

Supported Decision-Making and Youth in Transition

Webinar Transcript

April 16, 2015

1:00-2:30pm (EST)

MICHAEL MORRIS: Okay. Welcome, everyone, to the National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making three-part webinar series. This webinar today is focused on the next generation of freedom and self-determination, moving supported decision-making from theory to practice.

Our focus today is on youth in transition, the first in a three-part series. My name is Michael Morris. I'm the Executive Director of the Burton Blatt Institute and also the National Disability Institute, and I will be your moderator on today's webinar. Before we get started, I want to share some information and answer some of the frequently asked questions. Today's webinar is being conducted using Blackboard Collaborate. This system makes it possible for us to conduct workshops over the internet, from just about any computer with an internet connection and web browser. Unfortunately, there may be computer issues inherent in some systems that are beyond our control, which is why it is important for you to check your systems prior to this session. Our IT staff is available upon request to work with you in advance of the session. Once the webinar begins, we will be unable to troubleshoot technical issues.

We want you to be aware that this session is being captioned. To turn on captioning, please select the CC icon in the upper toolbar to open a separate window with captioning. Today's session is also being recorded and archived for future use. A link to the recording and presentation will be posted on the National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making website at <http://supporteddecisionmaking.org/>.

Please share this freely with your colleagues who may have missed this opportunity to participate in today's session. You should also be aware that all participants' microphones and phone lines are muted. If you have a question, please type it into the chat area. At this time we are advising you to close all other applications you may be running on your computer, because it may interfere with your successful experience today. You might also turn off any automatic systems, check your computer does automatically to eliminate further interference with this session. If your computer is networked, it may shut down if it stays idle for too long. So, if that is the case, periodically tap the space bar just to let the webinar system know that you are still there.

Our presenters today, I'm pleased to share with you, is Dr. Pamela Downing-Hosten, the director of the Office of Specialized Instruction in the District of Columbia Public Schools, and our second presenter is Jonathan Martinis, the legal director at Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities.

Pamela has over 35 years in the field of both general and special education, serving as a teacher, a coordinator, director of special education, and assistant superintendent of student services. She has taught Masters and doctoral level students and served as an expert witness for both general and special education matters. Currently, Pamela is

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leading major reform in the District of Columbia Public Schools with a targeted focus on secondary transition, the transfer of educational rights and supported decision-making.

She has also designed secondary transition curricula that are aligned with the Common Core state standards. Her work on modifying the standards for students to earn a certificate of Individualized Education Program completion has increased the number of students earning a standard high school diploma.

Our second presenter, Jonathan Martinis will be sharing with you a 20-years plus experience representing people with disabilities in cases under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Social Security Act, and other civil rights laws. In 2013, he represented Jenny Hatch in the Justice for Jenny case, which held that Ms. Hatch had the right to use supported decision-making instead of being subjected to a permanent plenary guardianship. He has also represented the plaintiffs in Brinn v. Tidewater Regional Transportation District, the first case to hold that people with disabilities have a right to paratransit transportation on a next-day basis. He is an active speaker across the country about supported decision-making and he is representing other individuals in their efforts to be independent and be able to make their own decisions.

To start our session today, Moving Supported Decision-Making From Theory to Practice, Youth in Transition, let me turn first to Jonathan. Jonathan, are you there? Please bear with us for a moment, we are having a bit of technical difficulties. We are going to get Jonathan Martinis with us momentarily.

While we wait for him, I will express my appreciation to all of you. We had 250 individuals to sign up to participate with us today, to listen in and also have an opportunity to ask questions. And as I looked at the registrations, they were from individuals all across the country. Both people with disabilities, family members, people connected in different ways with the school system as well, lawyers, and others. Just hang in there and any moment, we'll work through. There we go. We hear you now, Jonathan.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Okay, great. I'm in call-in. If I lose, please mention that in the chat box. I apologize for the technical difficulty problems.

Hello, my name is Jonathan Martinis. I'm so sorry for the delay so I will skip the preamble. Today, I'm going to talk to you about supported decision-making and how people can access that through the special education system. As we begin, we're going to discuss this in the light of three articles of faith, things that we have been believed and proven over decades. The first of which is this: That students who have more self-determination are more successful. Indeed, people who have more self-determination are more successful. This has been proven over decades of research. What is self-

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determination? A simple concept. Control over your life. The ability and the right to make decisions and choices that make you a causal agent in your life. Someone who acts, rather than gets acted upon. People with disabilities who exercise greater self-determination have been found to be more independent, more highly employed, more integrated into their communities, and better able to recognize abusive situations, and therefore better able to avoid abuse.

Second article of faith: Guardianship by definition decreases self-determination. Again, a simple concept. Guardianship has been around for 2000 years. Judges take away a person's rights and give them to someone else. And the studies have shown that the vast majority of guardianships are what are called plenary or full, where every single right is given to someone else. You lose your self-determination. And the research has shown that people with less self-determination have less good life outcomes. They are less healthy. They are less well employed. They have worse physical and mental health.

