



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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Self-Determination and Choice Making

By Wendy Overturf

Self-determination for children with intellectual disabilities can mean helping them learn to make their own choices, set goals, and take control of their lives in ways that match their abilities and interests.

What Is Self-Determination?

Self-determination refers to a person's ability to make choices, set goals, and take control of their own life. For children with intellectual disabilities, self-determination can mean:

- Understanding their strengths, needs, and preferences.
- Making decisions about their daily activities and future.
- Learning to advocate for themselves.
- Participating meaningfully in school, home, and community life.

Research (Wolf, Jacob and Joannou, Kristin (2013) "Choice Making and Individuals with Significant Disabilities," LC Journal of Special Education: Vol. 9, Article 4.) shows that children and youth with higher self-determination:

- Have better post-school outcomes (employment, community participation, and independence).
- Experience higher self-esteem and motivation.
- Are more engaged in learning and social activities.

Strategies to Support Choice-Making

General tips for parents:

- Use clear, positive language when presenting options.
- Respect your child's decisions whenever possible. Do not offer a choice that you cannot support.
- Model making decisions out loud ("I'm choosing this because...").
- Praise the effort of making a choice, not just the outcome.
- Encourage reflection—ask how a choice made them feel.

Examples of choice-making activities that can easily fit into daily home routines.

Morning Routine Choices:

- Which shirt to wear (red or blue).
- What to eat for breakfast (oatmeal or eggs).
- Which music to listen to while getting ready.

Snack Choices

Invite your child to help plan and prepare a snack. Offer two to three choices at each step.

Offer choices like:

- Crackers or apples.

- Letting them decide if they want to eat at the table or on the porch.

Chore Choices

Create a simple list of household tasks your child can help with. Let them pick one or two each day. Offer choices like:

- Feeding their pet.
- Dusting the furniture.
- Watering the plants.

Playtime Choices

Encourage independence in play by letting your child plan their playtime.

Offer choices like:

- Playing with blocks or drawing.
- Playing inside or outside.
- Playing alone or with someone.

The above examples can be modified for children who are nonverbal. Meaningful options can be provided through visual supports, gestures, or assistive communication tools, and by observing and honoring how they express preferences.

When children and youth with intellectual disabilities are encouraged to make choices, set goals, and speak up for themselves, they gain confidence and a stronger sense of ownership over their futures. It is an investment in a student's lifelong independence and success. Every opportunity they have to practice these skills helps prepare them for adulthood.

Additional Resources

[Mapping Choices-Example](#)

[Early Choices Matter: Children Building Choice-Making Skills](#)

[Choice-Making and Children: Hints to Build this Skill](#)

[Early Choices Matter: What is Choice-Making? \(YouTube video\)](#)

HOME LEARNING



[Talking About Books with Your Children - 10 Key Questions](#)

When children are asked open-ended questions about reading, they are given the opportunity to practice sharing their ideas. By sharing these ideas, they are developing their reading strengths in a way that boosts their confidence as readers. Asking children thought-provoking questions helps them improve their reading skills through deeper conversation about what they read.

Write an Acrostic Poem on Your Valentines

Acrostic poems are one of the simplest forms of poetry, most made by using the initial letters of a word as prompts for words or short sentences that describe the word being used. Encourage your child to create an acrostic poem with a friend's name. Here is an example for the name Blake.

Brave

Loyal

Athletic

Kind

Enthusiastic

Conversation Hearts Math

Using conversation hearts (those little candy hearts with words on them) is a fun way to practice math skills.

Counting & Sorting

- **Color Sorting:** Have students sort hearts by color and count how many of each.
- **Graphing:** Make a bar graph or pictograph of the results.
- **Comparisons:** Ask questions like "Which color has the most?" or "How many more pink than yellow?"

Addition & Subtraction

- “You have 3 purple hearts and 5 green hearts. How many in all?”
- “Sally had 12 candy hearts. She gave 4 to her teacher. How many hearts does she still have?”

Multiplication & Division

- Put hearts into equal groups (like 4 hearts in each cup) to practice multiplication.
- “Emma has 24 hearts. She wants to give 6 friends the same number. How many hearts does each friend get?”

Fractions

- “What fraction of your hearts are pink?”
- “If you eat half your hearts, how many are left?”

