



Supported Decision Making in DCPS

Before the Age of Majority

What is Supported Decision Making?

Supported decision-making (SDM) is the process of empowering individuals with disabilities to make decisions on their own as an alternative to guardianship when they reach the age of majority. Students who have little understanding of their educational decisions may need support from others to make informed, decisions about their future. A supported decision-making arrangement would be helpful for capable individuals who face complex decisions, people whose first language is not English and people with mild disabilities.

What can I do as an educator to support this process?

As educational professionals, it is our responsibility to prepare students to make the best decisions possible, and to help students understand that they have a stake in their educational careers. The following activities can be done to better prepare a student to make decisions about their future:

- Ensure students are enrolled in the Self-Advocacy Course.
- Engage students in problem solving activities that encourage them to think critically about their decisions.
- Explain the Transfer of Rights and the Individual Education Program (IEP) process to the student.
- Encourage students to take on key roles in their IEP meeting to demonstrate an active awareness of their educational strengths and needs.
- Counsel students on ways to make the best decisions and show them the costs and benefits to each of the options before them.

What is in place to train students to be aware of their needs?

The District of Columbia Public Schools has developed a Self-Advocacy Course designed to teach students how to be aware of their needs and their disability as they transition to post-secondary opportunities. Students will participate in a variety of activities aimed at developing their decision-making skills and preparing them to take an active role in their future.

When should I start to discuss these issues with my students?

Students should be involved in a supported decision making process as an alternative to guardianship. However, students should be involved no later than 9th grade. Throughout their educational careers, students should be actively involved in the decision making process. If we begin to involve students at a young age, they are more aware of their support network and their ability to make decisions on their own or request support from someone they trust.

How should parents be involved?

Parents are active participants of their student's support network at any age. Educators should encourage students to discuss their decisions with their parents, as they feel comfortable. As taught in the self-advocacy course, students must make the decision that they feel best meets their needs in the educational setting, but they are able to seek their parent's support and guidance in the SDM process.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact Christopher Nace at Christopher.Nace@dc.gov.



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What is the role of the Adult Student in the Supported Decision Making (SDM) process?

Students who are the age of majority have the ability to determine the people who make up their educational support network. As an element of post-secondary transition, students are taught to make educational decisions on their own. However, students who are more cognitively impaired have the ability to appoint individuals whom they trust to become members of their Supported Decision Making network. The student's role is to identify these individuals and seek their guidance regarding educational matters, as needed.

Is the Supported Decision Making process the same as Guardianship?

No, the supported decision making process is an alternative to guardianship. Students seek guidance from adults they trust to guide them through key decisions in their lives. Guardians are appointed by the court to make decisions on behalf of the student. If a student enters into a Supported Decision Making agreement but is found incapable of making decisions, a guardian will be appointed and the Supported Decision Making agreement will be nullified.

Who can be a member of the Supported Decision Making network?

Members of the Supported Decision Making network must be over the age of 18. Students can choose people to support them in the educational decision making process. Students choose these people based on their trust in that individual. Students can rely on their members to guide them in making the best educational decisions possible.

What does a member of a Supported Decision Making network do?

Adult network members are able to assist students in making educational decisions. Network members must have a copy of the signed agreement before accessing the student's educational records.

What documents are needed to begin a Supported Decision Making process?

The District of Columbia Public Schools created a form necessary for the Supported Decision Making process. Students choose their adult network members based on trust and comfort. The student and network member(s) complete and sign the agreement. It is important to note that students must determine the members of their network. Adults may not act on the student's behalf without the student's written consent.

How do I become involved in the Supported Decision Making process?

There is no formal court process to become a member of the supported decision making network. Between the adult student and the supportive network member, an agreement is signed granting access to educational documents. The network member uses the documents to assist the student in making the best educational decisions possible. Both parties should retain a copy of the agreement, and a copy should be uploaded to the student file in SEDS using a miscellaneous cover sheet titled "Supported Decision Making Agreement". The agreement can be terminated at any time from either party based on a determined need.

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