Third article of faith: supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship increases supported decision-making because it increases people's right and ability to make their own choices. As we'll hear later, supported decision-making is a process where people with disabilities use families, friends and professionals to help them understand the choices they have to make so they can make their own choices without the need for a guardian. I often call this decision-making because every single person on this webinar has engaged in supported decision-making, probably today. If you've ever asked a doctor, a lawyer, a mechanic, a friend, to explain something in English or help you understand something so you can make the best choice, you've engaged in supported decision-making. The difference is, is that when people without disabilities engage in supported decision-making, when they admit they don't know everything and need some help, they're viewed as wise, they're judicious, they're getting the information they need to make the best decisions.

When people with disabilities ask for help doing something, what happens too often is that society assumes they cannot do anything. And then through guardianship, they lose their right to do everything. Those are the three articles of faith for this presentation. And by the way, I know there is a fourth article of faith, that it is incredibly tacky to quote yourself in a presentation you are giving. I recognize several names in the room today. Anyone who knows me or has heard me speak knows that lack of class has never been an impediment to me teaching a lesson. So you're going to hear my name again.

What are we talking about when we're getting from the special education system to supported decision-making? Well, what do we know about special education? The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has been around for 40 years, forever has said people have a right to a free and appropriate public education. The Supreme Court,

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in the Rowley decision, has defined that as receiving services that are calculated to give the child educational benefits. What are educational benefits? The IDEA helps us there, too. They give us a definition in the purpose of the act, take a look at the bold words on the screen. Those are services to prepare students for further education, employment, and independent living. So written right into the law is the obligation for schools to prepare children for what happens after school. For independent living, for employment, for all of those things that are the components of self-determination.

So everything that we know benefits people with disabilities, people with disabilities are entitled to through the special education system. And that is why paper after paper, study after study has said that self-determination is the ultimate goal of education. That self-determination is a best practice in education. That schools should be focused on improving students' self-determination. Helping them become more independent. And yet in a terrible irony, schools are the primary source of referrals for guardianship. A paper coming out this year, a survey that I was involved in and a paper I helped write—there's that tackiness again-- found that schools are the most likely place where parents are referred to or recommended to get guardianship. And that's what we see time after time and case after case is that a student is approaching 18 and a teacher, well meaning, or counselor or school says, "Transfer of rights is coming up. You better get guardianship or you are not going to have a say in your child's education." Or "have you thought about guardianship yet, because you're going to have to get that to help your child."

We see schools being what I call the onramp to guardianship. The purpose of today's, or my presentation today, is to preach and hope that you will help shut down the onramp to guardianship. The way we are going to do that is to do what best practice has been saying to do for decades: To ensure that self-determination is the primary focus of education. To ensure that schools and teachers and students are focused on becoming as independent and self-determined as possible. Because if we do that, if that's the focus of education, guardianship isn't even a consideration. We're not thinking about taking away rights, we're thinking about empowering and increasing them.

So how do we do that? Well, first, we start early. Education and self-determination should go hand in hand from as early as possible. Dr. Downing-Hosten is going to tell you in the DCPS, in District of Columbia Public Schools, they are teaching self-determination in pre-K. I have heard about kindergarten and first grade kids talking about kids in their network, their decision-making network. So, it becomes not only an expectation but ingrained from early on. And as the IEP process goes on, self-determination and independence become goals. Because I'll tell you, there is not an IEP goal I can think of that can't or does not encompass self-determination. And every IEP goal should have self-determination objectives, what we call "I" statements. Instead of doing it the old way where you have a behavior goal that says "you will not be late or you will cut your latenesses in half," we have a goal that says "I will develop a plan for

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reducing my latenesses. Or reduce the number of times I am late.” And then put in procedures in there, following up on the plan, working on the plan with the teacher, so the student takes ownership of the plan. Instead of saying “improve your writing or improve your grammar,” we have a goal that says:

[I'm having difficulty progressing this slide. Celestia, would you go to the next slide, please? Back one, please? Thank you.]

Instead of having a writing goal that says “I will improve my writing and my spelling and my grammar,” “I will identify a subject I want to write about and I will make sure my spelling and grammar is right three out of every four times. The student works with the teacher, with the professional to come up with that goal. The expectation, that they will work together to fulfill and be accountable for that goal. This is part of the student-led IEP process, again, a best practice going well over a decade, unfortunately not used nearly enough.

But if you think about the student-led IEP, it is the definition of self-determination. The student leads the meeting. And I tell parents, have your student in there the second your student can sit in there. If the student can handle one second, so be it. If the student can just introduce him or herself, so be it. Get the student used to being at that meeting and leading the meeting to the point where eventually, the student leads the meeting, introduces people, calls on people, it becomes a board of directors meeting, much less so than what we have seen time and time again, which is professionals surrounding a student and parent, telling them what to do. Now it's the student working with the professionals to determine together what to do. Where the student takes ownership. This is actually practicing different decision-making methods in a safe environment, because everyone is working together to develop the IEP goals, the "I" statements and working together to make sure they are measurable and accountable.