A Bit More Challenging

- If red = 2 points and blue = 3 points, how much are 4 red + 2 blue worth?



Groundhog Day - February 2, 2026

Groundhog Day occurs on February 2nd each year in the United States. It is a part of popular culture among many Americans. The tradition of Groundhog Day is based on the idea that a groundhog can predict the weather by coming out from its burrow on February 2nd and predicting the length of the remaining winter by whether it sees its shadow.

If the groundhog sees its shadow (on a sunny day), winter will continue for six more weeks. If it does not see its shadow (on a cloudy day), spring will arrive early. Below are some activities you can do with your child.

- [Groundhog Day word search](#)
- Read Alouds
- [Groundhog Gets it Wrong](#)
- [Punxsutawney Phyllis](#)
- [Groundhog's Day Off](#)
- [Go to Sleep Groundhog](#)



Community Service as a Family

Engaging in community service together not only strengthens bonds but also teaches valuable lessons about compassion and responsibility.

When you choose to volunteer at a local food bank or organize a neighborhood clean-up this Valentine's

Day, you're showing your kids the importance of giving back in a tangible way. It's about more than just sharing love within your family; it's about spreading that love throughout your community.

Imagine the smiles you'll bring to faces when you and your kids hand out handmade Valentine's cards at a senior center. Or how fulfilled you'll feel helping out at an animal shelter, letting your children see the direct impact of their kindness on furry friends in need. These experiences can profoundly shape how your children view the world and their role in it.

WI FACETS EVENTS

[Changing the Scripts: Supporting Healthy Sexuality in People with Disabilities \(not recorded\)](#)

Date: February 2, 2026

Presenter: Terri Couwenhoven, MS, is a Certified Sexuality Educator

[Social Security Disability Benefits: Everything You Need to Know](#)

Spanish Translation Available

Date: February 4, 2026

Presenter: Elida Elizondo, Social Security Administration

[Encontrando mi lugar entre los diferentes grupos de toma de decisiones \(Parte 2\)](#)

Date: February 5, 2026

Presenter: Alejandra Loeza, WI FACETS

[IEP Checklist](#)

Date: February 10, 2026

Presenters: Ann Zielke and Lisa Stewart, WI FACETS

[Bridging the Transition Abyss: Person-Centered Strategies for Holistic Planning](#)

Date: February 11, 2026

Presenter: Samantha Bear, Executive Director, Blossom IDD

[¿Cuándo se puede cambiar el IEP? Y ¿Qué es ESY? IEP 9](#)

Date: February 12, 2026

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

[Building Resilience in Families of Children with Disabilities](#)

Date: February 18, 2026

Presenter: Sharon M. Dossett, Sharon M Dossett Consulting LLC

[¿Cómo se toman las decisiones y se organiza el trabajo dentro del grupo? \(Parte 3\)](#)

Date: February 19, 2026

Presenter: Alejandra Loeza, WI FACETS

[The New WiTransition App for Transition Planning](#)

Date: February 25, 2026

Presenter: Pam Jenson, Transition Improvement Grant

[Trabajando en equipo: Tus derechos como padre en el IEP](#)

Date: February 26, 2026

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

UPCOMING STATE EVENTS

[Leadership in Action: Finding the Leader in You!](#)

Wednesdays, February 11 and 18, 2026 6-8pm on Zoom

WI FACETS has partnered with WSPEI to bring you this FREE 2-part virtual leadership workshop. This series focuses on empowering parents and family members to become **decision-makers and advocates** who **shape school policies** and build strong family-school partnership. Registration is required, see flyer for details: <https://wspei.org/documents/leadership-in-action-feb-2026.pdf>

[Training for Home Language Interpreters: Supporting Families through the Special Education Process](#)

For those seeking training for home language interpreters for families at IEP meetings, DPI has partnered with WI FACETS, LEAs, and other organizations to develop a one-day training for home language interpreters who interpret for families at IEP meetings. Language interpretation training is a requirement to meet the provisions outlined in DPI's [Providing Language Assistance to Parents guidance document](#). The training provides increased awareness of state and federal regulations related to the educational rights of students who receive special education through an IEP and who may also be English Learners. The training also provides increased knowledge and resources related to legal responsibilities and ethical considerations for translation and interpretation of special education terms and concepts.

