p>T2: "Students with severe disabilities need a way to communicate their needs and wants."</p> <p>T3: "Students need to be able to identify their basic rights. They need to be able to understand that they deserve the same respect and treatment as individuals without disabilities. They need to know they can express themselves."</p> <p>T4: "Being able to express one's desires, like and dislikes, social skill, community involvement, understanding their disability and the supports they need to be successful, understanding where to get help, and problem solving."</p>

Subheading	Parent responses
Define quality of life (QOL)	<p>P1: "To me the highest quality of life means they (SWSD) have been cared for, nurtured, and taught life skills that will help them be as functional as possible in the real world."</p> <p>P2: "To be happy; to have a job, make friends outside of the family-choose his own peers, feel successful and self-sufficient. To feel like an adult."</p> <p>P4: "A life that is constantly growing in independence, voice and choices, wants and needs, communication and relationships."</p>
SA promote transitioning adult	<p>P1: "To know your strengths and weaknesses can only help guide them in finding a job in the future."</p> <p>P2: "Having ambition to get a job, make friends, to go out and do things. When high school ends"</p> <p>P3: "Support themselves, and feel part of the community (included), feel part of the solution rather than a 'problem'."</p>
What SA skills needed for adult success	<p>P1: "Students need a way to voice their opinions by using gestures, electronic devices, or other means of communicating. Teacher and parents need to work together and be on the same page regarding the needs of the student."</p> <p>P2: "Basic life skills and communication; the are key points in all live, having these skills make the difference for success in job, relationships, and overall happiness."</p> <p>P5: "Again PCP and SDM (also an alternative to legal guardianship but not limited to that) should be emphasized for all students. All of us ate interdependent (not independent) and desire, even require, support from others in many aspects of our lives, incl as we transition to adulthood, a lifelong process."</p>

**Table 4***Sections and Codes: Teacher and Parent Responses*

Section	Teacher codes	Parent codes
RQ1: Roles during the IEP process for students and advocates.	Observation, communication, awareness, abilities	Listening, present, knowledge, differences
RQ2: Impact of implementing SA strategies to improve student participation in IEP	Independence, questioning, expression, responsibility, expectations	Voice, guides/questioning, consideration, point-of-view, responsibility
RQ3:SA skills to enhance self-determination for highest QOL	Independence, community, communication, social skills, basic needs	Relationships, self-sufficiency, voice/communication, real-world experiences

**Themes**

Codes were compared individually as teacher responses and those of parent responses per the subsections of the research questions. In comparing the codes, not only were commonalities between responses and subsections but trends between research questions. I found that many of the themes related to the all the research questions rather than being unique to one specific question; many responses showed overlap between research questions and group answers. These themes were (a) responsibility point-of-view, (b) rejection of ableism through expressive communication, (c) value of real-world experiences, and (d) community acceptance for individual success. These themes are discussed below.

***Responsibility Point-of-View***

Although advocates agreed that there must be coherent communication and expectations for student progress, that agreement also led to varied point-of-view for

responsibilities in varied settings and subjects. When discussing the academics, it is understood that this is the area for the teacher to provide information and the parents to ask to questions/ be told the strategies from improvement. However, when relating to social or extracurricular, this was a topic for parents to be experts. Parent Interviewee #1 stated, “Teachers and parents often have different goals in mind. The teacher was more concerned with educational skills whereas a parent might not only want education skills addressed but skills to help them in their daily living.” Both advocates have similar strategies for enhancing student progress in those areas, the skills and learning were specific to the advocates location. There was little cross-over or building support: teachers focus should be academic learning, and parent focus is social and extracurricular. The expectation is for teachers to have all the knowledge for maintaining school/academic affairs, while parents contain the familiarity of the student’s personal needs, such as social, medical, and adaptive needs. According to most participants, this separation is the norm; advocates have their own responsibility for knowledge. Parent Interviewee #5 is an educator who was able to cross those expectations for IEP team members. “In fact, there were several times I presented a novel approach of which other professionals at the table had not yet heard...I will admit to being frustrated that others didn’t want to know what I’d learned.” Although this parent was knowledgeable, during the IEP meeting the opinions and expertise were not considered due to the acting role as parent.

### ***Rejection of Ableism Through Expressive Communication***

Communication was a revolving response for teachers and parents, specifically to voicing preferences and building relationships. Although both advocates felt the student needed to have opportunities to improve communication skills, there was discrepancies in that desire for improvement and actions during IEP meetings. Teacher Interviewee #3 stated,

“Students are often able to share what they perceive as their own areas of strengths and weaknesses, as well as progress toward IEP goal and objectives. This does vary on verbal skills...I would estimate that about half of my student would be able to fully participate in the aforementioned ways based on their expressive language skills or verbal vs. nonverbal.”

The capacity to participate is available to students, but the expectation to participate is not for the masses; only those that have verbal skills developed.

This notion that students are limited by their verbal skills, hinders the expectation that all students require opportunities for expression. Yet, expression nor communication are restricted to verbal words alone. Non-verbal communication, regardless of disabilities, is a valid mode of exchange. “My son is nonverbal, but he can let you know when he is NOT happy participating in certain goals/activities” (Parent Interviewee #1). Although teachers and parents were advocating for the good of the whole child, their interference rejects the abilities already acquired and the potential to gain new aptitudes.

### ***Value of Real-World Experiences***

Collectively, interviewees referenced building basic skills as an approach for expanding autonomy. Forming basic skills requires significant supports and time to master; there is a need for continuous growth. “If the student can efficiently get themselves ready (including waking up, showering, getting dressed) on time for the bus in high school that would promote successful transitioning to adulthood” (Teacher Interviewee #4). Exposure to real-world expectations prior to adulthood while under the supervision of advocates, provides SWSD the opportunity to develop basic skills before entering community mandates.

### ***Community Acceptance for Individual Success***

According to both teacher and parent responses, the hope for all advocates of SWSD are for the young adults to be happy; again, many declared that happiness is derived from community acceptance. Acceptance requires more than involvement for SWSD; it is a sense of inclusion or purpose. “Simply put, the highest quality of life for adults with severe disabilities would mean that the individual lives a life that has purpose and meaning to both them and their family/community” (Teacher Interviewee #3). SWSD can be diligent employees, dedicated friends, and stewards for social change when their opinions and abilities are embraced. Parents Interviewees 3 and 4 both express the hardship for SWSD of being part of the solution rather than a “problem” to overcome or to “deal with.”

### **Review of Findings**

Through interviews and written submissions, advocates acknowledged the needs for self-advocacy, the reluctance for implementing self-advocacy skills came in the form

of “how”; advocates require guidance to find a cohesive understanding of the strategies and roles to enhance SWSD preparation for real-world daily living as an adult with severe need. Parents and teachers need to know the same information, practice the same strategies, and be united for the development of student growth for independence. The level of independence will vary per student needs, but advocate expectations and relationships should show no discrepancies.

“When high school ends and the teacher supports for students and parents end from the school system, what community connections will host those same intentions? After high school, what ambitions are sought after? Encouragement for self-advocacy is not for the SWSD alone, but parents, and siblings, and communities- how do we move forward?”

(Parent Interviewee #2).

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

Based on the findings, I designed this project to create a platform for teachers and parents (i.e., advocates) to communicate and collaborate to support SWSD build self-advocacy skills. Advocates will attend a 3-day professional workshop to develop knowledge, strategies, and aids for working together to enhance advocacy skills for SWSD. The workshop focuses on providing advocates with joint awareness and hands-on, real-world training scenarios using various media, discussions, and group interactions. My goal for the professional workshop is to create union between teachers and parents while enriching their familiarity of SWSD self-advocacy skills for transitioning into adulthood.

#### **Rationale**

The problem under study was the lack of awareness and strategies among advocates to enhance transitioning SWSD into adulthood through self-advocacy skills. The purpose of this study was to identify teacher and parent perspectives of developing students' self-advocacy skills during the IEP process. Guided by data, I created a teacher and parent-centered workshop that identifies the need for collaboration between advocates. When participant responses were compared, I found that both teachers and parents had similar hangups but from varying perspectives. Through the parent and teacher-centered workshop, participants will gain knowledge of self-advocacy and how to implement it through the IEP process with the points-of-view combined. Parents and teachers are expected to collaborate to build their knowledge and understanding through

an informative, action-filled workshop. Although similar to a workshop, professional development would not have been a suitable format for this project because parents are involved in the solution, and professional development is typically reserved for teachers alone. Moreover, a workshop offers less lecturing and more working through the real-world situations.

### **Review of the Literature**

Using the databases accessible through the Walden University Library, I conducted searches to help develop this project and further my understanding of the results of the data collected. I used the following keyword search terms in the ERIC and Education Source databases: *parent workshops*, *teacher professional development*, *teacher efficacy*, *parent-teacher collaboration*, and *virtual or remote meetings*. As I conducted searches, it became apparent that many of the search terms yielded overlapping results. Hence, I organized the following literature review into four subsections in relation to the project: parent workshops, professional development for teachers, parent and teacher collaboration, and virtual meetings.

#### **Parent Workshops**

Parental involvement has been repeatedly reported to have a positive impact on student success in school, yet there is a concern from the teacher's perspective regarding parent knowledge of professional information (Tkach & Gallagher, 2020; Wood et al., 2021). Due to their lack of learning, many parents have a different perspective of effective practices for teaching and learning (Tkach & Gallagher, 2020; Zibulsky et al., 2019). By implementing parent workshops in the community, parents are given

opportunities to access the information necessary to build the understanding and skills to support their SWSD (Pearson et al., 2020). In addition, this access is nondiscriminatory because it is available to all parents, including but not limited to socioeconomic status (Pearson et al., 2020). Parents from various backgrounds, economic statuses, and limited prior education have the ability to become active members in their students' educational paths when given opportunities to learn (Baker et al., 2019). Besides gained knowledge, parental workshops aid parental self-efficacy, and in learning more, parents feel they are equals in supporting their student in their educational journey (Wilhelmsen-Langeland et al., 2020). Parents are unmatched in their students' lives; hence, it is imperative they acquire the knowledge to be confident, knowledgeable, and undaunted in making decisions regarding their children's education (Wood et al., 2021).

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

PD is a common term for teachers both new and seasoned, and for many, it is an added task to overcome in the heavy schedule of a school day. Although often complained about among the faculty due to time constraints, PD benefits all teachers. For new service teachers, especially in special education, PD offers training for situations that were not directly discussed in preservice coursework, while for veteran teachers, PD guides new and more effective practices (Francois, 2020). In addition to building knowledge with peers, PD increases teachers' self-efficacy and self-advocacy because teachers that are confident in their craft are able to engage with students and parents positively (Colson et al., 2021). When teachers have high self-efficacy, the likelihood of them continuing in the profession increases, preventing continuous turnover or unfulfilled

positions (Dos Santos, 2021). Moreover, SETs who have been supported with PD have more effective classroom management skills and instill self-efficacy in their students (Bruno et al., 2021; Cornelius & Murawski, 2021). Teachers who develop self-advocacy skills for themselves have personal experiences to offer as examples and guidance to colleagues, parents, and their students (Cornelius & Murawski, 2021). Teachers are the first line of defense for supporting student and parent knowledge; hence, teacher skills or a lack thereof can bolster or hinder parent-teacher relationships for future engagement (Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

### **Parent and Teacher Collaboration**

For years, academics have been the sole responsibility of teachers, and home or daily living skills were that of the parent (Farley et al., 2022; Sears et al., 2021). With this notion, teachers are perceived to be the main source for educating the parents in the processes, expectations, and specific skills that are related to student improvement in academics (Sears et al. 2021). For special education knowledge, teachers are the main source of information for parents (Farley et al., 2022). This relationship is changing as parents and teachers have begun to collaborate and connect education and adaptive skills together, creating a partnership (Farley et al., 2022). As relationships change within the school community, the need for effective parent and teacher collaboration becomes unavoidable (Lozančić et al., 2019, p. 137). For parents and teachers of SWSD, collaboration is necessary to support and make changes, especially through the IEP process. There are few opportunities for parents and teachers to learn together; however, it has been reported that parents and teachers have successful partnerships after engaging

in structured collaboration (Syeda & Bruck, 2022). On many occasions, both are expected to have knowledge prior to engagement, while other communication is centered in difficulties such as behaviors (Lozančić et al., 2019, p. 137). Lozančić et al. (2019) stated that, “Good collaboration aims to establish continuity in education, and it ensures effective relationships between all collaborators, which is key for their further development and for the development of a child-oriented curriculum and institutional curriculum” (p. 137). SWSD success is dependent on their advocates consolidating for a common goal (Sears et al., 2021). Hence, it is vital that parents and teachers begin learning strategies together.

Effective collaboration would provide both parents and teachers opportunities to bring both of their respective expertise about students to communicate and create strategies that will be successful in various settings (Carlson et al., 2020). Moreover, collaboration gathers the perspectives and experiences of all members to construct meaningful change (Solone et al., 2020). In today’s society, many families are made up of more than just parents, thus their perspectives and experiences alter their expectations from teachers (Garbacz et al., 2022). Discussing information, providing feedback, and fair scheduling are steps advocates can take to bridge the gap to build personalized cooperation (Carlson et al., 2020). Although such positive techniques are fundamental in maintaining effective collaboration, it is necessary to also make room for disagreement (Solone et al. 2021). Parents and teachers need to bypass the formalities and feel able to have varied opinions and experiences because these differences can build new perspectives and insight (Solone et al. 2021). No matter the means, SWSD success can be

achieved through the connections their advocates create with SWSD well-being in mind (Carlson et al., 2020; Garbacz et al., 2022).

### **Virtual Meetings**

Since the pandemic, virtual, or remote, meetings have become prevalent (Davis et al., 2021). Education, too, has found computer-based interaction to be a useful tool. Through my personal experiences and reported by other teachers, many meetings including professional development and IEPs, teachers have managed interactions virtually. Virtual interactions allow for higher attendance and engagement, reaching more participants (Brisendine et al., 2023). Although useful and in demand, it is crucial that presenters gage their audience for virtual meeting readiness (Davis et al., 2021). Virtual meetings cannot be conducted the same as face-to-face interactions, but there are ways to humanize the experience through various modes of communication (Davis et al., 2021). Using the chat box feature and turning on the camera promotes engagement and personalizes the experiences (Newman & Torretta, 2022). The chat function allows for many participants to engage on the same topic as well as gives space to typically quiet and reserved participants to be active without verbally communicating (Beeman, 2022).