So, sounds great, how do we get there? Again, act early. Get those in those early meetings. And I always tell people, ask the school. What is your school towards self-determination goals? Do you write them? What is your policy towards the student being involved? And then, the best way in my mind, evaluation. We already know two things. You can ask for an evaluation for just about anything as long as it affects the education process, you can ask for an evaluation for it. And we already know that the purpose of special education, one of them, is to prepare students for independent living. Therefore, what stops you from writing a dear school letter. Saying that I am concerned that students disabilities are decreasing his or her ability to be self-determined, to progress toward independent living just like IDEA says he or she should progress, so therefore we are requesting an evaluation to determine whether his or her disabilities affect self-determination and what steps are necessary to help fix that problem? And if you don't like the results, you have a right to an IEE, an Independent Education Evaluation, and ask for an independent outsider to do another evaluation. Everyone here who has been

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in an IEP meeting knows schools do not love doing evaluations or IEEs. However, given that their other option is taking you to due process, by and large if you make a reasonable request and you back it up, they are going to give you that evaluation. And that forces the team to think about self-determination. And if you've got an enlightened district like DCPS, they're already thinking about it and now they are focused on it. And you are looking into getting those goals together.

So wait a second, that's great. That's self-determination. We know that's important. What does that have to do with supported decision-making? I said you were going to access supported decision-making through the special education system. Well, think about it. What is supported decision-making? Supported decision-making is an alternative to guardianship where people use trusted family members, friends, and professionals to understand the decisions they have to make so they can make the best decisions possible. There I am quoting myself again and doubling down on climbing down Mount Self-Absorb by quoting a case in which I was lead counsel. But that's the definition of supported decision-making. Doesn't that sound just like what we just talked about? The student-led IEP. You sit in the meeting, you lead the meeting, you call on people at the meeting to develop the best possible goals using the best possible information. Doesn't that sound like the definition of supported decision-making? And doesn't supported decision-making sound just like a student-led IEP?

Celestia, please advance the slide. Mine didn't. Thank you.

Doesn't the student-led IEP sound just like supported decision-making? That is because supported decision-making is not static. It is a paradigm. It's not a process, there is no one set way to do it. It is wrapping your mind around the concept that people with disabilities have the right to make their own decision, have the same rights as everyone else does. And once that concept is accepted, then the only question is how we do it. So supported decision-making is accessed in special education by saying you have the right, student, to control your education, to work as part of the team, to make education with rather than for, by rather than about. The student plays the most important role, and when that happens, supported decision-making and self-determination and are the givens, not the exceptions.

And think about this. When does guardianship happen? Why does guardianship happen? Every study says guardianship happens the same way. One, due to incorrect assumptions about people with disabilities' ability to make decisions for themselves, but mostly because society feels that the person doesn't have the ability to take care of him or herself in a way that society deems appropriate. That's the definition of why people think people with disabilities need guardians. Think about this. Where can we gain those skills? Where can we gain the skills to live independently? To be able to have everyday living skills and linkages to employment as we're promised?

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Transition services, what I feel is the single most important part of the IEP process. You have a right to special ed until about age 22. Transition service prepares you for the next 50 years. It is setting you up for your life after school. Look at what transition services includes: Post-school adult school objectives, acquisition of daily living skills. In other words, the exact things people need to, quote, take care of themselves in the manner in which society deems is appropriate.

So when we look at transition, when we look at special ed and the goals of the IDEA and the definition of transition services, we are looking at the very things people with disabilities need to become more self-determined, to exercise their rights and avoid guardianship. Think about it this way. Transition happens age 16 or earlier. I once supervised an attorney who got transition services for a student at 12. Certain states require it at 14. They go through age 21 or 22. That means you've got minimum five years of transition services. And this is why I get so angry when well-meaning teachers and counselors at age 17 ½ recommend to a parent that they get guardianship because if a school or a teacher had a concern that a student could not take care of him or herself or had a problem making decisions for him or herself, why was that not addressed in the transition services? Why? That's the first thing I ask. If you had that concern, where were the instruction and related services around the acquisition of daily living skills? And if you are worried about decision-making, where were the services around improving decision-making? Where was supported decision-making? Instead, you are relegating people to guardianship instead of empowering them in the very way the IDEA says you must.

So you've got five years. Use them! Do what the law says. Link to adult services. Build and practice self-determination and develop independent living skills. Do that, and self-determination is the rule. Use supported decision-making and independence is the given. And you've closed the onramp to guardianship. And before I finish, let me tell you why that's so important. Everyone on this call, think about 1995. Think about where you were in 1995. Now, I know some of you were toddlers or in grade school, and please know that I hate you for that. But those of you who can remember 1995, think about it. Think about the state-of-the-art in civil rights and in supports and services for people with disabilities. It was four years before the Olmstead decision. Institutionalization was the rule. Sheltered workshops were common. Hell, sheltered workshop was an accepted employment outcome for vocational rehabilitation services. People were kept separate. It was the expectation. Now, think about today. We have Medicaid waivers. We have assistive technology like we never had before. A \$500 iPad can do more to assist people's communication than a \$10,000 Dynavox ever could. We have enhanced vocational opportunities. We have supports and services like we have never had before.

