

# Evaluating Self-Determination Skills of Individuals with Intellectual Disability in the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) Programs

Lyndsey M. Nunes, Ph.D.

Presentation materials for Think College Spring 2017 Research Summit

Federal laws such as Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities and mandate appropriate educational opportunities and services. Despite numerous revisions to IDEA, students with disabilities continue to be underprepared or unprepared to go to college.

Compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities are less likely to pursue postsecondary education (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Students with intellectual disability between the ages of 18 and 22 typically remain in high school because they have not met graduation requirements. Unfortunately, many of these students stay in the same high school during their last 3–4 years of special education entitlement. This means that they repeat a similar curriculum, rather than receiving community-based instruction. They also have limited interaction with same-age peers if their transition programs remain in their high schools, which widens the age discrepancy between these students and peers without disabilities (Grigal, Hart, & Paiewonsky, 2010).

**This study provides evidence that the MAICEI programs include the components to promote self-determination skills of individuals with intellectual disability.**

Over 10 years ago, Massachusetts piloted the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI), a program to provide a fully inclusive dual-enrollment college experience to students with intellectual disability who are still receiving special education services. Now there are 15 MAICEI programs throughout the state, at both 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. Each program

**This study found that staff's knowledge of self-determination and perception of students' capabilities impacted the way in which staff promoted self-determination skills of their students.**

varies in its day-to-day planning, but all programs adhere to the mission of full inclusion of students with intellectual disability.

To date, there has been limited research on effective programs or practices for supporting young adults with intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in dual-enrollment post-secondary education (PSE) settings. However, emerging research has suggested that providing individuals with intellectual disability and/or ASD opportunities to participate in PSE programs will greatly influence overall quality of life and self-determination (Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010).

There were three broad goals that guided this study to evaluate the self-determination skills of individuals with intellectual disability attending MAICEI programs: (1) to examine the self-determination of students in the MAICEI programs, (2) to examine and evaluate the current programming and staff preparedness to teach and enhance self-determination skills, and (3) to determine recommendations to promote self-determination skills of the students in the MAICEI programs.

Five research questions (see Figure 1) were developed to meet the overarching goals of the evaluation. These questions were designed to provide evidence to understand the functional components of a PSE program that promotes self-determination for students with intellectual disability, and to differentiate programs that do or do not include these components.

---

## METHODS

To answer the five research questions, several methods were employed and different data sources were analyzed:

- Surveys given to 30 students and 30 educational coaches
- Surveys given to ICEI coordinators
- A coordinator focus group
- Educational coach interviews
- Student interviews
- Student and program observations
- ICEI 2016-2017 Grant Records reviews

All of the data collected were interpreted through qualitative and quantitative approaches consistent with the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) evaluation model.

## KEY FINDINGS

Results and discussion points for each of the five questions are shown in Figure 1. Broadly, this study found that the MAICEI programs have components that support the development of self-determination of students with intellectual disability. MAICEI programs need to support students in failures, and help them develop coping skills, resilience, and most importantly a realistic self-assessment of strengths and limitations. Further, there is much variation among the different programs and staff abilities, resulting in each program not having every necessary component to support the development of self-determination skills.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study provides evidence that the MAICEI programs include the components to promote self-determination skills of individuals with intellectual disability. However, refinement of these components across all MAICEI programs will be vital in the long-lasting effective promotion of self-determination skills for individuals with intellectual disability.

Data collected from this study show that the role staff plays in students' lives is complex, and requires more careful consideration when pairing coaches and students. This study found that staff's knowledge of self-determination and perception of students' capabilities impacted the way in which staff promoted self-determination skills of their students.

The MAICEI programs should continue to engage in evaluation to ensure that they improve within the necessary parameters, and that they always put the needs of students first and foremost. For students to demonstrate generalization of skills and learned experiences to other situations outside the college campus, generalization must be carefully considered throughout the program planning process.

However, for students to generalize their experiences to other settings, such as workplace or community settings, the MAICEI programs need to dedicate substantive time and resources to self-determination instruction, support, and development.

---

## Figure 1: Findings of the study

### *Do students with intellectual disability and/or ASD in the MAICEI programs think they are self-determined in their daily lives?*

#### **FINDING:**

78% of students in the MAICEI program with intellectual disability and ASD agreed that they display high levels of self-determination. 8% of students disagreed that they display high levels of self-determination.