Virtual meetings have been misjudged for being dull and information heavy; however, there are a number of interactive modes to encourage communication and collaboration (Newman & Torretta, 2022). Depending on the online platform, breakout rooms can be utilized for verbal communication in smaller groups (Moore-Beyioku, 2021). Breakout rooms are small groups created from the main meeting (Zoom, 2022). These smaller groups allow participants to have a sense of community and relatedness

while not being physically together (Moore-Beyioku, 2021). Furthermore, scenarios are another tactic used within virtual experiences to give opportunities for participants to discuss and gain the perspectives of others (Luke & Vaughn, 2022). As a presenter, scenarios provide more content to be embedded into the course without overwhelming participants with endless content (Luke & Vaughn, 2022).. Using media, such as YouTube, allows presenters to use visual aids to support the created content that is unrestricted by time and budget (Mucundanyi & Woodley, X 2021). Mucundanyi and Woodley (2021) added that, “YouTube provides students and instructors with an opportunity to learn from the videos by pausing, playing, and replaying (p. 100). Like many other changes in society, virtual collaboration is overtaking education.

### **Project Description**

The project I created for this study is a 3-day parent-teacher workshop for advocates of SWSD. Similar to the selected participants, parents of high school students served in self-contained settings and high school teachers serving those classes are the recommended audience. The recommended size of participants for the workshop is 20–40, with a relatively even split between parents and teachers. The participants will be given assigned breakout rooms for small group sessions and the main workshop. The role of the instructor is to provide a welcoming environment for participants to engage within. I will present topics in a visually appealing PowerPoint presentation with the use of various modes of media to maintain the audience’s attention. Moreover, I will commit to an I DO model with I do referring to the instructor providing scaffolding and background knowledge, we do referring to the whole group’s responsibility to practice and discuss the

concepts, and you do referring to the participants engaging with case scenarios/real-world applications. Participants will be expected to interact as a group during the workshop to enhance their collaboration skills and content knowledge. Participant interaction will include turning on their camera for social awareness, joining the small group breakout sessions, providing details in the chat box, and raising their hand to verbally respond to whole group discussions. The instructor will be available for all participants but may move between individual breakout sessions to answer questions and reteach.

I intended this workshop to be conducted virtually with consideration given to schedules, COVID-19 pandemic protocols, and the participants' locations to allow for more willing participants. There are some limiting factors to consider with virtual workshops, such as participant access to technology/internet. For those that have limited access to technology, an in-person workshop will also be available upon registration. When registering for the workshop, participants will have a choice for in-person or virtual options. Those that choose the in-person workshop option will have additional questions regarding their preferred times and days of the week for in-person attendance. For virtual workshops, participants will need access to the internet, email, Google docs, and a camera and microphone (for interacting in the workshop). The documents, such as the evaluation/assessments and/or PowerPoint presentation slides will be provided via email and on Google Meet. This will allow participants to print the resources prior to the workshop if desired.

With awareness to prospective technological issues, the greatest barrier for the workshops, in-person or virtually, is the potential lack of involvement from participants.

This workshop relies heavily on participation in the small group sessions and workshop hour. Solutions for this barrier would be to create an inviting, judgement-free workspace, have the instructor check in on participants, and assign tasks to participants for reporting back to the whole group.

Although the workshop would be beneficial to all parents and teachers of SWSD, new self-contained teachers and new high school parents would be the revolving audience. Hence, the implementation of the workshop would be most appropriate at the beginning of the school year, such as during the teachers' preplanning time. Parents of SWSD would then have an awareness of strategies prior to the first high school IEP meeting, which would create confidence in parent participation. Additionally, new teachers would have the ability to practice interacting with parents and developing resources and IEPs/transition plans with the support of other teachers and advisors for guidance. This too will promote the accurate execution of thorough IEPs, confidence in partnering with parents, and recognition of student need. While the workshop is anticipated to be held over 3 consecutive days, the workshop could be spread out over a few days. However, the activities for each individual days should remain intact because interrupting the individual day would force abandoning the I DO model.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

In this parent-teacher workshop project, I will use formative assessments to enhance participant knowledge. Prior to any presented information, open-ended questions will be asked of participants to record their answers, similar to a journal entry. At the end of each daily session, participants will respond to the same questions. Each day, the

participants will compare their pre- and post-responses to evaluate their personal growth on the topic. In addition, during the afternoon workshops (that are presented in small group breakout sessions), participants will complete tasks with their group. The daily workshop activities will differ; however, all the tasks will require the groups to collaborate. Considering advocacy for each student/adult depends on their unique characteristics, so a journal entry provides opportunities to capture individual progression in the content. The overall goal for this project is to encourage advocates to work together to implement self-advocacy skills for SWSD. The workshop will provide stakeholders with common knowledge, strategies for working with other advocates and SWSD, and plans for supporting SWSD in adulthood. The stakeholders for this project include advocates of SWSD, specifically parents and teachers of high school students being served in self-contained settings.

### **Project Implications**

With aspirations for full community acceptance of AWD, the initial steps of this project begin at the school level with the stakeholders of parents and teachers of SWSD. By participating in the workshop, parents and teachers will have opportunities to collaborate with one another and build rapport and confidence when working together during IEP meetings and other school activities. This connection may result in a more inviting school culture, eliciting even more parent participation. Additionally, the workshop will provide a baseline of knowledge for stakeholders, allowing for common language, expectations, and awareness of student needs. This baseline may help stakeholders share in the responsibilities and communicate from the same level of

understanding. Although these benefits affect the stakeholders, the greatest change will be in the SWSD. Through the workshop, the advocates that support SWSD daily can become a unified force to fully support the whole of the student both inside and outside of school settings. Thus, SWSD may have more success self-advocating because their advocates can focus on the needs of the student rather than the challenges they face as teachers and parents individually. With more focus on implementing strategies for self-advocacy from advocates, SWSD may gain more skills at an earlier age, thus being more prepared for life as an adult. A chain reaction begins with SWSD becoming self-advocates at school with the guidance of advocates, leading to SWSD who have the necessary skills to be active participants in their community, resulting in stigmas in the community decreasing as more AWD are involved in the community and communities becoming more tolerant and accepting of individuals with severe disabilities creating sustainable relationships between disabled and nondisabled peers. These relationships become common place and reduce prejudices, biases, and ableism in the community as a whole. This project is a small step in the direction of making change for individuals with severe disabilities.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

#### **Strengths**

One of the strengths of this project was the connection to the SDT. Relating back to competence, relatedness, and autonomy, the participants discussed a need for themselves and SWSD to express self-determination (see Dispenza, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). The need for competence is addressed in the current project by asking the participants what the role of the advocate was and devoting time during each day of the workshop to the how the advocate can be useful. Relatedness is represented by beginning the workshop breakout sessions in the same groupings (i.e., teachers with teachers and parents with parents). This combination allows for relationships of empathy and acceptance for similar experiences to be built. Autonomy is embodied during the afternoon workshop breakout sessions in which groups are given the tasks but can make their own decisions on how to go about executing them. The project itself promoted the SDT for the support of SWSD to build self-advocacy. I designed it to give the participants the same freedoms desired by SWSD for decision making.

Another strength would be the online platform. For many teachers and parents, online meetings have become the norm post-COVID-19 pandemic. By being remote, more advocates have the opportunity to participate in the workshop because they can continue to carry out their other duties from a different location. Additionally, while considering the small size of interested participants (i.e., parents and teachers of SWSD served in self-contained settings), holding the workshop virtually participants to attend

despite their physical location. The workshop does not become exclusive to physical participants.

### **Limitations**

Due to the continued changes regarding post-COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, many group activities remain online. Although many IEPs and school meetings are held virtually, there are limitations when conducting group activities. For the breakout sessions, participants must leave the main group to connect with teammates, which may cause less technological adept participants the comfortability of participation. They may find it difficult to transfer between the main session and breakout groups. Additionally, accountability during these breakout sessions may alter the experience for participants: members may choose not to join their assigned breakout session, choose to not to turn on their camera or microphone, or choose not to participate in the activities as a group. To help mediate this concern, a facilitator would need to be assigned to each breakout session or the presenters need to go into each breakout session to check on the participants' progress.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

In speaking with potential volunteers, many were willing to participate in the study but were overwhelmed by the time necessary to complete the interview. More than five potential volunteers commented on the length of time for the interview; however, when presented with the option of a written interview, they were more interested but saw the expected time frame on the introduction letter and again were turned away. If the questions were not open ended and instead presented on a rating scale, there may have

been more participants willing to complete the study. The time needed to respond would be condensed. Although the data would be predetermined by the rating scale, with more participants, I still would have been able to reach data saturation and gather enough answers to draw conclusions from. Moreover, the responses from each advocate could be compared numerically, giving a different perspective of the data.

Although limited in potential participants, a study could also be conducted from the perspective of the transitioned adult. Using a case study design, a researcher could observe and interview adults at various stages of adulthood to gain knowledge of their successes related to self-advocacy within the community or lack thereof. Additionally, a researcher could discuss the adult's high school experiences, especially those during the IEP process, which would give a real-world look at the impact of self-advocacy skills supported prior to adulthood.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

The very first day of becoming a teacher I supported SWD, but it was not until I became pregnant and learned that my son would have some challenges to overcome that I became a student. As a parent you become a scholar because you are consistently learning new skills to make the world a better place for your child to grow up in. As a parent, I also wanted my son's teachers to be knowledgeable of the best practices, have a passion for learning new ideas, and willing to learn more to enhance my son's education. It was then that I realized that I could not ask this of his educators if I was not willing to do it for others. As I reflect on the progression of this study, I see my progress as a

learner, as an educator, and as a mother, all in which continue to mature with knowledge and experience.

### **Scholarship**

Although I am constantly seeking knowledge, I often became overwhelmed with the vastness of information while researching the topics in this study, especially during literature reviews. Each keyword search term provided a new perspective or idea to investigate, making it difficult to narrow my thoughts and writing. After submitting many drafts to my chairperson, the writing became intertwined and impossible to follow with topics leading nowhere yet to everything. Not only did I learn to focus on my writing but also to focus on results. With support from my chair, I was able to learn that staying the course with one topic can be more impactful because you gain a depth of knowledge rather than graze the surface of many ideas and concepts.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

From the beginning of this study, it was crucial to have a project that encompassed teachers and parents because I connect with both. As an educator serving students in self-contained settings, I had the perspective of teachers, and as a parent, I had difficulty seeing the connection with parents. Throughout the research, it was apparent many teachers and parents had similar experiences and expectations. Hence, when developing my project with my chair, it was obvious that establishing the connection between teachers and parents was imperative for supporting SWSD. I decided that a workshop would provide the most opportunities for advocates to come together to learn and improve their own knowledge and skills.

Throughout the development of the project, I often became unfocused in my delivery of information and execution of tasks. Again, I wanted to present too many topics and ideas. Yet, I remembered what it felt like to be a participant in a workshop that was overwhelming with information; it became unmemorable. I wanted my project to have value and make an impact on teachers and parents who then empower students. I needed to narrow my thoughts of success and how it would be received by others. The topics needed to be thorough yet concise. After deciding on the main topics and creating the 3-day workshop structure around those topics, the project began to be sequential. Through this process I learned that less is more and that if I can become knowledgeable on one topic and share that with others, I will make a difference as a professional and parent.

### **Leadership and Change**

To make effective change, I had to be willing to be a leader. A leader does not have all of the answers, but a leader goes looking for answers and is willing to share that found knowledge with others. This project has made me realize that I do not have all the answers, nor do I have to. I have attended several professional development sessions where I graded papers or lesson planned during the presentation. Now having created my own workshop, I see there are so many hidden gems of information that cannot be absorbed by glancing up from a graded paper every now and then. An effective leader acknowledges the value of shared professional knowledge. Likewise, being a parent leader is not only being a role model for other parents but for students/children as well. Although there are many programs and support groups for parents with SWSD, being a

parent and educator fosters a trustworthiness as a liaison between fellow parents and teachers. Being a leader for change is being willing to take your knowledge and build on it by through hands-on experiences.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

Although this study and project focused on the perspectives of advocates, the overall goal was to gain experiences for SWSD transitioning into adulthood with skills in self-advocacy. During the interviews, it was obvious in both teacher and parent responses that they desired for the successful transitions of SWSD but were often overwhelmed or unknowledgeable about implementing support strategies. Additionally, advocates were waiting for the other role (e.g., parents waiting for teachers and teachers waiting for parents) to support these skills, each unsure of their role for collaboration. This project is important because it connects advocates, so they are able to make strides together in reinforcing SWSD self-advocacy skills for successful adult transitions.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Implications**

With consideration of the literature and the access to state resources, as a teacher and parent, I was startled by the lack of knowledge and training to support active participation during the IEP process. The implication for accumulated information is that the resources are available, but advocates are not accessing them. Theoretically, if the information is available, especially through common sources, then everyone has access and the ability to acquire the knowledge. Through this project study, I learned that parents and teachers are overwhelmed with schedules and daily expectations and have

little training to overcome these barriers. The results of this study revealed that advocates may have resources available to them, but they are not provided with focused development of their skills or expected to utilize the resources with SWSD.

### **Applications**

With the creation of the 3-day advocate workshop, those resources and information are developed into skills. My aspiration is to develop the skills of local parents and teachers so they may support the knowledge of others. When SWSD begin to have more involvement in the community, the community will notice and begin asking questions. That is how any scholar begins, with a question. These questions will be answered by the AWD and their advocates as equals. By giving parents and teachers the opportunity to be shown and taught using the available resources with the support of their own advocates, they will absorb the knowledge and be able to help SWSD build self-advocacy skills for successful adult living.

### **Directions for Future Research**

In this study, I focused on the IEP process in regard to enhancing SWSD self-advocacy, yet there are many other aspects of successful adult transitioning. Considering this study was focused in a local area, the research could be expanded to include several counties or states. Information on ASPIRE and other resources are available on the U.S. Department of Education website; however, it is possible that other advocates are having similar experiences with student-led IEPs. Considering the sample size was small due to the relative size of the subject area (self-contained settings), it is possible that other locations may have similar experiences with limiting SWSD during the IEP process.

Additionally, future researchers focused on SWSD could interview transitioned adults to gain their perspectives of their self-advocacy skills. Through collecting participants' perspectives, researchers could gain direct information about adult employment, community involvement, etc. Another future research possibility related to the current study would be looking at guardianship versus supportive decision making for maintaining the highest QOL from the perspectives of the AWD. The intent may be to find the perspectives of AWD with the focus of happiness while supported with guardianship compared to supported decision making. These future studies would provide insight into the impact that self-advocacy has on SWSDs' success transitioning to adult living.

### **Conclusion**

To explore the problem of SWSD having limited access to the IEP process due to advocate preference, I conducted this basic qualitative study to identify advocate perspectives of implementing strategies for SWSD self-advocacy skills during the IEP process. Through interviews with teachers and parents of students served in self-contained setting, I collected data to address the lack of knowledge, collaboration, and communication. Students cannot be encouraged if their advocates are not supported; therefore, my project was a 3-day workshop for parents and teachers to collaborate. The workshop provides advocates with background knowledge, opportunities to connect with other advocates, and real-world problems to find solutions. Similar to their guidance of SWSD, in the workshop advocates will have the security to learn and make mistakes with knowledgeable presenters and likeminded peers. Advocates will learn how to nurture

SWSD abilities to be self-advocates through effecting student-led IEPs. Student-led IEPs may be the initial step for advocates to begin implementing self-advocacy skills for SWSD. Self-advocacy is a crucial component for offering SWSD opportunities for the highest QOL.