So with that in mind, can anybody tell me why the number of people under guardianship has tripled since 1995? In 1995, when institutionalization and dependence was the rule,

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there were half a million adults under guardianship. Today, 1.5 million. That's why it is important to close the onramp to guardianship.

You have the ability, if you insist upon self-determination, supported decision-making and alternatives to guardianship, you can save a generation. You can save a generation. You can ensure that the same rights we all have, those rights the tall guy from Virginia said were inalienable. The rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness are equally available to people with disabilities because, as a friend of mine says, when you are under a guardianship, you become an unperson. You cease to exist in the eyes of the law.

We have the ability to change that. If we insist that the onramp be closed. If more school districts do what the District of Columbia Public Schools do and Dr. Downing-Hosten is going to tell you in a couple of minutes, we can make that change, and a million people are waiting for that change.

And lastly, to make that change we need you. On your screen is the website for the supported -- National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making. Please go. Please check it out. But most importantly, please help. You'll find resources and research. You'll find stories of supported decision-making. And you'll find the opportunity to submit your own stories. We need your stories. We need your experiences. In the upper right-hand corner of that site is a link to join Supported Decision-Making Interactive. That is our dedicated listserv. And there, you can talk to people around the country about important issues about self-determination, guardianship, whatever comes to mind. You can talk to people who have been in situations like you have been in to come up with solutions. Because we get one shot at making this work. If supported decision-making doesn't take hold, it's just going to become another thing, another buzzword that we've heard of and then, in my opinion, we're going to lose another million people in 20 years.

So thank you for your time today, thank you in advance for your participation in this and other webinars and for your work helping people with disabilities. Thank you so much.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Thank you, Jonathan. That provides a perfect context to go from conceptual framework around supported decision-making to, as you said in very practical terms, taking it into legal requirements of the IEP and working with students with disabilities in our school system.

We are going to next turn to an expert in our public education system, Dr. Pamela Downing-Hosten, the director of the Office of Specialized Instruction in the District of Columbia Public Schools. Pamela, you're going to take us to how you have embraced supported decision-making and building critical skills around self-determination. So let me turn it over to you.

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PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Well, thank you so much, Michael and Jonathan, for laying that wonderful groundwork there. I'm so excited about shutting down the onramp. I didn't know that's what I was doing, but now that I know, let me show you all how to do the same.

What we are going to do today is talk about supported decision-making through secondary transition and self-advocacy, because we believe that self-advocacy has to be taught. And once one is a self-advocate, they can become self determined.

So what is secondary transition? According to the IDEA, it's a process for preparing students for life after they leave high school. And that includes any type of post-secondary education or training, employment, and independent living. And in DCPS we say that if a student cannot graduate from school, find employment, prepare a meal, and take care of their expenses, then independent living is definitely not an option. It is required on that student's transition plan. It also includes teaching students to become self-advocates and how to build and use a supported decision-making network. I have lots of stories to tell, but not enough time, about how our students are becoming self-advocates. They are using it in the community, and how the community is so excited and wanting to help students actually use the skills that they're learning within school.

So now what does it actually look like in DCPS? Everyone wanted to know, well, Dr. Downing-Hosten, how does your model work? What do you do when? And as you can see from the ages of birth to three, the office of the state superintendent of education assists with managing those students' educational outcomes. But as soon as a student is three and in our early stages program, which is pre-K, we begin to work with them on their abilities, their limitations, and making at least two choices. Then we move toward educating the students and training them on their interests. There's a program that we use that allows students to create what is called a play plan. Within their play plan, the students get a chance to choose what it is they want to do. They write about it, and they can even include the students they want to have work with them.

Then we begin identifying interests early. Before the student is ten years old, and this is still in elementary, we start looking at what really interests the student and attempting to find opportunities for them to experience activities in those interests. Then, as the student moves on through school, we look at the course of study for a student to ensure that the courses in which they are enrolled are actually courses about which they can become excited and courses that enable them to practice some of their abilities. And the courses also enable them to become very independent, and it helps them lead their IEP team meetings.

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Before a student in DCPS exits, there's a paid work experience that is part of their curriculum. And we also work on independent living skills and community experiences. By the time a student exits DCPS, they will have had many opportunities to become aware of their abilities, limitations, as well as their preferences and actually how to use them.

So when does transition planning begin? As you saw in a previous diagram it begins in pre-K. So here, it looks like the student is actually just playing around with our president. But this student in a pre-K program has a choice. He wanted to decide whether or not he could be a doctor or the president of the United States.

And we're in Washington, D.C. so why not try to arrange it so that the student can have an experience with both? And for us, transition really never ends as we have, this is the first year for us to have an alumni association. For students who have graduated, they may come back and ask questions of any of us on the transition team and figure out what to do next.

So transition planning in DCPS follows the advocate model. We have students acquaint themselves with their preferences, determine their ability and limitations, as you've heard me say, vocalize their needs in any way they can. And it may be using some type of assistive technology, if they're nonverbal. It could be through using a friend. We also have them outline accommodations based on their needs, consider their goals, and ask for help when planning strategies to meet goals, then tell the team members about difficulties that they are facing, and then executing their strategies to meet goals.