#### **IMPLICATIONS:**

- **Perceptions of self-determination:** There are discrepancies between students' abilities and perceptions. For example, the students interviewed described themselves as problem solvers but their educators' reported having the students not identifying problems and if they did needing a lot of support to solve the problem.
- **Overreliance on support:** While students scored themselves high on the surveys during student interviews, all students referenced their reliance on staff. Researchers and student advocates must examine whether a student can be self-determined, and also highly reliant on a staff member."
- **Awareness of self-determination:** Students' perceptions that they are self-determined are consistent with the literature, but findings from students interviewed were not consistent with the literature (Wehman, 2006). Students' in the MAICEI programs were not more aware of the things they were unable to do.
- **Confidence vs. competence:** Students responded confidently in their perceptions of their abilities in both the survey and the interviews, while 55% of coaches and coordinators didn't agree with students' perceptions of abilities.

### *Do the educators of students with intellectual disability and ASD in PSE feel students' perceptions about their self-determination skills are accurate?*

#### **FINDING:**

Educators gave inconsistent reports about their perceptions of student's abilities.

#### **IMPLICATIONS:**

Educators' definitions of self-determination changed based on individual students and what educators perceived their self-determination should look like.

- **Educators lacked student outcome expectancy:** that is, there was a gap between what educators' perceived students to be able to do, and how that interacted with educators' teaching. For example, many of the educators interviewed discussed how due to their students' diagnoses they wouldn't know how to demonstrate certain self-determination skills, such as problem solving.
- **Educators lowered the criteria of self-determination for higher-need students.** In other words, if a student had significant disabilities, the educator would not expect that student to be self-determined.

### *How do educators define self-determination?*

#### **FINDING:**

Educators could not precisely define self-determination and its associated terms, and definitions changed based on the students they referred to.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Findings aligned with Lane et al. (2012) that paraprofessionals' perceptions and knowledge of self-determination could influence whether they provide opportunities for students to learn and practice skills throughout the day.

Educators showed inability to define or demonstrate what self-determined behaviors are. The mean score of correct definitions was 3.22 for twenty-eight coaches, equivalent to having broad prevalence to self-determination but not accurate.

***Do educators involved in PSE programs feel adequately prepared to teach self-determination?*****FINDING:**

Educators involved in the MAICEI programs feel adequately prepared to teach self-determination skills.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Based on Wehmeyer (2000) the fact that the MAICEI educators felt adequately prepared to teach self-determination skills should result in the educators perceiving the importance of self-determination

Educators showed inaccurate knowledge and perceptions of self-determination. This resulted in a confidence vs. competence relationship, similar to student. For example, educators defined self-determination words with a mean of 3.22 but felt prepared to teach self-determination skills based on a mean score of 4.08 equivalent to agree. This was problematic since the educators weren't actually knowledgeable of what self-determination was but felt prepared to teach it.

***Does the MAICEI program model have components that support the development of self-determination among students?*****FINDING:**

Expansive answer: Yes! Smaller answer is that there is much variation among the different programs and staff abilities, resulting in program effectiveness variability.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Explore the interaction and impact of staff and student perceptions. For example, developing a scale to measure competency of skills and then having students rate their confidence on completing those skills could initially provide a basis for understanding the student perceptions.

**Universal Design for Learning:** Teach educators' to use the 3 pillars to identify, access, teach, and engage students in development of self-determination skills.

The MAICEI programs met most of Morningstar et al. (2010) quality program indicators.

## READ THE FULL STUDY:

Nunes, L. (2017). *Promoting self-determination skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities participating in the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative programs throughout Massachusetts* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

## REFERENCES

- Getzel, E. E., & Thoma, C. A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career development for exceptional individuals, 31*(2), 77-84.
- Grigal, M. & Hart, D. (2010). *Think College! Postsecondary education options for students with intellectual and disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Paiewonsky, M. (2010). Postsecondary education: The next frontier for individuals with intellectual disabilities. *Think college: Postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities, 1-28*.
- Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Weir, C. (2012). A survey of postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the United States. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9*(4), 223-233.
- Hart, D., Grigal, M., & Weir, C. (2010). Expanding the paradigm: Postsecondary education options for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*.
- Lane, K. L., Carter, E. W., & Sisco, L. (2012). Paraprofessional involvement in self determination instruction for students with high-incidence disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 78*(2), 237-251.
- Morningstar, M. E., Frey, B. B., Noonan, P. M., Ng, J., Clavenna-Deane, B., Graves, P., & Williams-Diehm, K. (2010). A preliminary investigation of the relationship of transition preparation and self-determination for students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*.
- Wehman, P. (2006). *Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (2000). A national survey of teachers' promotion of self-determination and student-directed learning. *Journal of Special Education, 34*(2), 58-68.