Society is changing, and acceptance of SWSD is growing. It has come to the point that advocates no longer need to hide SWSD to protect them but to prepare them for real-world experiences in their community. Regardless of guardianships or supportive decision-making, AWD are going to have more interactions with their community based on the acceptance and expectations developing from the various civil rights movements occurring. That acceptance and those expectations stem from the labor and devotion of advocates over the years; hence, it is imperative that advocates continue their work for this next generation.

Providing SWSD with the skills to be self-advocates does not eradicate the need for advocates; those needs evolve with the individual with disabilities. Advocates will always have wisdom from experiences, opportunities to teach and guide, and battles to face, but the difference with implementing self-advocacy skills in SWSD is that the advocate will be that model with an empowered AWD. With a voice, confidence, and encouragement, SWSD will create the highest QOL that is fulfilling: a life of their own choosing.

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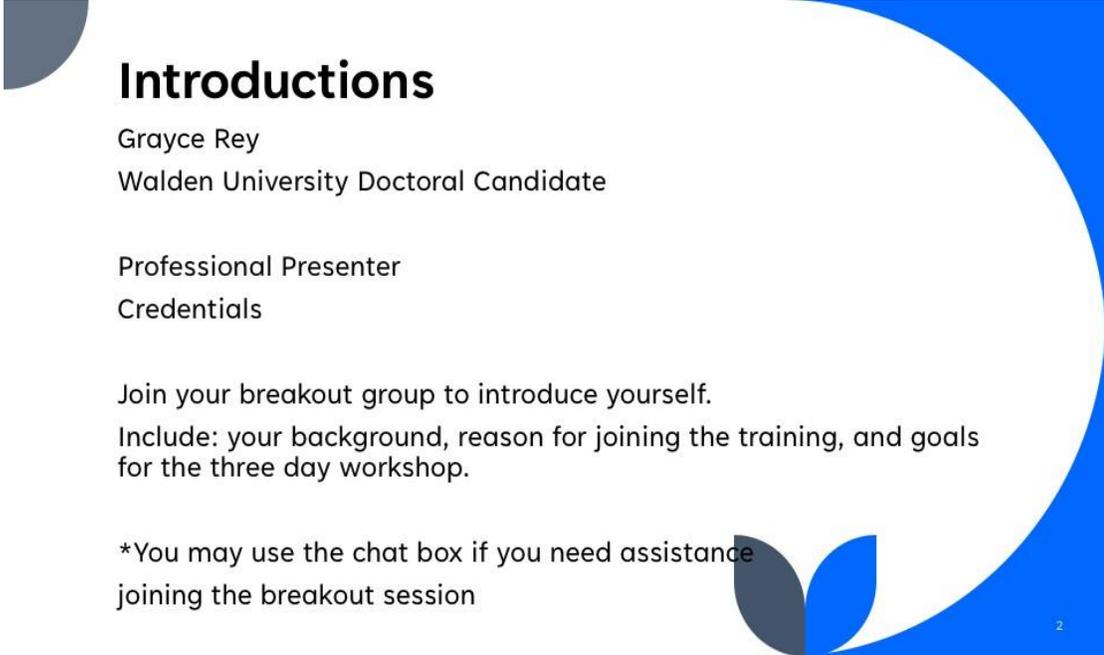
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# All Hands On Deck

Navigating Student Self-Advocacy Skills as a Team through Student-led IEPs



## Introductions

Grayce Rey  
Walden University Doctoral Candidate

Professional Presenter  
Credentials

Join your breakout group to introduce yourself.  
Include: your background, reason for joining the training, and goals for the three day workshop.

\*You may use the chat box if you need assistance joining the breakout session

Check in will begin at 8:00 and the presentation will begin at 8:15. This will provide time for everyone to familiarize themselves with the breakout sessions. The presenters will introduce themselves but then allow each breakout group a moment to meet with their team to work out any problems with going in and out of a breakout session. This will promote comfortability for communicating with one another throughout the workshop.

## Day 1 Agenda:

- 8:30- Pre Assessment Journal Entry #1
- 9:00- What is self-advocacy?
- 10:30- Break
- 10:45- Supported Decision Making
- 11:45- Lunch
- 12:45- What is my role as an Advocate?
- 1:30- Break
- 1:45- Workshop: Breakout Session
- 3:00- Whole group share
- 3:30- Post Assessment & Survey  
Journal Entry #2/ TOD

Before the lunch break participants will be grouped as teachers or parents. However, after lunch participants will be grouped as a mixed group of teacher and parents. The beginning session will allow for content building specifically for each group, focusing on those perspectives. For the workshop, collaboration of advocates is needed to build communication skills, awareness and tools to navigate varied perspectives.

## Essential Questions: Journal Entry #1

- What is self-advocacy?
- How does a student with severe disabilities (SWSD) become self-advocate?
- How does self-advocacy support decision making skills?
- What is my role as an advocate to support student self advocacy?
- How will self-advocacy support my SWSD transition into adulthood?

Participants will be asked to answer the essential questions in a journal format as a pre-assessment for the day's content.

## What is self-advocacy?

Think-Pair-Share:

What is self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities?

Does it differ based on abilities? How so?

Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Group

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Breakout groups will have 10 minutes to discuss their thoughts and record their answers. Each group will be called on to provide input to a running Google Document that will be added to in real time. Groups can also add to the chat box as needed.

## What is self-advocacy?

The Awesome MARY Show

<https://youtu.be/hRKWShkgNw>

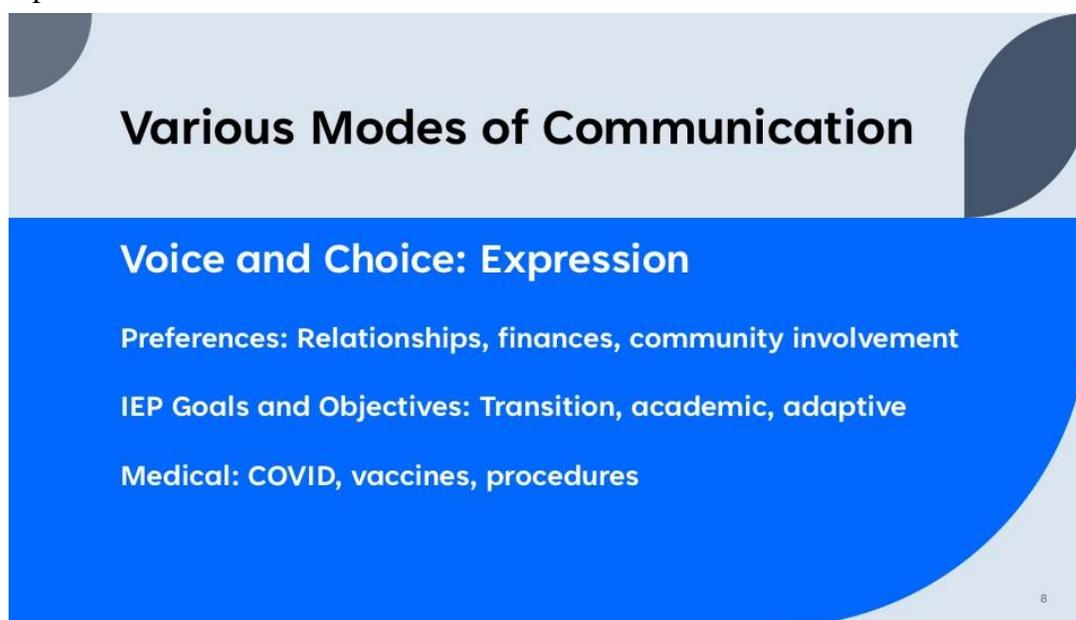
After sharing as a whole group from the Think-pair-share, this video will be played to provide another visual.



## First steps?

- Various modes of communication
  - Voice and choice
  - More than words
- Awareness
  - Know Your Rights
  - Know your Exceptionality
  - Strengths and areas of need
- Independence
  - Planning for future
  - Community participation

How can SWSD become self-advocate? These are some of the more notable first steps and areas for discussion. Many participants in the study referenced one or all of these topics in their interviews.



## Various Modes of Communication

### Voice and Choice: Expression

Preferences: Relationships, finances, community involvement

IEP Goals and Objectives: Transition, academic, adaptive

Medical: COVID, vaccines, procedures

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One of the first ways to promote self-advocacy is to provide opportunities to express oneself. Here are a few areas in which SWSD could have a voice and choice.

## Various Modes of Communication

### Preferences: Likes and Dislikes

Peer counseling: Let's face it, we don't know what it is like...

Non-forced relationships

Community involvement

Shopping: To buy or not to buy?

9

Advocates know quite a bit about their SWSD, however, they don't know everything especially without communicating. disAbility link, among others offer counseling for SWSD (and adults) the freedom to express themselves with a peer. This promotes independence, because the SWSD will have to do the "work" during and after the session. Advocates tend to want to "fix" the problem, when it is the SWSD responsibly to find and uphold the resolution. SWSD are often paired with peers selected by advocates, but it is obvious when there is limited connection. In my experience, I have witnessed a relationship between two non-verbal students with Autism become the best of friends. They had their own communication system and both began to express more as their time with each other passed. These relationships can build and develop other areas such as community involvement. The more involved SWSD become the more they want to communicate that is sustainable between many settings. With this exposure to the community, SWSD will have jobs and experiences buying things wanted. However, SWSD not only need to opportunity to express what they want but the ability to communicate with employees to access items/pay for them.

## Various Modes of Communication

### IEP Goals and Objectives:

Students provide their perspectives for goals/objectives with support

Student decides manner of implementation and data collection

Student discusses successes and areas for improvement of previous IEP

Goal and Objectives.

10

How students can communicate their preferences will be addressed in later slides, however, it is important to reference SWSD have the ability to communicate in the areas of goals and objectives. For teachers, this is the most important, or most common area of supporting SWSD with self-advocacy. Parents have an equal responsibility, yet, their focus tends to be outside of academic growth. The IEP process will be addressed in more detail in later training days as well.

## Various Modes of Communication

### Medical: Controversial

Use of preferred communication mode to connect with advocates

Decisions made together, not told

Understandable language

Respecting preferences of precautionary measures: COVID, vaccines, procedures

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This is a controversial topic and will lend conversation into guardianship. From the perspectives of communication, SWSD should be given the opportunity to express their opinion in their communication preference and without judgement. The language for describing medical needs, procedures, and expectations should be explained in the language the SWSD understands and communicates. Medical decisions should be made with the SWSD as it is their body experience. Lastly, SWSD should be given various modes to communicate preferences for precautionary measures. This is controversial with COVID, as in my experience few SWSD wanted to wear masks.

## Various Modes of Communication

### More than words: Non-verbal not excluded

Use of personal communication systems: sign language, utterances, technology

Choices: physical gestures, eye gaze, tangible choices

Body language: Knowing personal cues

12

As we know for many of our SWSD, communication verbally is not always the only form of communicating. In the study, one parent describes her son as non-verbal, however he is able to express his preferences with body movements, facial cues, and audible sounds. This is true for many of our students, communication is more than words and using those clues to determine their wants and needs.

## Appropriate Communication DOES NOT take more time

Set up is Key!

Don't reinvent the wheel. Reuse materials, use technology, ask for help. Occupational, physical, and speech services may have resources.

Same communication expectations at school and home settings

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It will take time to set up for students, but no more than having to use communication modes throughout the year or at home. Once it is established it can be reused for that

student and potentially others. For teachers, reuse information you have had in previous years, use talk buttons, pictures, and choice cards/boards. Also, some students may have a tablet or other electronic support for communicating. At the beginning of the year, collaborate as teachers and parents (potentially in a new school year meet and greet) to discuss and create a whole communication system to be used at school and home. This will reinforce communication and provide consistency for language. For example: if the family uses a specific sign for restroom, the teacher would need to know that sign.

Disabled persons are entitled to the measures designed to enable them to become self-reliant as possible.

Declaration on the Right of  
Disabled Persons  
United Nations Human Rights

14

Transition to Awareness.

## Awareness- Knowing your Rights

### Know your Exceptionality

Most SWSD do not know the name of their disability

Advocates think they are protecting SWSD by not including them

Makes having a disability a taboo

How does this disability make an impact for basic human rights?

15

Advocates tiptoe around SWSD when discussing diagnosis, however knowing empowers SWSD. Not knowing a key characteristic of themselves is unfair; others will seem to know and treat them differently based on their exceptionality. Thus, shouldn't they be aware of the vary concept everyone is judging them?

## Awareness- Strengths and barriers

### Know your needs and how to ask for help

SWSD may not have been involved in the conversation of their strengths and areas of need. Due to this they have a lack of self-awareness.

Asking for accommodations/modifications based on ability

Setting realistic goals

16

By knowing strengths and areas of need, SWSD can learn how to overcome their barriers or how to ask for help. Without this knowledge, SWSD may become overly confident or set unreachable goals. This lack of self-awareness hinders the decision-making process due to a lack of trust.

## Independence

### Planning for the future in the community

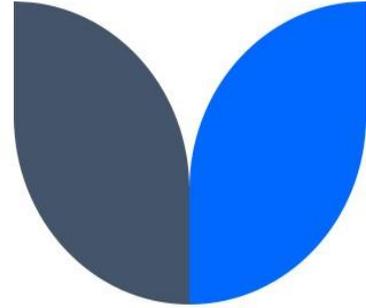
Job and housing placement: safe, yet preferred by transitioning adult

Relationships- chosen by SWSD not supplied

Extra-Curricular Activities are made available

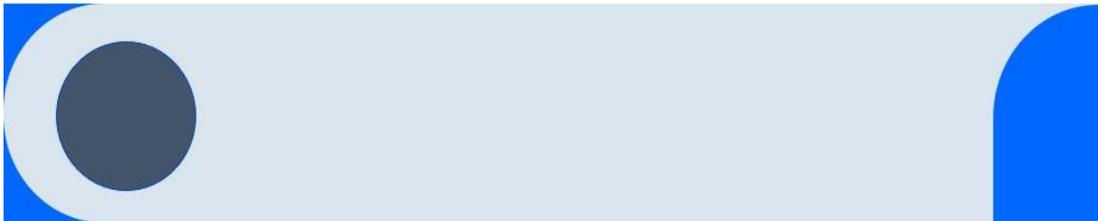
17

Independence does not mean figure it out on your own. For SWSD independence means getting to be an individual in addition to building skills to facilitate those preferences.



## Let's Take a Break

10:30-10:45



Allow for questions to be put in the text box during the break to be answered then (if needed immediate attention) or throughout the course.

## What is Supported Decision Making?

Think-Pair-Share:

- What is Supported Decision Making (SDM)?
- How does it look for adults with disabilities?
- How is it different from Guardianship?

**Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Group**

**Five Minutes: Whole Group**

Direct participants to their morning breakout session group. Give them 10 minutes to meet then 5 to discuss in whole group. As a reminder groups can use the microphone to communicate or the chat box feature.

## What is Supported Decision Making?

Video

[https://youtu.be/S8A\\_hj00ehg](https://youtu.be/S8A_hj00ehg)

Visual to support SDM and give perspective from different media.

## SDM not just for disabilities!

- From an early age we learn to ask for advice and support from others and it never ends...New parents!
- We look to those we trust, have a good reputation, are knowledgeable: Medical provider, financial advisor, religious official.
- We need validation for our thoughts, feelings, and choices.

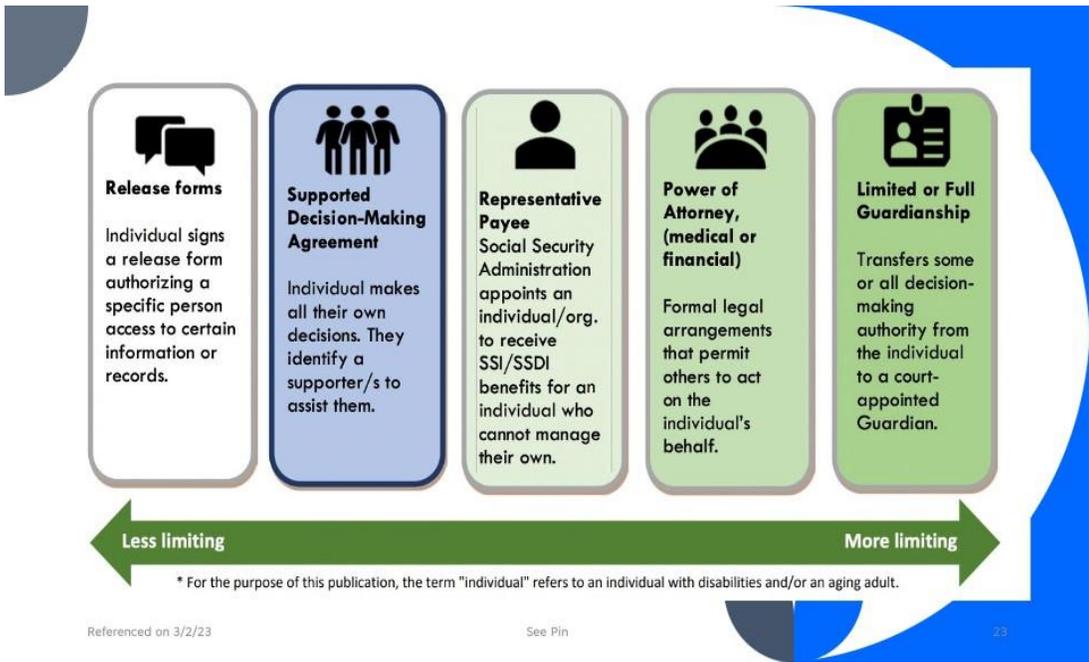
21

Seeking advice, supporting decisions is not a new concept for individuals with disabilities. As humans, we talk through our choices with others, it gives us validation and a sounding board of our thoughts, feelings, and progress. For example as new parents, we call our families for home remedies, doctors for medical advice, blessings from the preacher. SDM should not need to be a designated action for supporting SWSD, yet, it is needed to ensure their basic human rights.

# What is Supported Decision Making?

Alternative to Guardianship  
 Connections to the community  
 Decisions based on the person's preferences

A few key features to explain SDM. These will be broken down to individuals slides



A visual of progressing decision making models

## Controversies to Guardianship

- Created to protect
- Knowledgeable Reference (best interest)
- Intervention for medical and complex language situations
- All or nothing system
- "Civil Death" -Loss of rights
- Over Controlled: Relationships
- Taken advantage: Finances

(Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2019)

24

Background knowledge of guardianship.

## Alternative to Guardianship

- Guardianship is an all or nothing for the individual with disabilities rights, SDM is flexible based on individual need.
- SDM allows advocates to support without full control
- Transitioned adult have the ability to make changes, thus, allowing for life changes
- Does not require legal mandates; Adults choose their supporter not court mandated.

25

As adults our lives and needs are always evolving. This is true for adults with disabilities. By having guardianship, there is a no change or growth without the permission of the guardian. If the advocates are already supporting in positive ways, there is no need for the harsh conditions of guardianship.

People under guardianship often are less likely to live in their own homes or apartments, less likely to have jobs in the community, and less likely to have friends.

(Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2019)

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Transition to community connections

## Community Connections

- Who to spend time with: family, friends, colleagues
- What to spend time: work, volunteering, recreation
- When to engage: advocates not overly pushing to get involved
- Where to live: family, assisted living, group, independent
- Why make community connections: all determined by individuals' preferences for building preferences.

27

As advocates we want to ensure SWSD have exposure to different experiences, though this is needed, it is critical to their development of self-advocacy to make choices in their personal community activities. If promoted successfully, adults will spend the majority of their time connected with the community.

## Decisions Based on Preferences

- SDM is most successful with the adult with disabilities is choosing based on their own preferences rather than making decisions to appease advocates.
- Preferences can change from experiences and advice
- Preferences may not be age appropriate, however, that does not mean the decision with those preferences in mind are wrong.

28

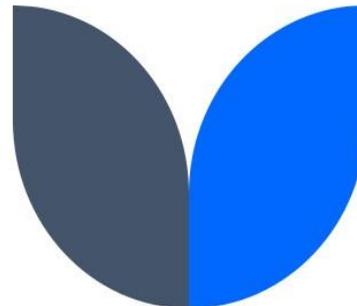
Society norms shape our opinions of what is right and wrong, including what are preferences should be. Examples: adults shouldn't like cartoons-that's for kids. SWSD want to please advocates and society, but it comes at an expense they are unfamiliar or not ready for. Some decisions require readiness, and it is ok for advocates to walk SWSD through the process without taking over.

## A parent's view of SDM

Video

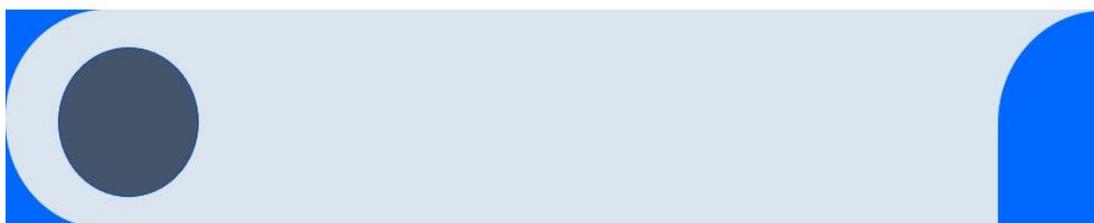
<https://youtu.be/NeI5RbO-p-Q>

A visual from a parent's perspective.



## Lunch Time!

11:45-12:45



The chat box will be open, however the instructor will be at lunch as well and will not answer in real time.

### What is my role as an Advocate?

Think-Pair-Share:

How do advocates support self-advocacy?

How do advocates create positive SDM?

What does it look like?

What is my responsibility?

Ten Minutes: Afternoon Breakout  
Group

Five Minutes: Whole Group



Participants will be reminded of their afternoon breakout group as they changed from the morning.

## Communication!

- Practice what we preach! Be an ACTIVE participant with students and other advocates
- Students should not be the go between, advocates should be a united front
- Do not be afraid to ask questions or for help
- Have humility and understanding
- Model effective communication modes

32

Based on the morning session explain how to support communication skills as an advocates.

## How to Teach Awareness?

- Use language that is not overwhelming
- Provide visuals and evidence of others with similar diagnosis
- Discuss abilities and barriers to overcome- Not impossibilities
- Reiterate they are not "broken"

33

Explain being "broken" give examples of famous people with disabilities to reiterate the fact people with disabilities are respected and have worth in the community.

## How to Teach Independence?

- Start small: create tasks that are small building up to gain independence
- Have a plan or a model for guidance: I do, we do, you do/ metacognition/ hand-over-hand/ checklists/ etc.
- Allow for mistakes: build knowledge from successes and failures (can't have failures if you do it for them).
- Encouragement, positive reinforcers and have PATIENCE!

34

Provide examples of models such as metacognition. Not all participants will have knowledge of those models.

## How to encourage SDM?

- Begin with easy preferences (food, hobbies)
- Ask questions: how do you feel about that? What are the benefits and consequences?
- Practice respecting their decisions; you're not always going to like them!
- Decision-check: Repeat what is desired without inflation of voice/facial expressions
- Set limits and expectations- And stick to them!

35

Role play these examples with the other presenter. Allow for questions in the chat box. The presenter not talking will answer in chat box unless pertinent to the topic.

## Your Turn!

In your breakout session:  
Supported Decision Making and  
Awareness

Discuss the scenarios from the teacher  
and parent perspectives.

Create a script for potential conversation  
with SWSD.

Remind participants to join their breakout session for the workshop. This is not the one from the morning sessions. This breakout session include teachers and parents.

## Awareness Scenarios

Use your knowledge from today's  
discussions to support your answers

Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for  
easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon  
completion

Directions for when in the breakout session. The group will record answers on a Google Doc.

**A ninth grade student diagnosed with Down Syndrome and currently served in a Moderate ID self-contained class. The student is verbal, active in class, and participates in extra-curricular activities in the community. The student has never been included in IEP meetings, in medical discussions, nor adult planning. The student has never been told of a disability, need for accommodations, etc.**

**Teacher**

- How to discuss with parents the need for awareness of disability?
- How to explain disability to student?
- Will there be changes for the student?
- What resources can you use for supporting both?

**Parent**

- How do you ask for help from teachers?
- How to talk to your child? Does it feel like you are breaking trust with them?
- What resources can you use?
- Are there any changes in your daily routine?

38

For this scenario, advocates will discuss the questions.

**Create a script for communicating to the student about their disability. Include the topics for each advocate.**

**Teacher**

- What is the disability?
- How does it relate to school activities?
- What are strengths and barriers to overcome?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

**Parent**

- What is the disability?
- How does it relate to home activities?
- What are strengths and barriers to overcome?
- How can you (the parent) be supportive?

39

Does the script change in language based on the role of the advocate? Why or why not?

**A ninth grade student diagnosed with Autism and currently served in an Moderate ID self-contained class. The student is non-verbal, active in class, and participates in extra-curricular activities in the community. The student has never been included in IEP meetings, in medical discussions, nor adult planning. The student has never been told of a disability, need for accommodations, etc.**

#### **Teacher**

- How to discuss with parents the need for awareness of disability?
- How to explain disability to student?
- Will there be changes for the student?
- What resources can you use for supporting both?

#### **Parent**

- How do you ask for help from teachers?
- How to talk to your child? Does it feel like you are breaking trust with them?
- What resources can you use?
- Are there any changes in your daily routine?

40

Do the answers to the question differ now that the student is non-verbal?

**Create a script for communicating to the student about their disability. Include the topics for each advocate.**

#### **Teacher**

- What is the disability?
- How does it relate to school activities?
- What are strengths and barriers to overcome?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

#### **Parent**

- What is the disability?
- How does it relate to home activities?
- What are strengths and barriers to overcome?
- How can you (the parent) be supportive?

41

Considering the student is non-verbal, how will the script and resource change? More visuals? Different communication modes?

## Supported Decision Making Scenarios

Use your knowledge from today's discussions to support your answers

Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon completion

A group member can check in with the instructor prior to moving on to follow up with previous scenarios and discuss questions for continuing as needed.

**A student with Traumatic Brain Injury currently served in a Mild ID self-contained classroom. The student does not want to wear a mask in public settings. There is no mandate requiring the use of a mask. However, the student is at higher risk, due to medical needs.**

### Teacher

- How do you handle this if the parent wants the student to wear a mask?
- How do you respect the decisions of both student and parent?
- How do you communicate the benefits and consequences?
- What resources are needed to help maintain SDM?

### Parent

- How do you support the decision of your child but worry about their well-being?
- How do you communicate with teachers about your preference? What are your expectations for them?
- How do you communicate with your child about their medical needs?
- What resources are needed to help maintain SDM?

This could be a controversial topic; the instructor needs to enter each breakout session to provide guidance and mediation as needed.

## Create a script for communicating to the student about their decisions. Include the topics for each advocate.

### Teacher

- What is the decision?
- How does it relate to school activities?
- What are the benefits and consequences of the decision?
- What advice can you give?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?
- Are there alternatives without taking rights?

### Parent

- What is the decision?
- How does it relate to home activities?
- What are the benefits and consequences of the decision?
- What advice can you give?
- How can you (the parent) be supportive?
- Are there alternatives without taking rights?

44

The instructor can provide sample scripts if needed.

**A senior student currently served in an E/BD self-contained classroom is trying to express choices for future education: career technical training or college. The student has a severe studder and difficulty sharing sequential thoughts. The studder increases with frustration, thus promoting outward undesired behaviors. It would be much easier for the advocate to make the choice instead of the student working it through and causing the student to increase negative emotions.**

### Teacher

- How do you stay supportive without taking control?
- What communication resources could be used?
- What accommodations could the student utilize to prevent frustration?
- How do you collaborate with student/ parent to make necessary changes?

### Parent

- How do stay supportive without taking control?
- How do you communicate with your child to ensure a safe and judgement free environment?
- What resources can you use?

45

Another controversial topic. Advocates do not want to add to negative reactions by encouraging something out of the SWSD comfort zone, so how do you allow SDM without taking over or causing the SWSD to meltdown?

## Create a script for communicating to the student about their decisions. Include the topics for each advocate.

### Teacher

- What is the decision?
- How does it relate to school activities?
- What are the benefits and consequences of the decision?
- What advice can you give?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?
- Are there alternatives without taking rights?

### Parent

- What is the decision?
- How does it relate to home activities?
- What are the benefits and consequences of the decision?
- What advice can you give?
- How can you (the parent) be supportive?
- Are there alternatives without taking rights?

Breakout Session

46

It is possible for scenarios to have the same script for teachers and parents. This case may be one of them; this will show that in some instance teacher and parent advocate responses are not that different.

## How'd it go?

Collaboration?  
Questions and answers?  
Script?

Whole group discussion

Come back to whole group to discuss the results and findings of the breakout sessions. How do the groups compare in their responses and creations?

## Essential Questions: Journal Entry #2

What is self-advocacy?

How does a student with severe disabilities become self-advocate?

How does self-advocacy support decision making skills?

What is my role as an advocate to support student self advocacy?

How will self-advocacy support my SWSD transition into adulthood?

48

Have participants answer the same questions from the morning journal entry. Remind participants to maintain the same document for the entirety of the course.

## Ticket Out the Door

- Did your responses in Journal entry #1 change or progress by Journal Entry #2?
- What was your biggest take home for today?
- What did you need more information about today?