The part that the students really like is the "O" in the advocate model, outline accommodations based on their needs. We have students who have had serious behavioral problems and attendance problems. But once they could articulate in their way what they needed to be successful, and they saw those accommodations and modifications were put in place, we've seen behaviors decrease. Inappropriate behaviors decrease, and attendance increase.

So now, what does transition planning look like in pre-K? Well, in prekindergarten students learn about preference and their various learning styles. In kindergarten, students learn about how emotions affect their preferences, and how to express various emotions. And then in first grade, students focus on reading, writing, and speaking skills to articulate their needs with and without assistive technology. And they identify their preferences as it relates to their literacy needs.

In grades two through four students practice appropriate team building skills. Students demonstrate team building skills through group activities that reinforce core subject content. And in third grade they begin to discuss their personal abilities in every day life. And this is very important as students begin to participate in the IEP process. They have to be able to talk about how the goals and objectives on their IEP are shaping them for

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everyday life. We don't want to wait until a student is 15 years old to talk about how their ability begins to affect their every day life. Because as Jonathan said, we want to empower our students early so they have enough time to practice these skills.

So by the time the student is in fourth grade, they also apply the concept of team building to recognize that everyone has limitations. And they begin the process as early as fourth grade to design their own network. So now we have students about to exit elementary. They are in grade five and for us, middle school begins in grade six. So by then we want students to have a pretty good concept of themselves, what they can and cannot do, as well as being able to shape their individuality. So by the time a student is in sixth grade they are able to express areas of difficulty. This is very important in sixth grade. Sixth grade is a pivotal year academically.

And then in the seventh grade we want students to explore the concepts of independence and independent living. You may think a seventh grade student will think about independent living? Yes, what better time than seventh grade to have a student think about what is appropriate for them to live independently as opposed to what they see on TV or what someone else is doing.

So when a student is in grades eight to ten, we are really now having students really invested in their IEP team meetings, identifying their needs and any changes that need to be made during their IEPs. Students also participate in a leadership capacity, actually telling the team what they need in order to become successful. And this is truly the basis of self-determination. When you have students sitting in an IEP team meeting actively participating, telling the team what works for them and what doesn't work, and then revising some of the goals and objectives because the student actually knows that they won't be in school forever, that they have to prepare themselves for the exit from school. So by the time a student is in tenth grade, our students are able to look at their goals and tell if they're smart and also determine who can assist them, whether it's a teacher or another student, with accomplishing those goals.

So, transition planning looks like this in grades 11 and beyond. By the time a student reaches 11th grade, the teachers are there, the student is there. The student might decide to invite one of his or her friends to the meeting who knows them very well. And then 12th grade, by that time most of our students have reached the age of majority. And since parents have been working with the students all along, parents could be very much part of the network if the student wants them to be. And beyond 12th grade, our students are on their way to be fully self-determined. So as you can see, these are just overview points of students as they move through school and approach the transfer of rights. Because we want to ensure that students are informed and making informed decisions about their future.

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So when we come to the transfer of rights, students begin discussing this when they are at least 14 years old. Not the year before. So when a student is 14 and sometimes it's earlier. It depends upon the student's abilities. We begin to talk about their educational rights automatically transitioning to them. We kind of, sort of keep guardianship out of the conversation because students have been taught to become self-advocates. It's kind of unheard of for them to think of someone else leading their life because they know that they can ask a parent, a friend or someone if they don't understand. So what we do is assure that, we talk about other alternatives to guardianship. And make sure the students are sent all notices prior to them going out to parents.

So the transfer of rights through supported decision-making, once the student's rights have transferred, parents and guardians can still be part of the meeting collaboratively if the student agrees. And there's a process for that. What we've done all along is prepare the parents and the students, beginning when the student was 14 years old, how to make decisions together as a team. So supported decision-making is really child's play. So going back to pre-K, as you can see here, we have students working in teams. You may think this is a teacher, yet it's a student helping other students. And this is a network right here. This is a supported decision-making network of students actually planning and working together.

Parental support is key. Again, we don't wait until a student is 16 or 17 years old. We actually are in the process now of partnering with organizations that have large parent groups, to begin to train parents on the supported decision-making process. Because parents play a key role in showing students it is okay to advocate for supports and seek assistance if questions arise.

So now let's go into supported decision-making. As Jonathan said, and here is this picture just in case you don't know what he looks like, supported decision-making is a process where we are having students become aware of utilizing a network to choose between options and to choose with regard to various actions that need to take place in their life. Students have to have, we believe, the ability to choose between two or more options, work with someone they trust. And they are the age of majority.

So there's some key points in the process. You must know that supported decision-making is an alternative to guardianship, network members must be identified by the newly-transitioned student, and an agreement must be made between the student and network members. And that agreement outlines what the network member can and cannot access and the type of support that will be required.

So now, some examples. Our teachers wanted to know how a supporter can assist a student. And our schools wanted to know what to expect. So here are just three ways in which a supporter can assist a student. They can review educational documents on

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their behalf, they can receive educational information to review with the student, and assist the student to prepare for any type of meeting related to their education.

