

3 BIG IDEAS for Supporting Self-Determination in Transition to Employment

Promoting self-determination for students with disabilities by affording decision-making and leadership opportunities has been recommended for a number of years. And, applying self-determination principles to transition and employment planning is also a well-established best practice. The Let's Get to Work (LGTW) Quick Guide includes a list of free resources available to help teams implement activities designed to promote self-determination. Below are three BIG IDEAS for supporting students to be self-determined in planning for employment.

1. Make Time for Student-Led Preparation to Foster MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

a) **Get Students THINKING about their Career Goals** – In preparation for goal-setting and IEP meetings, students can be engaged in opportunities to consider their own interests, abilities, and learning needs. Some options for making this happen can include: *hold individual and group discussions about a variety of jobs; talk about what jobs students have already tried at home and school; watch videos about various careers and jobs; visit local businesses; have guest presenters; and use information-gathering tools* such as the LGTW Employment Planning Tool or the Self-Directed Employment Planning Modules and Workbook (links to both are available in the Career Goals section of the LGTW Quick Guide). Once a student has had time to consider what they like to do, what they are good at doing, and the types of jobs and places that interest them most, they are better prepared to set goals for themselves.

b) **Support Students to EXPRESS their Career Goals** – Educators are accustomed to writing student goals, but *students can benefit when they are engaged to write down, type, or verbally express their own goals.*

Taking part in developing goals can promote a deeper understanding of the fact that transition and employment goals are all about them. When getting personal goals from thought to written or verbal form, both short and longer-term goals should be outlined, since one leads to the other. Starting with the end in mind and then working backward (backward planning design) is usually most effective. Laying out the small steps or “achievable chunks” needed to accomplish the employment goal makes the process less overwhelming for students and the whole team. Another important step is letting students know that goals can change – setting them is a starting point, not an ending point!

Support students to:

- ✓ **THINK** about their career goals
- ✓ **EXPRESS** their career goals
- ✓ **PREPARE** visuals about their career goals
- ✓ **PRACTICE** sharing their goals

c) **Help Students PREPARE Visual Representations** – Students can *create written and/or electronic documents about their interests, abilities, and support needs.* The format can include pictures, videos, audio files, words, or a combination. The product can be a poster, a visual resume, a presentation like PowerPoint, or something else the student wants to use. The best format really depends on the individual student (another opportunity to provide choice).

- d) **Provide Time for Students to PRACTICE Sharing their Goals** – Once a student sets short and long-term employment goals, gets them down on paper, and prepares a format for sharing them, **teachers can facilitate discussions and presentation by students**. This practice can happen one-on-one, in small groups, in classes, and with trusted friends and educators. After some practice, students will be ready to take the lead on presenting their goals and plans to their family members, other team members, and in more formal meetings.

2. Commit to Student-Led Planning Meetings that Promote LEADERSHIP

Once students have created visual plan representations and practiced, they can **take the lead in sharing that plan, including short and long-term goals, at IEP meetings**. When students are well-prepared and clearly express what they want to accomplish, teams usually find working together toward those goals happens more easily and enlisting support and help of other team members with potential employer connections and tasks also unfolds more naturally because goals are clear and person-centered. Team members generally want to be supportive, and students can lead the way to explain how everyone on the team can be helpful in supporting their career objective.



3. Ensure that Evolving Goals Based on Experience is the EXPECTATION

This idea really involves knowing when to go back to the first one. When students begin to gain experience with different jobs in a variety of settings, there is a higher likelihood that both short and long-term goals will change. Sometimes goals need slight tweaks, and sometimes they need complete overhauls. **Truly supporting self-determination means allowing students to draw from their experiences and go back to square one when they figure out that they don't really want the kind of job they originally thought they did**. Maybe a student had a goal to become a pre-school teacher based on experience babysitting cousins, but figured out changing diapers was not something he wanted to do each day at a job. Or perhaps a student's employment goal was to become a chef, until she realized that cooking at home is much more pleasant than trying to get through the busy dinner rush at a restaurant. Everyone becomes self-determined by learning from successes and failures, and the education system best promotes actual self-determination by allowing dignity of risk, trial and error – and going back to the drawing board with students as many times as needed.

Additional Resources

The [Let's Get to Work Quick Guide](#) has many additional resources to help you support students' self-determination and goal setting. Resources you may find helpful include:

- [Self-Directed Employment Planning Tool](#)
- [Self-Directed Employment Planning Modules](#)
- [Transition Services Rating Scale](#)
- [Discovery Notes Form](#)