49

Provide a link to a survey, or allow to respond in the chatbox to complete the questions from the days activities. The instructor will stay available for 10 minutes for comments and questions.

## Day 2 Agenda:

- 8:30- Pre Assessment Journal Entry #3
- 9:00- What is Self Determination Theory?
- 10:30- Break
- 10:45- What is Quality of Life?
- 11:45- Lunch
- 12:45- What is my role as an Advocate?
- 1:30- Break
- 1:45- Workshop: Breakout Session
- 3:00- Whole group share
- 3:30- Post Assessment & Survey  
Journal Entry #4/ TOD



Before the lunch break participants will be grouped as teachers or parents. However, after lunch participants will be grouped as a mixed group of teacher and parents. The beginning session will allow for content building specifically for each group, focusing on those perspectives. For the workshop, collaboration of advocates is needed to build communication skills, awareness and tools to navigate varied perspectives.

## Essential Questions: Journal Entry #3

What is Self-Determination Theory (SDT); how does it apply to self-advocacy?

What are basic human needs? Does everyone have access to them?

What is Quality of Life (QoL)?

How does an adult with severe disabilities enhance their QoL?

What strategies can advocates use to enhance QoL for adults with severe disabilities?

51

Participants will be asked to answer the essential questions in a journal format as a pre-assessment for the day's content. It will be a continuation of the previous journal entries. The participants will keep the same document throughout the course.

## What is Self-Determination Theory?

Think-Pair-Share:

What are basic human rights?

What drives motivation?

Do motivations change based on individual abilities?

Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Group

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Breakout groups will have 10 minutes to discuss their thoughts and record their answers. Each group will be called on to provide input to a running Google Document that will be added to in real time. Groups can also add to the chat box as needed.

# What is Self-Determination Theory?

Video

<https://youtu.be/3sRBBNkSXpY>

A visual to provide background knowledge for all participants prior to presented information.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)  
represents a broad framework  
for the study of human  
motivation and personality.

## Experiences Driven by Motivation

- Three basic human needs for individual motivation: competence, relatedness, & autonomy
- These factors enhance performance, engagement, & self-awareness
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, yet, must be supported by advocates for quality impact on wellness of adults with disabilities.

55

It is important to mention here that experiences are necessary. If SWSD do not have opportunities for real-world experiences, the motivation and needs are diminished. Additionally, by limiting these basic human needs for motivation does not give purpose to life. By protecting SWSD from those experiences, advocates are limiting life experiences, motivations, and purpose for transitioning into adulthood.

## Basic Need: Competence

- One's ability to be useful and effective
- Supports the interest for success through work
- Success in the workplace promotes pride and self-worth
- The "workplace" can be in the home setting with chores, job lists, & community volunteering.

56

Discuss the need for all adults to be useful not just SWSD. Provide examples and ask for suggestion in the chat box.

## Competency and Self-advocacy

- **Choice in job:** builds a desire to be effective. This can be in the home setting as well- allow SWSD make choices on chores
- **The job matters:** Not only is the adult being useful but in a setting of their choosing- has more emphasis.
- **It's my money:** spending will have a higher meaning and impact. Adults will be more mindful of their finances since they have to work for it. Allowance would make home chores a real-world experience

57

Relate those examples back to SWSD. How does it directly apply to building selfadvocacy? Additionally, competency does not have to be at a job location, it can be at a home setting. Teachers and parents can teach these skills during adaptive daily living skills.

## Basic Need: Relatedness

- **Feeling connected to others**
- **Relationships with family, peers, community are necessary for feeling empathy, acceptance, and praise**
- **The emotions help build trust and self-confidence promoting independence**

58

Discuss the need for all adults to feel connected to others not just SWSD. Provide examples and ask for suggestion in the chat box.

## Relatedness and Self-advocacy

- **Avoidance:** SWSD should be able to choose the people they wish to be around and avoid. As advocates, we, too, have preferences on people around us.
- **Mom's friends:** Family and parental friends are not the same as have like-peers to have a relationship. SWSD need friends unique to them and at their level.
- **Milestones:** SWSD with their own relationships (of their choosing) are more willing to try new things and adapt to environment.

59

SWSD should have a set of their own friends, especially similar peers. This allows SWSD to have a connection that only another SWSD would understand. As adults, we connect with people that can understand what we are going through and have similar interests. It is difficult to be "friends" with someone out of our comfortability, such as a boss or colleague. But friends should be on the same level to invoke empathy and understanding.

## Basic Need: Autonomy

- Freedom to make decisions for one's self
- The grounding motivation for self-advocacy
- Autonomy can be guided, but when overtaken intrinsic and extrinsic motivation depletes.
- When autonomy is removed, competence and relatedness become trivial and unimportant to the individual.

60

Discuss the need for all adults to feel the freedom to make choices, not just SWSD.

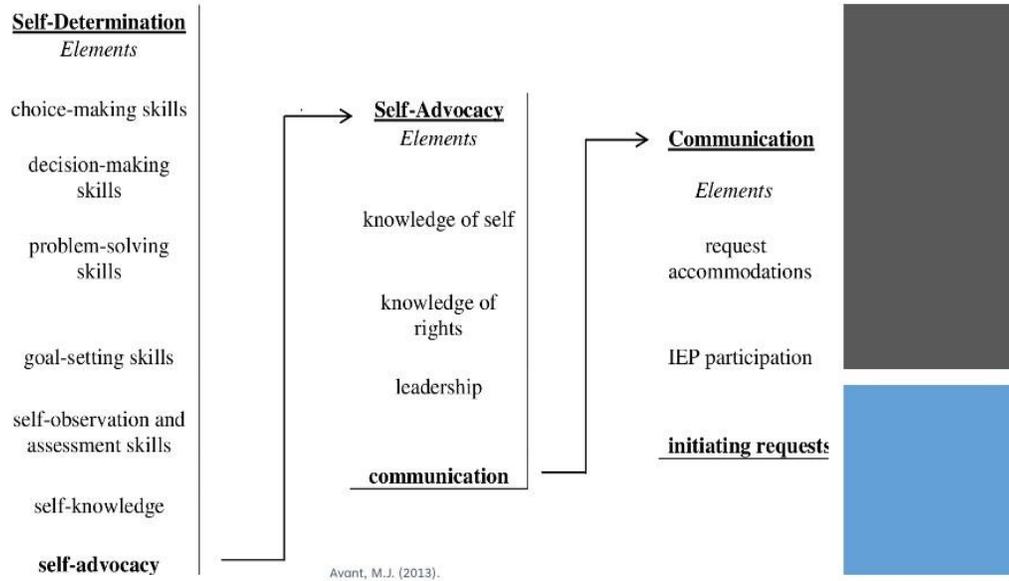
## Autonomy and Self-advocacy

- **Purpose:** When having the opportunities to choose, the why SWSD do things is recognized. Allowing for advocates to see the specific intentions, personality, and characteristics of a SWSD.
- **Sharing is Caring:** Advocates can provide advice but when sharing the responsibility to make decisions, SWSD learn to make choices while maintaining the protection of the advocate.
- **All or nothing:** Without autonomy SDT does not work; the other factors fail.

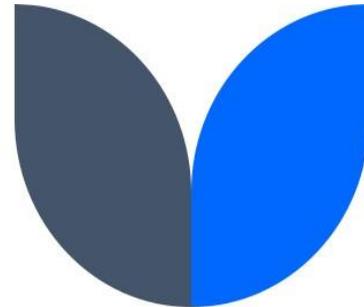
61

Provide examples and ask for suggestion in the chat box

Autonomy, and any decision making process, does not have to be a single action by SWSD. Adults reach out for advice and guidance by professionals, and others with experiences (Medical professional, church officials, Youtube, Blogs, advice columns). Autonomy is the freedom for SWSD to choose who helps them make the decisions and voice to be heard- not overran by advocate opinion.

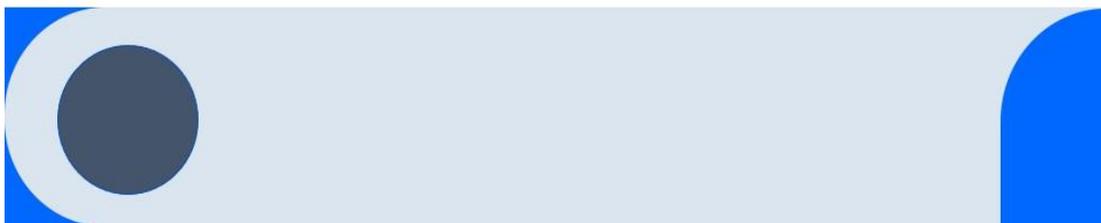


A visual of the process of self-determination to advocacy to communication. These concepts flow into one another.



## Let's Take a Break

10:30-10:45



Allow for questions to be put in the text box during the break to be answered then (if needed immediate attention) or throughout the course.

## What is Quality of Life?

Think-Pair-Share:

What is QoL for individuals with disabilities? How is it achieved?

Does it differ based on abilities? How so?

Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Group

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Direct participants to their morning breakout session group. Give them 10 minutes to meet then 5 to discuss in whole group. As a reminder groups can use the microphone to communicate or the chat box feature.

## What is Quality of Life?

Video

<https://youtu.be/EDwE56Y6opg>

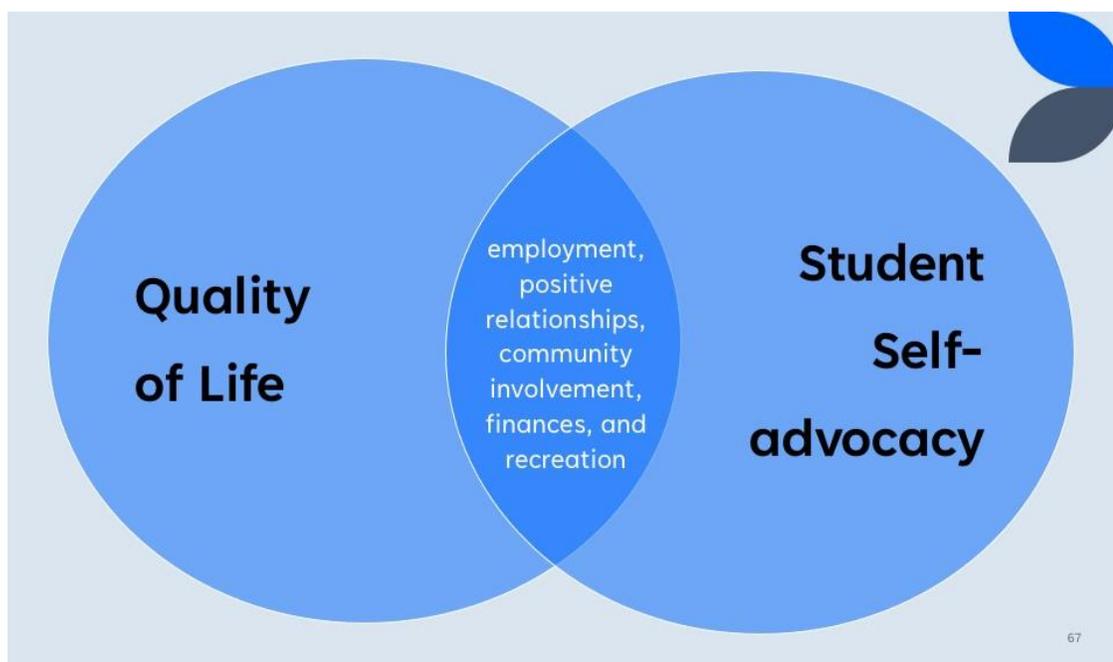
Visual and background knowledge for new topic.

## What is Quality of Life?

- Defined as the happiness and success of a person
- This includes areas more than emotions such as: employment, positive relationships, community involvement, finances, and recreation.
- Quality of life is enhanced by student decisions and preferences.
- Strategies and involvement should not be reserved for adulthood. Quality of life should be evaluated often and continuously from young to adult life choices.

66

Although it impossible to make everyone happy at the same time, it is possible to teach how to be happy and make the most of what you have. For SWSD, happiness and success may have to altered based on realistic goals. However, that does not indicate that their hopes and dreams are not important, it is taking those key elements and making them attainable.



67

A visual to show the link between QoL and self-advocacy. The middle shows the concepts that overlap

## How does QoL look for SWSD?

### Employment

- Realistic: Some SWSD have first job aspirations that are beyond skills set.
- Most jobs will be hands on; including but not limited to janitorial, factory line, stocking, etc.
- Some parents struggle with realistic careers, when many entry level jobs are primitive. (cleaning based). They want more urbane jobs for their student.

### Finances

- It's their money! SWSD have the final say for financial decisions.
- Budgeting: However, SWSD will need help budgeting. Advocates should begin discussing smart money managements as a team. This would be a great lessen for daily living skills.
- There should be a healthy mix between needs and wants.

68

SWSD and advocates need to be realistic and considerate of abilities. This is not a stab at their needs or ableism; it is an understanding of how make realistic paths for achievement. Advocates tend to shield SWSD from harsh realities but if they are to be adults in the community it should be guided as an adult and not a child.

## How does QoL look for SWSD?

### Positive Relationships

- Equal respect at home, work, and school settings especially as an adult.
- Chances to make own opinions
- Like peers: commonalities in likes, and experiences
- Not selected by advocates

### Community involvement

- Choice in religious beliefs and involvement
- Voting: adults should have the ability, and unbiased guidance
- Freedom to be themselves in public. Advocates try to protect them in society, when they should be embraced their unique characteristics; apologies are not needed for such traits.

### Recreation

- Choice in fun and relaxation.
- Opportunities to be unique and own person regardless of society norms.
- Some advocates have difficulty letting go of control

69

In contrast, advocates need to realize the preferences of an adult or student with severe disabilities are not typically not age appropriate. Preferences should not be pushed upon

them because that would be a societal norm. Look big picture, long term for quality of life.

## How is Self-Advocacy necessary for Quality of Life?

- SELF-ADVOCACY! In preparing and implementing self-advocacy, QoL will improve and take shape to the SWSD needs.
- Preferences need to be realized. If advocates are making all the decisions, the SWSD will not know what they have preferences for.
- Decision making skills are vital. SWSD need to have opportunities to make their own choices so they build self-awareness.
- QoL is a snowball effect from self-advocacy skills. With one skill advanced others benefit.

70

A conclusion for QoL. Allow for participants to ask questions through microphone and chat box.

## Lunch Time!

11:45-12:45

The chat box will be open, however the instructor will be at lunch as well and will not answer in real time.