Now, there's no formal legal process, but in DCPS we created a form, a supported decision-making form. There were students on the committee to develop this form, two parents, of course, teachers, and my team. What we did is came up with the way, you just see the top portion of the form. With a way that students can actually begin the process of using an official form that becomes part of their record. Now, keep in mind, using forms just didn't begin when the student was in high school. Way down in pre-K, I stated earlier that students design a play plan. A play plan is a written document. Students decide what they want to do and who they need to help them. So it stands to reason that it makes sense for a student to use supported decision-making form and know what it is if they have been using some type of document all along.

So as for the special educator, the special educator can assist with supported decision-making by teaching a self advocacy course. Within DCPS there are 79 transition courses that can be utilized as either a core course for students pursuing a certificate of IEP completion, or as an elective for students pursuing a diploma. The educational team can also serve as an adviser. They can explain the IEP and transfer of rights to students. And they can encourage the students to take an active role. And if guardianship comes up from someone outside of the school system, explain to the student why their rights would automatically transfer and how they can navigate within that system.

So with that being said, here is my contact information for this presentation. You can feel free to give me a call or e-mail me. And I'd like to thank you very much.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Pamela? We are going to start with some questions that some have come in and some we prepared in advance. But between you and Jonathan, we're going to try to reinforce some of the points that you both have made. And I think I am going to start with you with a first question in terms of, this one relates to school districts. Why do you think so many school districts working with youth in transition continue to recommend to parents to seek guardianship for their son or daughter?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: I used to work in a school system that recommended guardianship because the educational system was thinking of what would happen to the student beyond exit in terms of health services and other areas. And it wasn't a support system in place to actually train students to become self-advocates. So that they could be self-determined. So some school systems, and I don't speak for all, believe that guardianship is appropriate because it's a way of actually protecting a student because there aren't systems in place to actually educate the student to become an advocate so that they can use supported decision-making to make choices about their future.

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MICHAEL MORRIS: And Jonathan, do you want to amplify on that at all? What do you think you've encountered with school districts continuing to recommend parents seek guardianship for their son or daughter?

JONATHAN MARTINIS: I just think it's well meaning but for the worst possible reason, which is, the way it's always been. Guardianship has been around for 2,000 plus years. It's what people like you, person with a disability, have done. It's a remnant of an old system long since discredited in the vast majority of situations.

But I think it is well meaning. I think Pamela is correct. People think it's protective. I think people view guardianship as a way to protect people with disabilities. And I often do a whole rap on, I can't imagine what people think the guardian actually does. You know, it's not the guardians of the galaxy. They're not wrapping their arms around a person 24/7 to keep that person away from all harm at all times. In fact, what the studies show is that if you want to protect a person with a disability, you enhance or empower their rights. When I mentioned earlier on, the studies showed a study of women with intellectual disabilities found that those who were educated in self-determination became better able to recognize abusive situations and avoid abuse. So in other words, if you want to protect people, don't put them in a guardianship. Give them the ability they need to recognize and make their own decisions in the best possible way, getting the support they need and they want.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Jonathan, maybe amplifying on that, so parents seeking alternatives to guardianship, how can parents learn more about supported decision-making?

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Well, the best way is to go to supporteddecisionmaking.org. Thankfully, the administration for community living through the Department of Health and Human Services has chosen us to lead this first national effort to educate people, to gather together in one place as much information as possible so that people can use it. Please do. As I said again, we need your input, everyone out there, your stories, your resources. You can go to our research and resource library and see forms including DCPS's supported decision-making form. You can support the Supported Decision-Making Interactive and become teachers and ask questions. To me it is the best repository of information, and it's only going to get better.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Okay. Let's go to-- Pam, go ahead. I'm sorry.

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Sorry, I wanted to add that one of the things that we've done is created a brochure and materials that we distribute throughout the district. Places where parents may frequent. And of course, the supported decision-making form is distributed in offices and with some of our collaborative offices and the attorney's

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offices, because when the form comes back to our school and the school sees- wait, that's a DCPS form, we have to do this. It makes it easier for the school team to move forward and talk about creating a network, as opposed to trying to describe why we are not going to discuss guardianship in detail.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Pamela, one of the questions that just appeared in the chat room is, you featured in your PowerPoint a copy of the supported decision-making form that the D.C. public schools are using. The question has come in, how can the person get the full copy of that form?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Well, as Jonathan mentioned it's on the website. He can tell you exactly where to click to get it, but it is there. And you have my e-mail as well with the presentation. Just send me an e-mail and I'll just get it out to you.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: You'll also find the form at supporteddecisionmaking.org. Go to the library section, and it's in resources. The resources section is specifically set up for specific audiences, and specific topics. You will find it there. If not, either feel free to e-mail Pamela or myself and we'll get it to you.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Okay. Let's go to the next slide and the next question. Who are likely candidates to become a supporter for a youth in transition? A person at, let's say, middle school has moved on and now in high school and is going to transition into the adult world. And at age 18, is in the age of majority, who would you suggest might be likely candidates to be supporters?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Well, we have students select someone over the age of 18, someone they trust in terms of making appropriate decisions. And then someone who is knowledgeable in the area where they have questions. And that seems to help our students narrow it down because at first they would say Okay, well, I'm just going to choose all my friends because they are over the age of 18. Well, is your friend knowledgeable of the areas where you have questions? No. Well, perhaps we should choose someone else. And they get it. So it seems that our students are beginning to think critically about who they need to assist them based on their preferences, abilities and limitations.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: That's one of the reasons why I think the DCPS system is great. Because it recognizes there can be multiple supporters for multiple topics. The first thing you think of is family. But your family may be useful in some areas but may not have knowledge in other areas. For example, if anyone is coming to me for advice on surgery, they're making a mistake. So you find people who know what it is you need to know and who have information that you can trust. Anyone can be a supporter. And when you are building your network, one of the things you should do is identify people who can be supporters in particular areas.