Each training date covers the same content areas detailed in the description above. It is not necessary to register for more than one date. For virtual trainings, due to the high-level of interaction among participants, registration is limited to the first 30 registrants. There is no fee for virtual trainings, but you must register.

Virtual trainings:

February 6, 2026 (8am-2pm) – [Registration Information](#)

February 20, 2026 (8am-2pm) – [Registration Information](#)

In-person trainings:

March 12, 2026 – [CESA 6](#) – [Registration Information](#) – Use CODE “**SpecialEvent**” at checkout

March 13, 2026 – [CESA 1](#) - [Registration Information](#)

[24th Annual WI Transition Conference](#)

Dates: February 12-13, 2026

Location: Kalahari Resort, WI Dells, WI

The conference will have two knowledgeable and humorous keynote speaker presentations. Spend all Thursday morning with the extremely informative and funny, Pam Schuller and all Friday morning with

the hilarious "Shut Up Sisters", Patricia Terrasi and Gina Gallagher. These keynote speakers bring a wealth of knowledge, from different perspectives, regarding the challenges faced in the world of special education. In addition, there are over 20 breakout sessions to choose from, relevant exhibitors, and networking time.

2026 Promoting Early Childhood Conference (PEC)-Save the Dates

Dates: March 4-6, 2026

PEC is an early childhood collaborative event sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in partnership with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP). Location and details for attending and/or presenting at this early childhood collaborative event are not yet determined.

[2026 Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin and the Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin Annual Conference](#)

Dates: April 23-25, 2026

Location: Kalahari Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

The purpose of the annual conference is to provide a wide range of information to those within the autism community. The goal is to provide relevant information for attendees at all levels, including those who are new to autism and those who have years of experience.

[Circles of Life Conference-Save the Dates](#)

Dates: May 14-15, 2026

Location: Holiday Inn Stevens Point Convention Center, Stevens Point, WI

Circles of Life is Wisconsin's annual conference for families who have children with disabilities and the professionals who support them.

[2026 WI FACETS Endless Possibilities Conference](#) - Save the Date

Date: August 7, 2026

Topics: Advocacy in Education and Beyond

Location: Waukesha County Technical College ([AJN Center](#)), Pewaukee, WI

The annual Endless Possibilities conference invites families and professionals who support students with disabilities to learn and grow together. We encourage open dialogue between families and professionals to discuss positive solutions for all our students with special needs in Wisconsin. Please join us!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

[Related Services in the IEP](#)

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has developed a new resource. This resource outlines what related services are, tips for IEP teams on how to make related services decisions. It also gives examples of who can provide these services and where related services can be provided. Also included is an appendix that gives definitions of common related services, how each service supports students with disabilities, and license requirements. Additional resources for each related service are cited. The resource should be used to compliment [Bulletin 10.07: Describing Special Education, Related Services, Supplementary Aids and Services, and Program Modifications and Supports](#) that provides additional information on documenting special education services in the IEP.

Public School Open Enrollment

The open enrollment application period for the 2026-27 school year is February 2 - April 30, 2026.

[Open Enrollment regular application period Brochure](#)

[Alternative Open Enrollment Application for the 2025-26 school year](#)

(You must download or save the form prior to completing it electronically. Once the form has been completed, submit it to the school district to which you are applying.)

[Alternative Procedures for Applying for Open Enrollment Brochure, 2025-26](#)

ONLINE RESOURCES



[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

This website has fact sheets on intellectual disabilities and includes links to resources related to infants, toddlers, and school-age children. The website also has links to other organizations that support individuals with intellectual disabilities.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\)](#)

The Wisconsin DPI website has information related to eligibility criteria, programming and services, and assessment for students with intellectual disabilities. The disability category criteria eligibility forms assist IEP teams with determining if a child has a disability. However, using these forms alone is not sufficient for completing an evaluation and developing a student's IEP. To ensure compliance with implementing a full, individual, and comprehensive evaluation, go to the Wisconsin DPI [Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation web page](#). On the page you will also find information on how to use the [Six Areas of Academic and Functional Skill](#) in the IEP development process.

[College Career and Community Readiness for students with IEPs](#)

This website has resources to support students at all ages and developmental levels to be independent and college, career, and community ready.

[Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities \(BPDD\)](#)

The mission of the BPDD is to unite all of Wisconsin in supporting its residents with developmental disabilities to lead their most independent lives. They have numerous [toolkits](#) and [videos](#) that may be helpful for individuals with disabilities and their families to help prepare for adult life.

[American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(AAIDD\)](#)

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) mission is to promote progressive policies, sound research, effective practices, and universal human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

[Exceptional Parent](#)

Exceptional Parent provides practical advice, emotional support, and the most up-to-date educational information for families of children and adults with disabilities. It also provides information on special healthcare needs to physicians, allied health care professionals, and educational professionals who are involved with families who have children with disabilities.

[National Down Syndrome Society \(NDSS\)](#)

The mission of the NDSS is to be the national advocate for the value, acceptance, and inclusion of people with Down syndrome. The vision of NDSS is a world in which all people with Down syndrome have the opportunity to enhance their quality of life, realize their life aspirations, and become valued members of welcoming communities. Their website gives facts about Down syndrome, has a section that dispels common misperceptions, and has numerous links related to advocacy.

[The Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin \(DSAW\)](#)

The DSAW's mission is to provide support to Wisconsin families and individuals with Down syndrome and related disabilities through awareness, education, information, programs, services, and the exchange of ideas and experiences.

[The Arc](#)

The mission of the Arc is to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively support their full inclusion and participation in the community. Local chapters provide individual advocacy, programs, services, and supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Information on local, state, and national programs is available on the website. Click [here](#) for local chapters in Wisconsin.

[Special Olympics Wisconsin](#)

Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI) provides year-round sports opportunities for thousands of athletes across the state, regardless of age or skill level. Competing in 18 Olympic-style sports, these athletes strive to beat personal records and defy expectations. From swimming to snowboarding, they showcase the talents and triumphs of people with intellectual disabilities at local, national, and even global events like the World Games.

[I'm Determined](#)

This website has resources for students related to self-determination and self-directed IEPs.

[Transition Programming Beyond 18](#)

The Beyond Age 18 website is designed to help teams create meaningful, individualized special education services for students with IEPs who stay in high school after their peers graduate.

[Opening Doors to Transition Series](#)

The Opening Doors series provides a process of planning for life after high school that includes making decisions, planning, and taking actions. Specifically, it is a tool for students with IEPs to use as they begin to plan for a successful future. There are four Opening Door guides to assist with transition planning.

[Supported Decision-Making: Because Choices Matters](#)

This resource provides information about Supported Decision-Making. Supported Decision-Making is a process of supporting and accommodating an adult with a functional impairment to enable the adult to make life decisions without impeding the self-determination of the adult.

[Wisconsin Transition App](#)

The Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP) is the part of the IEP that focuses on transition. Using this app will provide valuable information to share and talk about with the student's IEP Team, such as education or training, employment, and independent living goals for after high school. It will also provide information on the student's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths.

[Resources for Health and Safety for Students with Disabilities](#)

These resources support educators, families, and others in helping students with disabilities build self-determination, understand personal safety and well-being, and learn how to report crimes such as physical or sexual abuse.

[Think College Search](#)

The only directory of its kind, Think College Search features 353 colleges and universities that offer postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Users of this searchable online database can filter by state, length of program, type of school, options for living on campus, and more.

RESEARCH

Planning Supports for Students with Intellectual Disability in General Education Classrooms

Thompson, J. R., Walker, V. L., Snodgrass, M. R., Nelson, J. A., Carpenter, M. E., Hagiwara, M., & Shogren, K. A. (2020). Planning supports for students with intellectual disability in general education classrooms. *Inclusion*, 8(1), 27-42.

[Read Full Article](#)

For many students with an intellectual disability (ID), education in the least restrictive environment has been determined to be a separate special education classroom. One means to promote greater participation in general education classrooms is for educators to identify and arrange individualized supports that these students need to be successful. The researchers in this study conducted focus group interviews with educators to explore how they currently plan supports for students with intellectual disabilities. From these discussions, recommendations for improving educators' skills in planning and tracking individualized supports for students with ID were identified.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Upcoming Newsletter Topics

March: Early Childhood

April: Autism Spectrum Disorders

May: Mental Health

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources you may use the [Word document](#). Send submissions to [Wendy Overturf](#). If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

This monthly update is provided by Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, please email [WI FACETS](#).

The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter can be found online: www.servingongroups.org/newsletter



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