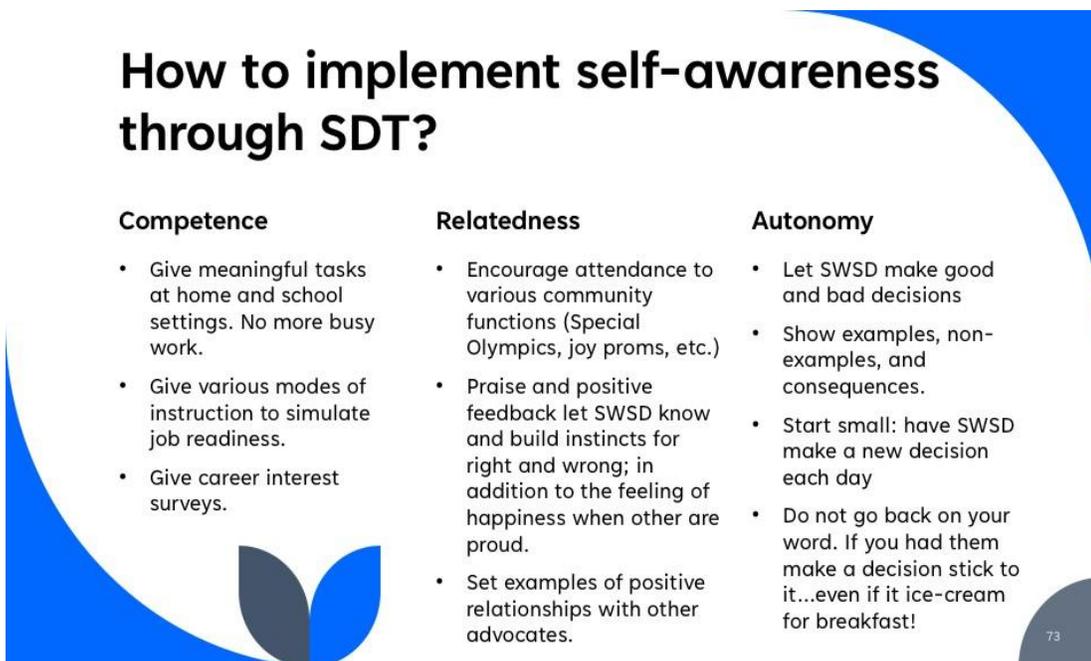
## What is my role as an Advocate?

**Think-Pair-Share:**

- How do advocates support self-advocacy through Self-Determination theory?
- How do advocates promote highest Quality of Life?

**Ten Minutes: Afternoon Breakout group**  
**Five Minutes: Whole Group**

Participants will be reminded of their afternoon breakout group as they changed from the morning.



## How to implement self-awareness through SDT?

Competence	Relatedness	Autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give meaningful tasks at home and school settings. No more busy work.</li> <li>• Give various modes of instruction to simulate job readiness.</li> <li>• Give career interest surveys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage attendance to various community functions (Special Olympics, joy proms, etc.)</li> <li>• Praise and positive feedback let SWSD know and build instincts for right and wrong; in addition to the feeling of happiness when other are proud.</li> <li>• Set examples of positive relationships with other advocates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let SWSD make good and bad decisions</li> <li>• Show examples, non-examples, and consequences.</li> <li>• Start small: have SWSD make a new decision each day</li> <li>• Do not go back on your word. If you had them make a decision stick to it...even if it ice-cream for breakfast!</li> </ul>

Although this topic has been presented, this information is more application. How can advocates build strategies with SWSD in mind.

## How to implement self-advocacy strategies for QoL

- Think big picture: Is the action, the lesson, the conversation going to benefit QoL?
- Be an active listener: advocates are often "fixers" but to build independence, SWSD need to deal with the punches. SWSD wont know how to critically think nor problem solve if advocates and interjecting.
- Be flexible: preferences, expectations, and abilities are going to change. DO not get stuck in the rut because it is safe and familiar.
- Be objective: SWSD do not need advocate dreams, they need their own. Be ok, with the QoL the SWSD chooses.

74

Strategies are great but only if there are examples and guidelines of how to use them.

## How to promote strategies?

- Let go of the control: Advocates try to bubble wrap SWSD when they need to have opportunities for trial and error.
- Be open: Advocates live everyday in routine- encourage adaptability & change!
- Pick your battles: Not everything is going to work out seamlessly. Pick and choose nonnegotiable topics and build from that starting point.
- Ignore the naysayers: society is quick to make a judgement, stereotype, and groupthink; Don't fall into the trap of joining them by trying to overprotect SWSD.

75

The presenter will open this up to the whole for questions and discussion. Potentially gain new and real-world examples.

## How do the strategies compare?

What the similarities of strategies used?  
Can the same strategies always be used?  
Are the strategies ever the same for teacher and parent advocates or are they different based on their role and location they have with the SWSD?

Whole group discussion. This discussion will help breakout session have a reference and talking points. Participants can use the microphone or chat box features to engage.

## Self-determination and self-advocacy

“Capable of being awesome”

<https://youtu.be/uwDvkinllDw>

A visual and transitional piece to recap the days' information prior to the workshop.

## Your Turn!

In your breakout session:

Self-determination theory and Quality of Life

Discuss the scenarios from the teacher and parent perspectives.

Create strategies for potential conversations/actions with SWSD.

Remind participants to join their breakout session for the workshop. This is not the one from the morning sessions. This breakout session includes teachers and parents.

## Self-determination Scenarios

Use your knowledge from today's discussions to support your answers

Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon completion

Directions for when in the breakout session. The group will record answers on a Google Doc.

**A student served in the MID program wants to join the flag football team. Although he is active and physically capable, he has a shunt, being more of a risk for him to participate. Yet, he is adamant he wants to be part of the sport.**

#### **Teacher**

- How do you promote SDT with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote SDT?
- Is it possible not to control the situation?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

#### **Parent**

- How do you promote SDT with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote SDT?
- Is it possible not to control the situation?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

80

Participants will read the scenario and answer the questions from each perspective. Presenters will periodically enter the breakout session; one question could be the similarities and difference of perspective in the scenario.

**Create a script for advocates to use for implementing SDT strategies with the student. Include the topics for each advocate.**

#### **Teacher**

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

#### **Parent**

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

81

The breakout session will create a script answering the questions with the student's abilities and comprehension in mind. The group will place answers in a shareable Google Doc so that all members have access and can make edits.

**A wheelchair bound student served in the MID program wants to go to a gathering with some friends. The student is a senior in high school and has had many of the friends throughout grade school. The gathering location does not have easy wheelchair accessibility. The student wants to be dropped off at the gather to enjoy the company without direct adult supervision.**

#### **Teacher**

- How do you promote SDT with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote SDT?
- Is it possible not to control the situation?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

#### **Parent**

- How do you promote SDT with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote SDT?
- Is it possible not to control the situation?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

82

Participants will read the scenario and answer the questions from each perspective. Presenters will periodically enter the breakout session; one question could be the similarities and difference of perspective in the scenario.

**Create a script for advocates to use for implementing SDT strategies with the student. Include the topics for each advocate.**

#### **Teacher**

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

#### **Parent**

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

83

The breakout session will create a script answering the questions with the student's abilities and comprehension in mind. The group will place answers in a shareable Google Doc so that all members have access and can make edits.

## Quality of Life Scenarios

Use your knowledge from today's discussions to support your answers

Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon completion

Directions for when in the breakout session. The group will record answers on a Google Doc.

**A young adult has received their first paycheck! She wants to take her two best friends out to dinner, very expensive dinner to celebrate. Although she can afford it, the dinner is expensive, and she has not considered her bills yet. When addressed about those bills, she says her family can pay them since they have been doing it.**

### Teacher

- How do you promote QoL with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote QoL?
- Is it possible not to control the situation? Allowing for mistakes?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

### Parent

- How do you promote QoL with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote QoL?
- Is it possible not to control the situation? Allowing for mistakes?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

Participants will read the scenario and answer the questions from each perspective. Presenters will periodically enter the breakout session; one question could be the similarities and difference of perspective in the scenario.

## Create a script for advocates to use for implementing QoL strategies with the student. Include the topics for each advocate.

### Teacher

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

### Parent

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

86

The breakout session will create a script answering the questions with the student's abilities and comprehension in mind. The group will place answers in a shareable Google Doc so that all members have access and can make edits.

**A student with Autism served in the MOID program is job training and has great skills for janitorial tasks. Nonetheless, the student dreams of being a train conductor. He knows every train make and model, the local train schedule, and plays a simulator game on the computer. The student has wonderful social skills, but need support academically, especially reading.**

### Teacher

- How do you promote QoL with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote QoL?
- Is it possible not to control the situation? Allowing for mistakes?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

### Parent

- How do you promote QoL with the specific needs of the student?
- What strategies do you use to promote QoL?
- Is it possible not to control the situation? Allowing for mistakes?
- What are the positive and negative consequences?

87

Participants will read the scenario and answer the questions from each perspective. Presenters will periodically enter the breakout session; one question could be the similarities and difference of perspective in the scenario.

## Create a script for advocates to use for implementing QoL strategies with the student. Include the topics for each advocate.

### Teacher

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

### Parent

- What is the strategy?
- What decisions were made by the advocate? By the SWSD?
- Were there accommodation made to overcome barriers?
- How can you (the teacher) be supportive?

88

The breakout session will create a script answering the questions with the student's abilities and comprehension in mind. The group will place answers in a shareable Google Doc so that all members have access and can make edits.

## Thoughts?

- Were you able to let go of control?
- Were any of the scenarios plausible for supporting SDT and QoL?
- What were your challenges?

Whole Group Discussion

Come back to whole group to discuss the results and findings of the breakout sessions. How do the groups compare in their responses and creations?

## Essential Questions: Journal Entry #4

What is Self-Determination Theory (SDT); how does it apply to self-advocacy?

What are basic human needs? Does everyone have access to them?

What is Quality of Life?

How does an adult with severe disabilities enhance their Quality of Life?

What strategies can advocates use to enhance Quality of Life for adults with severe disabilities?

90

Have participants answer the same questions from the morning journal entry. Remind participants to maintain the same document for the entirety of the course.

## Ticket Out the Door

- Did your responses in Journal entry #3 change or progress by Journal Entry #4?
- What was your biggest take home for today?
- What did you need more information about today?
- Look back to Journal Entries #1 & 2, do you have a different perspective with the gained knowledge of today?

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Provide a link to a survey or allow to respond in the chatbox to complete the questions from the day's activities. The instructor will stay available for 10 minutes for comments and questions.

## Day 3 Agenda:

- 8:30- Pre Assessment Journal Entry #5
- 9:00- What is a transition plan?
- 10:00- Break
- 10:15- Student Led IEPs
- 11:15- Break
- 11:30- What is my role as an Advocate?
- 12:15- Lunch
- 1:15- Workshop: Group Sessions
- 2:45- Whole Group Share
- 3:15- Recap
- 3:30- Post assessment & Closing

Participants will be reminded of the expectations for morning and afternoon groupings. Any questions lingering from the previous days will be addressed if needed. Gives participants the opportunity to ask questions that were thought off after the sessions. This brief discussion can be used as a recap as well.

## Essential Question: Journal Entry #5

- What is a Transition Plan?
- What role does it play in supporting SWSD transition into adulthood?
- What is a student-led IEP?
- How does it differ from current IEP meetings?
- How is self-advocacy relate to student-led IEPs and transition plans?

93

Participants will be asked to answer the essential questions in a journal format as a pre-assessment for the day's content. They will continue on the same document from the previous days' entries.

## What is a Transition Plan?

Think-Pair-Share:

What is a Transition Plan? How does it look for a SWSD?

How does a transition plan support self-advocacy?

Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Groups

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Breakout groups will have 10 minutes to discuss their thoughts and record their answers. Each group will be called on to provide input to a running Google Document that will be added to in real time. Groups can also add to the chat box as needed.

## What is a Transition Plan?



A visual for presenter to begin engaging participants. Connections from previous days' information will be referenced in addition to a discussion. Participants are encouraged to respond through voice chat or chat box.

## Transition Plan

- A plan included in their IEP for effective postsecondary living: training/higher education, employment, adult living skills, etc.
- Embedded in the IEP document at the age of 16 or high school level IEP
- Intended to have direct input from student; choices, aptitude, preferences
- Goal oriented: goals for school and home settings

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Brief overview of the transition plan. Most advocates will have seen or created a transition plan. This slide will help create uniformity in background knowledge.

## Georgia DOE Transition Plan Template

<https://www.gadoe.org/curriculum-instruction-and-assessment/Transition-Plan-Template>

15 minutes: Morning Breakout Group

10 minutes: Whole group

Participants will join their breakout groups the review the transition plan document.

## How Does a Transition Plan Look for SWSD?

- More goals are required: Such as community experience, adult living skills/post school, related services, & daily living skills.
- Goals may not be grand: what may seem small progress can be significant.
- Goals may require other agents to help facilitate success. SWSD may not have need advocate support to complete/master a goal.

98

Compare the transition plan template to transition plans of SWSD. How do they differ? Reiterate the importance of thorough and realistic plans.

## What are potential resources?

- Picture interest survey: Students select interests from pictures to calculate their interests, areas of strength, and work/learning style preferences.
- Self-evaluations: this can be a rating scale or open-ended depending on you student's preferences.
- Questionnaires & surveys: these could be combined in a interview style to gain specific preferences and emphasis. Parents may have more success with this format due to comfortability with the SWSD.

99

Describe potential resources for advocates to utilize with SWSD. Allow participants to write in the chatbox of other resources they have used with SWSD.

## Example: Picture Interest Career Survey

**Picture Interest Career Survey**  
PICS  
Third Edition  
Robert P. Brady, EdD

A visual way to identify your career interests and start career exploration and planning.

The Picture Interest Career Survey (PICS) is a quick, visual tool for use to identify work environments that interest you. You use their own visual PICS cards to explore careers that match their interests.

**Directions:** Each of the 36 items consists of three pictures. Each picture shows an individual working. Decide which of the three pictures in each item is most interesting to you and then circle that picture. Work through all 36 items in chronological order, and circle only one picture in each item. There are no right or wrong answers.

**Sample Item:** Below are three pictures of individuals working. Picture A is a person cleaning a boat, picture B is a person arranging flowers, and picture C is a person defining each of picture B's elements on the model out of the three pictures. Then circle A. The item number (1 in this sample) is printed to the left of picture A.

Turn the page to get started with this!

**R—Realistic**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with things, use tools and machines, and prefer physical, outdoor, and mechanical work. They are doers and often described as persistent and practical. They prefer a structured work environment. Workers with high realistic interest are found in construction and skilled trades, production and manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, hospitality and recreation, food service, and natural resources.

**S—Social**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with people and prefer helping, teaching, and healing work. Social individuals are helpers and often described as supportive, understanding, patient, and generous. They favor jobs that require listening, comforting, serving others, and advising. Workers with high social interest are found in education, health and human services, recreation and fitness, safety and service, and religious vocations.

**I—Investigative**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with ideas and data and prefer figuring out problems mentally. They are thinkers and often described as curious, intellectual, and independent. They favor jobs that require abstract thinking, research, and analysis. Workers with high investigative interest are found in the life and physical sciences, health and behavioral sciences, applied technologies, academics, research and development, mathematics, and engineering.