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Getting a little far afield, but one of the things I do recommend if it is something the person wants are even written plans. Identifying who your preferred supporters are on particular students. It's really very little different from power of attorney. When I make a medical decision I want Jonathan involved in it, I want this person involved in it. And when you have it in a written plan it is something you can give to people. Like Pamela said, when you see that DCPS form, you know it's important. When I go to the doctor and I give a form that says I give you permission to talk to this person here and involve this person in my decision-making process, that is a form that is going to be more likely respected and followed and allows you to identify formally a supporter. So the answer to the question, Michael, is anybody could be. But part of the import of developing this skill from a young age is identifying who should be. And where they should be.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Okay. Let's go to the next question. Can an IEP include development of independent decision making skills? And so is that something either the student or the parent could be asking for at an IEP meeting? Pamela?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Oh, absolutely. An IEP is a fluid document and can include anything that a student actually needs to attain independence. So yes, you can have independent decision making skills. And it could look like a student making a choice between two, three, or four objects. It could mean that a student is choosing which accommodations and modifications they've used and are most successful. Or some of the accommodations and modifications they would like to try because they want to build those skills. So yes, an IEP can include independent skills.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: I'll go one step farther: must. If the plan isn't including what I call the "I" goals, I don't think it's a good IEP. Because I don't think it's helping the student progress towards independent living. I think when we are independent, it means we are making our choices, we are choosing our path in life. And if a student is at all challenged in that, and we are all challenged in our decision-making because we all need support. It's why the tag line at the National Resource Center is everybody has the right to make choices, but everybody needs a little bit of help in making those choices. So there must be some kind of component of choice and some kind of assistance in developing those skills or I just don't think it's an appropriate IEP and the student is not going to appropriately progress towards those adult goals that employment and independent living skills that IDEA requires the student to progress towards.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Okay, let's go to the next question. What can parents do to support IEP goals that build critical skills of their son or daughter to make decisions independently? So I like your point, Jonathan, which is it is not a question of should it or could it be in the IEP, it's almost this should be the mandate. This should be an absolute goal of an IEP, certainly for any youth in transition. But what can the parents do to support that IEP goal to build critical skills, to make decision also independently?

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JONATHAN MARTINIS: Ask. If the school, I said asking early. What is your policy towards creating these goals? I would like goals focused on that. The parent has a great opportunity for input into the IEP process through the present level of performance. That is really the parent's opportunity to provide maximum input. If the parent thinks there needs to be IEP goals around decision-making, and again I say there must be, the parent should be including that in his or her input section. They should be asking for evaluations early and often. And in transition, I think it is not even a question of whether; it's a question of what. What goals are going to say it and where is it going to say it and how is it going to say it? And what related services are going to be provided to help us get there? All of those things are critical parts of the process. They are all critical in developing those skills that are going to lead toward self-determination and independence and away from guardianship.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Pamela, any additional thoughts?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: And I'd like to take that one step, absolutely. One of the things that we teach our teachers is to ensure that a particular goal can be generalized across settings. So we not only want the students to practice those goals within school, we want the parents to become part of the implementation of a particular goal that deals with building critical skills in decision-making. We want the community to be involved. And I'll share just a brief story. We were teaching self-advocacy and how students can build these critical skills and make decisions independently in class. Then the students, through their independent living course, decided that they wanted to go to a mall. And they went to a mall because they wanted to make a purchase. But before they went, they decided that they wanted to create a skit for the merchants because they believed that the merchants didn't know how to deal with them. So they did, and every student went into the store and they found the manager of the store from which they wanted to purchase materials, and they said well, I'm a person with a disability. When I come into your store, here are some things that I need you to do in order for me to shop and spend my money here. The vendors were so impressed that they called the students back to go into every store within the mall to show various merchants how to work with a student with autism, a student with an intellectual disability. So it's more than just teaching a student how to implement those goals in school. They must be generalized across settings in the home and in the community for a student to become truly independent.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Michael, if I could just- one more thing. First of all, what a marvelous example of self-determination in action. But secondly, what a great example to give to parents that the IEP process, like life, is not passive. So that's why I say parents have to ask. You have to be a part of this process. You have to be an example for the student to ask and to take control. Just like those students did in educating all of those merchants. They took charge of their experience. That is self-determination in

