

## **Grounding Assumptions**

In special education, we have long focused on student engagement, youth role and self-determination. While we have been consistent in highlighting the importance of this work in serving students with disabilities, we have often failed to recognize other initiatives with aligned purposes. As we work nationally and in states to promote the youth role in transition, it is critical to understand what other agencies and important groups are doing on this issue. To the greatest extent possible, those pursuing the goal of active youth engagement should be able to find each other and form alliances. Minimally, they must be knowledgeable about other initiatives and work to align, connect and not duplicate. In the development of this site, we will identify beliefs about youth role, identify key tenants, share a model for promotion and develop a listing of initiatives undertaken by various agencies and organizations.

As a Community of Practice, we believe:

- 1) Transition is a lifelong process. The transition process is different for each person (one model won't work for everyone).
- 2) Self determination is an important objective for everyone that requires specific skills:
  - knowing oneself,
  - what you are interested in,
  - what one is good at,
  - what one needs help with,
  - where to get support,
  - knowing what to ask for, and
  - knowing who to ask.
- 3) Self-determination is broader than just making choices
- 4) Self-determination begins at an early age with being taught to make informed age appropriate choices/decisions and continues throughout the lifespan
- 5) Communication in multiple forms and languages is essential to self-determination and requires:
  - finding communication that works for everyone;
  - learning the language and mode of communication ;
  - accessibility for communication;
  - understanding that nonverbal behavior carries a strong message (e.g. talk to the youth directly);
  - realizing not everyone has access to the internet, cell phones, or technology;
  - understanding that not everyone knows sign language and that hearing loss does not mean that the person can sign or read lips.
  - not assuming everyone uses the same mode of communication;

- determining any language issues and not assuming by someone's appearance that you know how to communicate in their language;
  - being aware that some culture assumptions can lead to a lot of misunderstandings;
- 6) Self-determination requires a paradigm shift in roles and responsibilities and how interactions take place (This takes work and requires strong support (rehearsal narrative for all participants).
  - 7) Youth engagement requires real, meaningful opportunities to participate. The provision of such opportunities and support may change the outcomes (Parents/educators may find this process difficult and thus they may not always accept the student's choice).
  - 8) Youth and young adults, including families, become the service coordinators across the lifespan
  - 9) The support of an individual's family or community may determine the success of a person's self-determination
  - 10) Adult allies support...but do not direct. They assist youth in understanding the context for their choices.