**E—Enterprising**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with start-up ideas and new projects and prefer leading. Enterprising individuals are persuaders and often described as confident, ambitious, and energetic. They generally favor jobs that involve selling and achieving set goals. Workers with high enterprising interest are often found in business and administration, marketing, finance and insurance, sales, regional planning, and law.

**A—Artistic**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with forms, designs, and patterns and prefer creative and self-expressive work. Artistic individuals are creators and often described as imaginative and original. They favor flexible and less predictable work environments. Workers with high artistic interest are found in design, applied arts, architecture, culinary arts, performing arts, fine arts, education, communication and media, and fashion.

**C—Conventional**  
Individuals interested in this area like to work with set procedures, data, and details and prefer clerical and computational work. Conventional individuals are organizers who are described as organized, efficient, and careful. They favor jobs that involve routine work with numbers, machines, and computers to meet required goals. Workers with high conventional interest are found in accounting, banking, statistics, office work, and computer applications.

This is an example of a picture interest survey that can be purchased. Your district may already have these available for distribution. Nonetheless, it is an example of a potential resource that can be used. Additionally, it is already created limiting the need to create a specific document.

## Let's Take a Break

10:00-10:15

Allow for questions to be put in the text box during the break to be answered then (if needed immediate attention) or throughout the course.

## What is a Student-Led IEP?

Think-Pair-Share:

What is a student-led IEP?

How is it different from current IEPs?

How does a student-led IEP meeting support self-advocacy?

Ten Minutes: Morning Breakout Group

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Breakout groups will have 10 minutes to discuss their thoughts and record their answers. Each group will be called on to provide input to a running Google Document that will be added to in real time. Groups can also add to the chat box as needed.

## What is a Student-Led IEP?

Video

[https://youtu.be/enkEcDUME\\_s](https://youtu.be/enkEcDUME_s)

After sharing as a whole group from the Think-pair-share, this video will be played to provide another visual and reference to the topic.

## What is a Student-Led IEP?

- Student participation is expected: No longer just in attendance.
- Student perspectives are the guideline for developing transitions, goals/objectives, accommodations, etc.: No longer “we know what’s best”.
- Not intended for student take over, but IEP team members will talk with the student not at them. Guided voice and choices are used to help make decisions.
- Various modes of communication is used so the SWSD make access the information.

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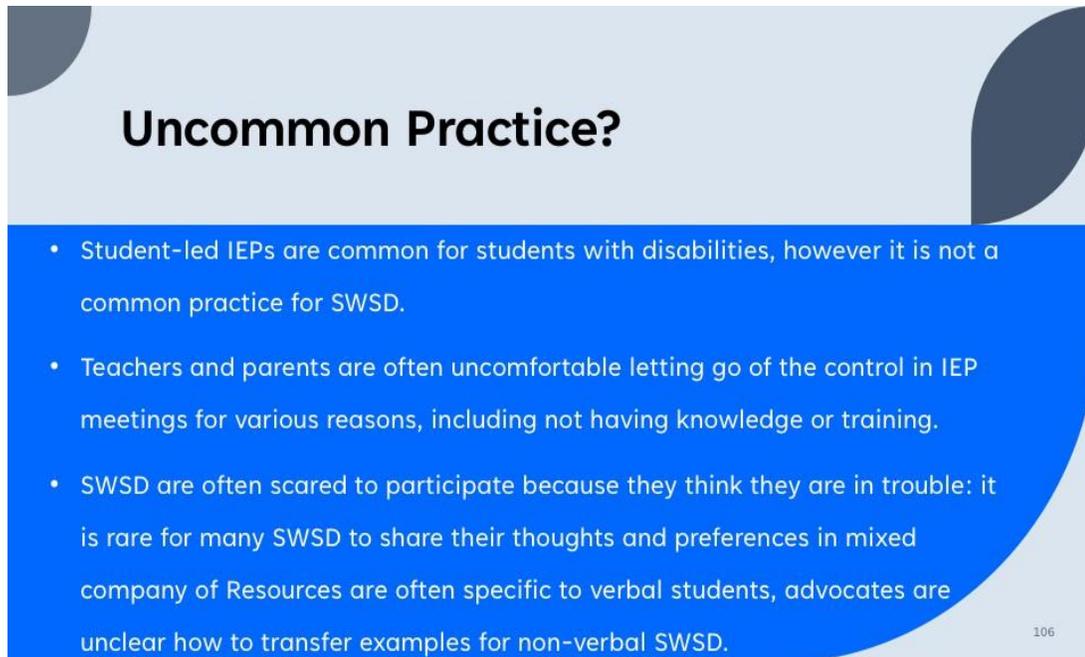
Most advocates will not have background knowledge nor experiences to connect to the concept. They will rely on their previous IEP meeting experiences. Comparing the two will help give a visual and reference point for participants. Student-Led IEPs are not a SWSD take over, and it is not intended to create more work. The present will explain the values of enhancing the IEP process not adding to it for advocates.

## Different from Current Practice?

- Student engagement is required: not just attendance.
- Full responsibility is not solely for the teacher; a collaboration between teachers, parents, and SWSD takes place before and after the meeting.
- Advocates collaborate continuously, rather than a one day meeting, and are not confined to areas of their expertise (Education, social, home-life).
- Advocates use the meeting as a training tool rather than only a informational session about the student.

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Student-led IEP are similar to the typical process; however it is crucial to get participants that student-led IEPs should be the norm not the exception for SWSD. The present will be thorough in the bullets providing examples and experiences.



## Uncommon Practice?

- Student-led IEPs are common for students with disabilities, however it is not a common practice for SWSD.
- Teachers and parents are often uncomfortable letting go of the control in IEP meetings for various reasons, including not having knowledge or training.
- SWSD are often scared to participate because they think they are in trouble: it is rare for many SWSD to share their thoughts and preferences in mixed company of Resources are often specific to verbal students, advocates are unclear how to transfer examples for non-verbal SWSD.

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Students with disabilities supported through general education classes are often offered opportunities to show self-advocacy through student-led IEPs; this is not the same for SWSD. Yet, it is important to remind teachers and parents that teachers serving self-contained students are not less trained or equipped for hosting IEP meetings. Additionally, SWSD are not often exposed to the responsibility to use voice and choice, especially in important matters such as an IEP. This may cause SWSD to be unsure of the new procedures and expectations.

## Student-led IEP Supports Self-advocacy?

- Makes the SWSD the center of attention: The conversation, meeting delivery, decisions, IEP team members.
- Guided practice helps the SWSD make choices in a safe and supportive environment.
- Promotes awareness of self and real-world applications into adulthood preparing SWSD to make decisions without the need for guardianship.
- Student voice and choice gives advocates insight of character, understanding, needs, and independence.

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The value in Student-led IEPs are the real-world experiences students are receiving while in the safety and guidance of teachers and parents. Moreover, each year SWSD will become more effective in the student-led IEPs because they will mature, know the expectations for participation, and advocates will have data from each meeting to improve strategy implementation.

## Let's Take a Break

11:15-11:30

Allow for questions to be put in the text box during the break to be answered then (if needed immediate attention) or throughout the course.



## What is my role as an Advocate?

Think-Pair-Share:

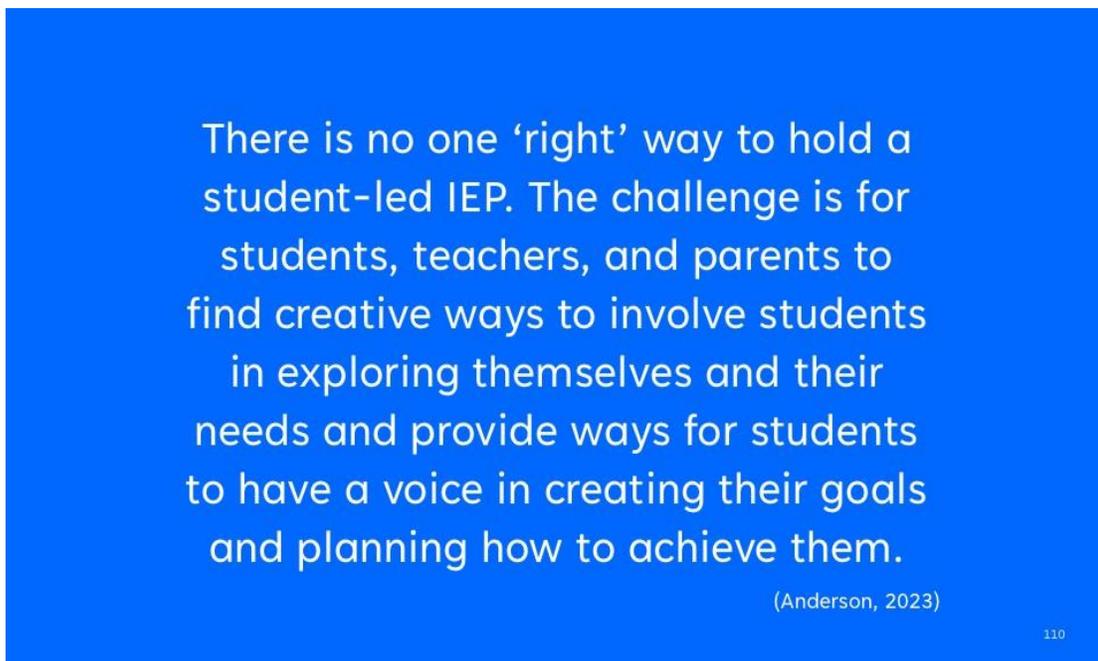
How do advocates support self-advocacy create transition plans?

How do advocates promote effective IEP meetings?

Ten Minutes: Afternoon Breakout group

Five Minutes: Whole Group

Participants will be reminded of their afternoon breakout group as they changed from the morning.



There is no one 'right' way to hold a student-led IEP. The challenge is for students, teachers, and parents to find creative ways to involve students in exploring themselves and their needs and provide ways for students to have a voice in creating their goals and planning how to achieve them.

(Anderson, 2023)

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A quote that captures the intent of student-led IEP meetings. It gives validation that someone else is seeing the need.

## Don't Reinvent the Wheel for Resources

- **Templates are available online:** Questionnaires, Picture surveys, Fill in the blank (laminated to reuse).
- **Use a script for students to follow:** deviate when needed to fit the needs of the individual.
- **Create an agenda:** can be reviewed before the meeting with teachers and parents. This will support advocate comfortability as each member will know what to expect at the formal meeting.

111

Templates can be used for present levels, goals, transition plan. This is not specific to teachers, although they may be the ones to find one that fits the process for their districts process. Parents can use this as well to learn about the specific outline of the meeting. This will help their anxieties as well.

## Student-Led IEPs don't have to be ALL or NOTHING

- **Collaboration!** Similar to SDM, having a student-led IEP does not mean the student needs to do it all by themselves. It is teamwork!
- **Assign parts:** An agenda can be used to assign responsibility to team members; everyone has a part to play.
- **Communicating present levels can be non-verbal.** Allow SWSD to choose work samples for discussing present levels.
- **Visuals and manipulatives for engagement:** specific tools can be created for selected parts. Again giving that responsibility to the SWSD.

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SWSD, nor advocates, are expected to complete the IEP on their own. The intent is to be a collaborative team. By saying student-led, the understanding is the student is in the

foreground and expected to be an active member in the process rather a bystander or observer.

## IEP Agenda

Student _____ Date _____	
<b>IEP Meeting Agenda</b>	
IEP Meeting Step	Description
<input type="checkbox"/> Introductions	General introductions are made and team members introduce themselves.
<input type="checkbox"/> Purpose of Meeting	The purpose of the meeting is stated to help keep the team on track.
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Concerns	Anyone on the team is given the chance to bring up a topic or concern that they would like to discuss at one point during the meeting.
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Reports and Assessments	The team reviews reports and assessment results.
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Current Program and Progress	The team reviews current program and progress.
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Goals	Current goals and objectives are discussed and reviewed.
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine Eligibility (if appropriate)	If this is the triennial year, the team will consider if the student continues to qualify for special education services.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Additional Testing	The team considers and discusses need for additional assessments.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Strengths and Needs	Identify and discuss strengths and needs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan Goals and Objectives	Discuss and plan goals and objectives.
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify Modifications and Accommodations	Discuss and plan necessary modifications and accommodations.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Proposed Services	Discuss and plan individual programming, including counseling, speech and language, social work, and other pull-out time.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Additional Concerns	Anyone at the table has a chance to discuss any concerns or needs that were not yet discussed.
<input type="checkbox"/> Closing	The team finishes up the official meeting. Sign necessary papers.
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This example gives the agenda with description. This would be a great option for parents to use at home to talk about what to expect during the meeting and what the steps mean. Other options could include pictures to support non-verbal students to use as a reference when communicating back with advocates.

## Other Success of Student-led IEPs?

- SWSD often do not know what an IEP meeting is for, by encouraging participation, SWSD gain trust of their advocates.
- It is reported during IEP meetings, students only speak for 3% of IEP meetings (Anderson, 2023). Student-led IEPs provide opportunities to talk to the most important supporters in the SWSD life as a single unit.
- Since the focus is on the SWSD, advocates create a bond through the student promoting more understanding for future collaboration.

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By gaining trust, SWSD learn how to make decisions with the support of advocates by request not mandated. Additionally, advocates learn to trust each other and create a positive education experience.

## Advocates Need Self-advocacy too!

### Parents

- **Professional wording is intimidating:** Many families are nervous when engaging with schools and teachers.
- **Parent participation lend to SWSD self-advocacy:** Parents do your research, collaborate with teachers, and be willing to feel uncomfortable. Do not pass on your opportunity to be supportive.
- **Sharing is caring:** Provide data to teachers. Do not withhold information due to the fear of judgement. You know your SWSD more than anyone.

### Teachers

- **It's ok not to know:** Teachers feel they need to have all the answers because they are the professional.
- **Ask questions:** Feel free to ask for help from colleagues, administration, and parents. Its likely they've had the question before, or need a learning moment as well.
- **Don't do all the heavy lifting:** Some teachers may feel that cannot give tasks to students or parents because an IEP is a "teacher's responsibility"

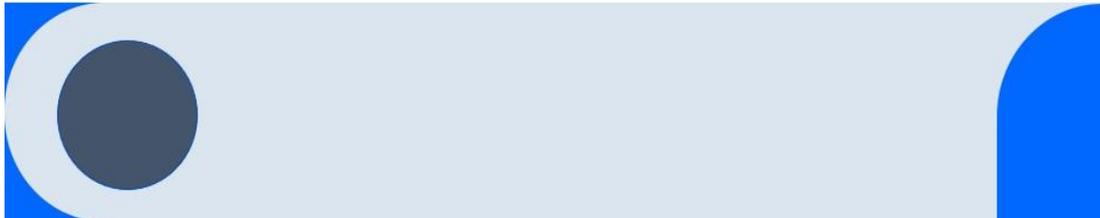
115

Self-advocacy cannot be taught if advocates do not do it for themselves. Collaboration is necessary to build strategies for SWSD. According to advocate interviews and literature review, parents and teachers find the responsibility is not shared. This continued disconnect will not help in an IEP meeting, and especially not a student-led IEP.

