

Supported Decision Making: At-A-Glance for Educators

DISCLAIMER: This document is intended solely for informational purposes. Its use is not mandatory, and school districts are encouraged to seek legal counsel to ensure compliance with state and federal law.

This guide provides educators with the information and tools needed to implement Supported Decision-Making, a process that empowers disabled students and students experiencing disabilities to make their own choices with support from trusted individuals. By integrating Supported Decision-Making into your practice, you can help students build skills for a more independent future.

Educator's Legal Responsibilities

Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 343.181(2) requires school districts to “provide the child and the child’s parents with information and training resources regarding supported decision-making as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship.”

What is Supported Decision-Making?

Supported Decision-Making is a process where individuals with disabilities and disabled individuals make their own decisions with help from people they select. In an educational context, Supported Decision-Making:

- Aligns with IDEA requirements for student participation.
- Supports the development of self-determination skills, a key foundation for post-school success.
- Serves as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship.
- Applies to educational, vocational, and personal decisions.
- Can be implemented informally or through formal written agreements.

The Educator's Critical Role

As an educator, you are essential in preparing students for a successful transition to adulthood. Your role in Supported Decision-Making includes:

- Introducing Supported Decision-Making concepts to students and their families.
- Teaching and reinforcing decision-making skills throughout a student’s K-12 education.
- Supporting and documenting student participation in their own educational decisions, including IEP meetings.
- Preparing students for the transfer of rights that occurs at age 18.

Integrating Supported Decision-Making into Educational Practice

Elementary (K-5)	Middle School (6-8)	High School (9-12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed choice-making opportunities throughout the day. • Teach students to identify and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase student leadership in IEP meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly teach about transfer of rights and adult decision-making. • Facilitate student-led IEP meetings.

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<p>communicate their preferences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce problem-solving frameworks and decision-making steps. Involve students in parts of their IEP meetings. Have students practice expressing opinions and listening to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach students to articulate strengths, challenges, and needs. Introduce Supported Decision-Making concepts in age-appropriate language. Support students in identifying trusted supporters. Develop self-advocacy vocabulary and skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support creation of formal Supported Decision-Making agreements when appropriate. Connect Supported Decision-Making to transition assessments and planning. Document Supported Decision-Making discussions in transition IEPs.

Including Supported Decision-Making in the IEP

- Ensure the student's decision-making skills are documented in the present levels of functional performance, including their preferences, decision-making support needs, and specific Supported Decision-Making strategies that work for the student.
- Develop measurable annual goals related to self-advocacy, self-determination, and decision-making skills, when appropriate
- Document discussions about Supported Decision-Making in meeting notes

Addressing Common Challenges

Challenge	Educator Strategies
Family preference for guardianship	Provide balanced information on all options; invite adult service providers to explain less restrictive alternatives; and share success stories.
Student struggles with communication	Identify and implement effective communication methods and supports (e.g., assistive technology); recognize and respect all forms of expression.
Difficulty assessing decision-making capacity	Focus on specific, situational assessments rather than global capacity; document growth over time to show progress. If a student consistently struggles to make choices even with extensive support, it may be a sign to convene the IEP team to discuss more intensive strategies.
Balancing safety and autonomy	Use a supported risk assessment process; create safe opportunities for students to learn from natural consequences. If a student's choices pose a significant risk of harm that cannot be mitigated, consult with the support team and administration.

Supported Decision-Making Implementation Checklist for Educators

Introduce and discuss Supported Decision-Making concepts with students and families.

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- Assess** each student's current decision-making skills and needs.
- Incorporate** specific decision-making and self-advocacy goals into IEPs when appropriate.
- Create** consistent classroom opportunities to practice making decisions.
- Document** student preferences and the supports that work best for them.
- Discuss** the transfer of rights with students and families beginning at age 16, or earlier if appropriate.
- Connect** families with resources and training on Supported Decision-Making.
- Include** Supported Decision-Making strategies and student decision-making supports in the Summary of Performance.