

Using the Decision-Making Routine for IEP and Post-Secondary Goal Development

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How can we help students with disabilities take ownership of their Individualized Education Program (IEP)? Research on transition planning over the last 20 years suggests that active student involvement in transition planning is essential to improve post-secondary outcomes (Martin & Zhang, 2020). One effective strategy to promote more active student involvement is the [Decision-Making Routine](#). This research-driven device helps students narrow down their post-secondary goals and identify the services and support they need to reach them.

The Decision-Making Routine involves higher order thinking and reasoning when there are multiple options or ways to respond to a particular issue (Bulgren, 2018). This approach includes critical thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and judgment. The routine's linking steps spell out the word **DECISION** (see Table 1), providing an explicit structure that guides teachers and students during the interactive creation of the Decision-Making Routine. The teacher creates a draft routine in advance as a model, and then the device is co-constructed, allowing students to demonstrate their higher order thinking and reasoning skills as they participate in the final creation process. Following the Cue, Do, Review Sequence, the teacher cues the routine, follows the linking steps, and reviews the reasons for the final decision, frequently referring back to the content addressed throughout the course/year.

Table 1. Decision-making DECISION Linking Steps

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- D**ecide the issue
 - E**nter options
 - C**reate a list of important information
 - I**dentify reasons to support each option
 - S**et rank for each reason
 - I**dentify compromises or alternatives
 - O**ffer a decision
 - N**ame reasons for the decision

Source: Bulgren, J.A. (2018). *Teaching decision-making*. University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

When using the Decision-Making Routine for post-secondary goal development, students first **D**ecide on the post-secondary goal category and ask themselves, "What are my goals and dreams for the

future?" Then, the student participates in transition assessments to gather data on employment/career, education/training, and independent living/community participation post-secondary goals. In collaboration with the teacher, the student Enters the options identified through the transition assessment data.

After entering options, the student Creates a list of important information connected to the listed options. These items are typically pieces of information that a student needs to keep in mind, regardless of the option they choose. Then, the student goes through each option individually to Identify reasons to support each option.

The fourth step involves ranking the reasons listed in the options. When a student Sets the rank for each reason, it helps prioritize which option should become a post-secondary goal. A numbered system or pluses and minuses can be used to identify the most valued reasons.

During the first four linking steps, students may come across related topics or alternatives while researching their options. They may also realize that their options might be overly ambitious or will take longer to achieve. In this case, the Identify compromises and alternatives section of the device is used to list related topics or alternatives and to discuss any compromises that might be necessary.

The last two steps involve writing the post-secondary goals and explaining the reasoning for selecting certain goals. In the Offer a decision step, the student takes the selected option and writes a goal using one of the following sentence stems:

- After high school completion, I will...
- After graduation, I will...
- Following exit from age 18-21 transition services, I will...
- Within one year of completing high school, I will...
- After high school graduation and graduation from ____, I will....

Finally, the student Names reasons for choosing the goal and creates a series of "I" statements explaining why the post-secondary goal chosen fits with their goals and dreams for the future. The "I" statements also help explain the transition services needed in the next year to support the knowledge and skills necessary to reach their post-secondary goal. The student is answering the question, "What do I need to learn in a year to help me achieve my goal after graduation from high school?" Remember, transition services do not always need to be outside services or even services provided directly by school personnel. Students and their families can also provide transition services to support post-secondary goals.

Figure 1 provides a sample Decision-Making Routine examining an employment goal. Through transition assessment data, the student indicated that teaching was a future employment goal. Because the student is nearing graduation, a narrowing of the postsecondary goal was needed as choices were being made regarding post-secondary education. The student examined three options and also considered the possibility of working in a related education career.

Figure 1. Decision Making Routine for Post-secondary Goals

1. Decide the Post-secondary Goal Category <i>What are your goals and dreams for your future? Employment - Teaching</i>					
3. Create important information ✓ License - grades 6-8, grades 6-12, and add on possible Special Ed ✓ Some divisions offering sign-on bonus ✓ Special Ed jobs more available ✓ Might need to take more classes	2. Enter Option A Middle School Social Studies		2. Enter Option B High School Social Studies		2. Enter Option C Special Education
	4. Identify reasons for option A ✓ I love this age group ✓ I like U.S. History (6th and 7th grade) and Civics (8th grade) ✓ I like how middle schools are set up with the teachers working together	5. Set Rank + +	4. Identify reasons for option B ✓ More subject options to teach ✓ I like U.S. History (taught in 11th grade) and U.S. Government (12th grade) ✓ I like all of the high school extra curriculars (sports and clubs)	5. Set Rank +	4. Identify reasons for option C ✓ I have autism so I think I could relate and be a role model ✓ I like other subjects like math ✓ I want to help students with IEPs become self-determined
6. Identify compromises/alternatives <i>I could get a graduate degree in education before I start teaching. I could take special education classes so that I can also teach special education. I could work for an organization that focuses on social studies or other topics.</i>					
7. Offer a decision (a measurable post-secondary goal) <i>After high school graduation and completion of a 4-year degree in education, I will become a middle school social studies teacher.</i>					
8. Name reasons for the decision (I chose this goal...I can support this goal...) <i>I chose this goal because I think I would rather teach younger students (11-13 years old)</i> <i>I can support this goal by continuing to get good grades in my high school classes and by talking with social studies teachers to learn about their education and responsibilities.</i>					

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 Decision Making Routine Guidebook: <https://deptsec.ku.edu/~kucrl/teaching-decision-making.html>

The Decision-Making Routine is an effective tool for helping students write their own post-secondary goals and sections of the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. This is an opportunity for students to exercise self-determination in the IEP process. By better understanding their hopes and dreams for the future and what it takes to reach those goals, students can be empowered to be independent and live dignified lives.

References

- Bulgren, J. A. (2018). *The Decision-Making routine*. University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.
- Martin, J., & Zhang, D. (2020). Student involvement in the transition process. In *Handbook of adolescent transition education for youth with disabilities* (pp. 120-137). Routledge.