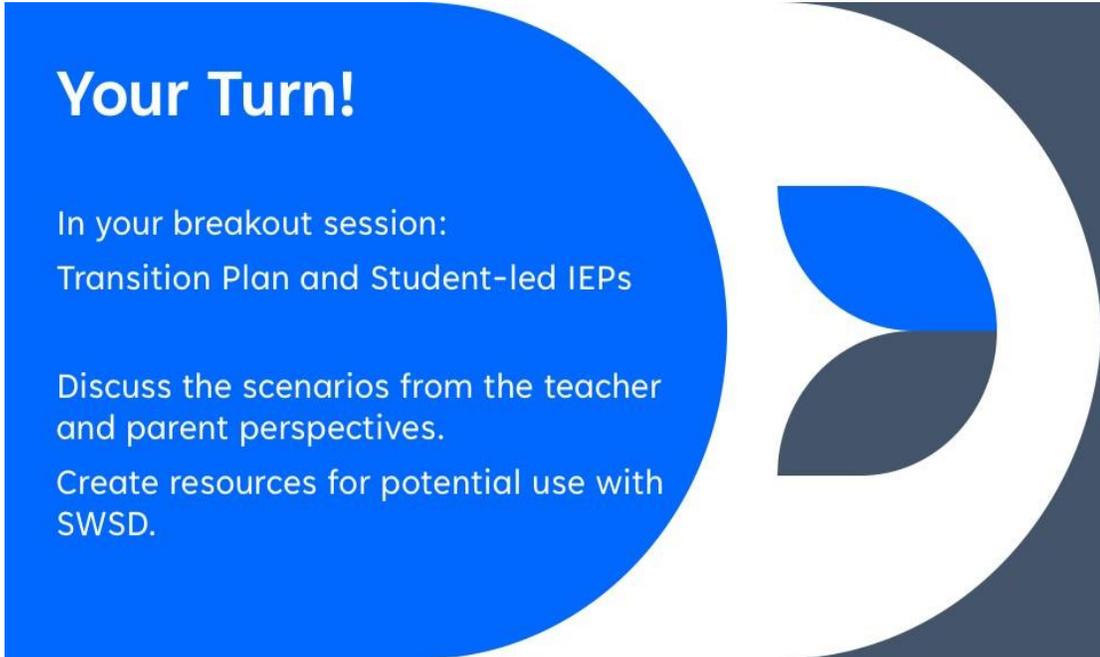


## Lunch Time

12:15-1:15



Allow for questions to be put in the text box during the break to be answered then (if needed immediate attention) or throughout the course.



### Your Turn!

In your breakout session:

Transition Plan and Student-led IEPs

Discuss the scenarios from the teacher and parent perspectives.

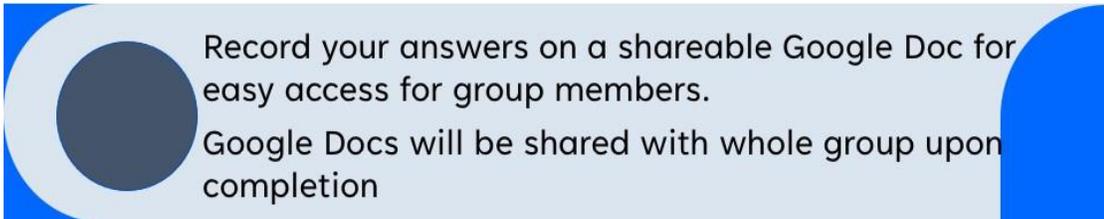
Create resources for potential use with SWSD.

Remind participants to join their breakout session for the workshop. This is not the one from the morning sessions. This breakout session includes teachers and parents.



## Transition Plan Scenarios

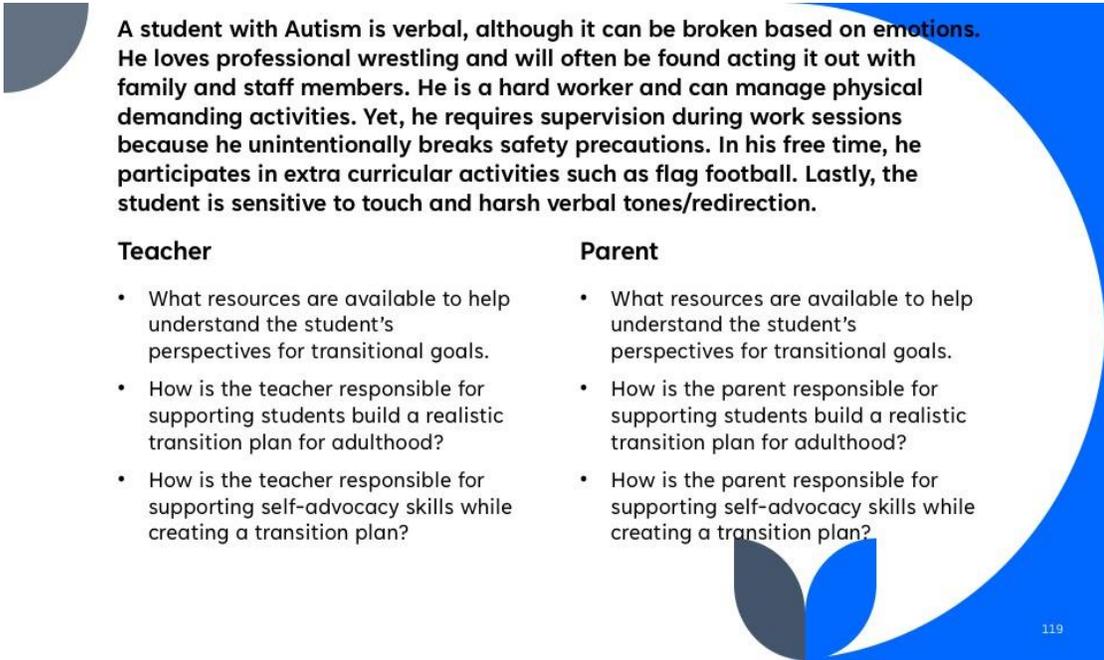
Use your knowledge from today's discussions to support your answers



Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon completion

Directions for the breakout groups are given. Participants are reminded of their afternoon groups. The presenters will remain on the original group meet while the other will carousel from each group engaging as asking questions to support critical thinking and collaboration.



**A student with Autism is verbal, although it can be broken based on emotions. He loves professional wrestling and will often be found acting it out with family and staff members. He is a hard worker and can manage physical demanding activities. Yet, he requires supervision during work sessions because he unintentionally breaks safety precautions. In his free time, he participates in extra curricular activities such as flag football. Lastly, the student is sensitive to touch and harsh verbal tones/redirection.**

### Teacher

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for transitional goals.
- How is the teacher responsible for supporting students build a realistic transition plan for adulthood?
- How is the teacher responsible for supporting self-advocacy skills while creating a transition plan?

### Parent

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for transitional goals.
- How is the parent responsible for supporting students build a realistic transition plan for adulthood?
- How is the parent responsible for supporting self-advocacy skills while creating a transition plan?

Participants will read the scenarios and discuss the posed questions with both teacher and parent advocates in mind. Participants may have varied answers, thus showing the plethora of opinions.

## Create Self-advocacy Resources: What resources would you use to support self-advocacy skills while creating the Transition Plan?

### Teacher

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

### Parent

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

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Although the questions/guidelines are the same the creation may be different based on role of advocate.

**A student with Autism is non-verbal, but responds to verbal and picture cues using an array of communication modes including an iPad and modified sign language. He is interested in coloring, playing basketball, and swimming. When on job sites in the classroom and community, he is a skilled worker especially with laundry. While working he needs some supervision but not constant. He follows safety regulations but has moments of outward behaviors when overwhelmed with external stimuli.**

### Teacher

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for transitional goals.
- How is the teacher responsible for supporting students build a realistic transition plan for adulthood?
- How is the teacher responsible for supporting self-advocacy skills while creating a transition plan?

### Parent

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for transitional goals.
- How is the parent responsible for supporting students build a realistic transition plan for adulthood?
- How is the parent responsible for supporting self-advocacy skills while creating a transition plan?

121

Again, a discussion will be made, however in this scenario the student is non-verbal. Will the resources change? And if so, why?

## Create Self-advocacy Resources: What resources would you use to support self-advocacy during the transition plan?

### Teacher

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

### Parent

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

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Are the roles of the advocate really different? How do they compare? Talk with groups about the roles inside the IEP meeting as well as before and after the meeting.

## Student-Led IEP Scenarios

Use your knowledge from today's discussions to support your answers

Record your answers on a shareable Google Doc for easy access for group members.

Google Docs will be shared with whole group upon completion

A group member can check in with the instructor prior to moving on to follow up with previous scenarios and discuss questions for continuing as needed.

**A student with Autism is verbal and requires no supports for communicating. He is able to read with picture cues. Academically, math is a strength. He is often found wondering the classroom and home setting to help with tasks. He is very involved with teachers and family and requires constant praise from them. His family has not given specifics to his exceptionality but the student is aware of his strengths and areas of need. He is interested in job skills and is an active member in his youth group at church.**

<p><b>Teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for the IEP process?</li> <li>• How is the teacher responsible for engaging the student in the IEP process?</li> <li>• How is the teacher responsible for supporting self-advocacy during the IEP process?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Parent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for the IEP process?</li> <li>• How is the parent responsible for engaging the student in the IEP process?</li> <li>• How is the parent responsible for supporting self-advocacy during the IEP process?</li> </ul>
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How do the resources compare from the transition plan to the IEP process? Are the resources similar or different; why?

**Create Self-advocacy Resources:  
What resources would you use to support self-advocacy during the IEP process?**

<p><b>Teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the resource?</li> <li>• How is it implemented?</li> <li>• How does it support self-advocacy?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Parent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the resource?</li> <li>• How is it implemented?</li> <li>• How does it support self-advocacy?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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125

Implementation is the creative component. Having a document/plan for student is easy, how to get it to be successfully implemented is thought-provoking.

A student with Traumatic Brain injury is non-verbal, but responds to verbal and picture cues using an array of communication modes including picture cues and recorded talking buttons. He will respond to simple questions, including person identification. His mobility is limited, thus he spends significant time in a wheelchair. He is unable to read however, will follow along and maintain attention.

#### Teacher

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for the IEP process.
- How is the teacher responsible for engaging the student in the IEP process?
- How is the teacher responsible for supporting self-advocacy during the IEP process?

#### Parent

- What resources are available to help understand the student's perspectives for IEP process.
- How is the parent responsible for engaging the student in the IEP process?
- How is the parent responsible for supporting self-advocacy during the IEP process?

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Does the discussion focus on the fact the SWSD is not verbal? Why or why not? What are the contributing factors?

### Create Self-advocacy Resources: What resources would you use to support self-advocacy during the IEP process?

#### Teacher

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

#### Parent

- What is the resource?
- How is it implemented?
- How does it support self-advocacy?
  - Communication
  - Awareness
  - Independence
  - Community involvement

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How does implementation for verbal SWSD compare to non-verbal SWSD?

## Did the resources change based on the students' descriptions?

Why or why not?

Share with the Whole group or in the chat box.

Return to the whole group to debrief on the experiences, discussions, resources, etc. This whole group could lead to more discussion as there should be a variety of resources created.

## Essential Question: Journal Entry #6

- What is a Transition Plan?
- What role does it play in supporting SWSD transition into adulthood?
- What is a student-led IEP?
- How does it differ from current IEP meetings?
- How is self-advocacy relate to student-led IEPs and transition plans?

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Have participants take a moment to complete their final journey entry. Participants should not have many questions as it is the 6th entry.

## Recap from Student Perspective

Video

<https://youtu.be/ibhmgslipw>

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One last visual to sum up the workshop.

## Ticket Out the Door

- Did your responses in Journal entry #5 change or progress by Journal Entry #6?
- What was your biggest take home for today?
- What did you need more information about today?
- Look back to your previous Journal Entries, do you have a different perspective with the gained knowledge of today?
- What will be your first step in implementing self-advocacy strategies?

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Provide a link to a survey or allow to respond in the chatbox to complete the questions from the days' activities. The instructor will stay available for 10 minutes for comments and questions.

## References

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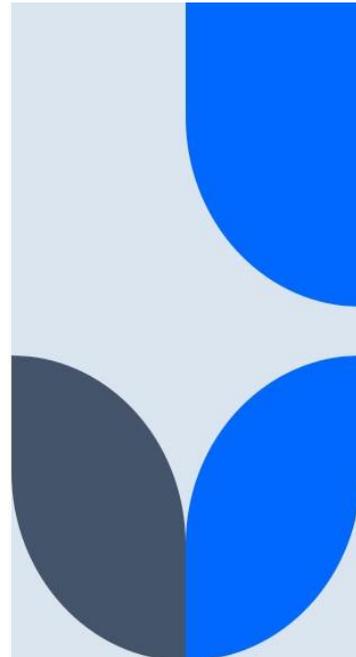


# Thank you

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Allow for any follow up questions and comments. Participants may leave the virtual setting at any time.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

Q1: What are advocates' (parents and teachers) perceptions of the role high school students served in self-contained settings participate in the current IEP process?

- a. In your experiences in the IEP process (before, during and after the IEP meeting), what is the role of the student? In what ways do students participate, how does it look?
- b. In your experiences in the IEP process (before, during and after the IEP meeting), what is the role of advocates? In what ways does it differ from student participation?
- c. Do the roles of the student differ based on the preferences and/or participation of advocates?

Q2: What are advocates' (parents and teachers) perceptions of the impact implementing self-advocacy strategies to improve high school SWSD active participation in the IEP process?

- a. In your experience, how would you define self-advocacy for students served in self-contained settings?
- b. In your experience, what strategies, regardless of success, do you use with your students to support self-advocacy skills? How to you support active participation of students?

- c. In your experiences, how does promoting self-advocacy skills through active participation impact students during the IEP process? Are there advantages and/or conflicts?
- d. How does implementing self-advocacy strategies compare between teachers and parents? Is there a difference in responsibility to build skills? Do strategies differ based on school or home setting, considering IEP meetings are held in the school setting?

Q3: What are advocates' (parents and teachers) perceptions of self-advocacy skills obtained by SWSD for enhanced self-determination to ensure the highest Quality of Life as an adult with severe disabilities?

- a. In your experience, how would you define highest Quality of Life for adults with severe disability?
- b. In your experience, how would implementing self-advocacy skills as a student with severe disabilities promote successful transitioning for adulthood? Are some aspects of daily living (employment, community participation, guardianship, etc.) more affected than others?
- c. In your experience, what self-advocacy skills are needed for SWSD to be successful in adulthood? What strategies could be utilized by advocates to support these needs?