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action. So parents have to be an active part of the process. So I say ask, and secondly, learn and listen and become a part of the process and encourage your child to do the same.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Excellent. Let's go to the next question. What advice do you have for teachers and school districts to start teaching self-determination skills early in elementary and middle school? And I think, Pamela in your presentation, what was remarkable to me is you start before elementary school. You're starting in pre-K. So what advice do you have for teachers in school districts? This is not as you so eloquently presented just a set of issues that start with youth in transition. You have laid out an agenda that begins at your very entry point of working with very young children and families. So what advice to school districts to create similar programs, start early?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: The advice I have for school systems is to just look at their student population and parents within that total community. And begin to have various conversations just conversations about what they want for students within that particular district. And as they begin to unfold that, begin to take a look at starting early. It's really a must. Because as we know, students learn everything they need to know by the time they are in kindergarten. So we need to begin to instill in those students that they are important. Their preferences can be recognized. And school systems need to, just like they are setting aside a block of time for reading, math, science, social studies, self advocacy is a must on so many fronts. We have seen students make leaps and bounds in terms of simple things like attendance, behavior, grades, communicating with their classmates, collaborating as a team.

So we've seen students move to the higher end of Bloom's Taxonomy. It's because they are becoming self-advocates. So my advice to teachers and school districts is just to begin early with having students begin to identify their abilities, limitations, preferences, and the fact that they have a disability. Nothing worse than sitting down with an eight-year-old or a 12-year-old and they say I don't have a disability; I don't have an IEP. We must start early to ensure that our students are aware of themselves and what they need to be successful. And in that way, we begin to ensure that our students are successful in the future. So we must begin early. It's really not an option.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: I think that's an excellent answer and I'd like to amplify it a little bit and use that opportunity to address a comment I just saw in the chat field, one that's really important, I think.

Starting early, starting instruction early, building self-determination early, is important for many reasons, not just avoiding guardianship down the road. Not just building skills down the road, but for those rare times when substituted decision-making, whether through a guardianship or any other process, is appropriate. And there are times when

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a person needs a substituted decision making model. The most extreme circumstance, a person in a coma obviously needs substituted decision-making. There are different people with different levels.

So supported decision-making does not create the dichotomy of guardian versus no guardian. I think what supported decision-making does especially when it's addressed early, is it creates a dichotomy of self-determination to the maximum extent possible, or not. Guardianship in every shape and form is not wrong or evil, and I would hate to make parents feel like because they made a choice that they thought was in the best interests of their child, they did something wrong. If anyone feels that way, what a horrible feeling that must be and I'm sorry if I ever contributed to a feeling like that.

What I feel, and what I think Pamela just said, is we preach self-determination to the maximum extent possible, to the extent where, in the vast majority of situations, in my opinion, guardianship is not necessary. And in those rare situations where it is, we still use supported decision-making to the maximum extent possible. In the Jenny Hatch case, the judge made a finding that even when guardianship is used, supported decision-making to the maximum extent should be used to make sure the person has maximum control over his or her life even when they're in a guardianship.

So we are not preaching that never, ever, ever, ever should a person have a substituted decision-making model. What we are preaching is that the more self-determined you are, the more control and independence you have over your life, the better your life outcome is going to be. And for those who don't need a guardian it won't ever enter in the conversation. For the small amount of people who do need a guardian, they will still be more self determined and have better life outcomes using this method.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Thanks, Pamela and Jonathan. I do want to point out, and it's going on in the chat room, some folks from Virginia have pointed out that Virginia has a curriculum called "I'm determined" and you can reach it by going to www.doe.virginia.gov and then put in the search box, I believe at the right top, put in the name of that curriculum, "I'm determined." I'm sure there are other school districts and other school systems across the country that recognize the critical importance of teachers bringing in, as Pamela has said, at the earliest point and at different age group levels, to teach both self-determination and, of course, independent and supported decision-making.

Let's go to the next question. The next question is can you help us understand, is supported decision-making and self-determination complementary concepts? Or is there some differences or nuances between one versus the other? Next slide, please.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Supported decision-making is a paradigm, as I said, not a process. Self-determination is the overarching goal, a way to get to self-determination is

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through supported decision-making. Think of it that way. Think of self-determination as the ultimate goal. Because a person who is self-determined is in control of his or her life to the maximum extent possible. And studies for decades have linked self-determination with better life outcomes for people with disabilities. That's simply not an arguable point. If a person with intellectual or developmental disabilities has higher levels of self-determination, he or she is going to be more independent, better employed at higher wages, more integrated into his or her community, and better able to understand, recognize and resist abuse.

So if that is our goal, we need to find ways to get there. Supported decision-making is a way to get there. And there are multiple areas of supported decision-making concepts and methods. Everything from the student-led IEP in special education to informed choice in vocational rehabilitation, to person-centered planning in medical and Medicaid services. All of those fall under the umbrella of supported decision-making which leads, I think, directly and causally, to greater levels of self-determination.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Pamela, would you like to add anything?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Yes, I would like to add to that. Thank you so much, Jonathan, for a very clear definition. Yet I would like to add that before the supported decision-making, a student must become a self-advocate. The student must be taught to be able to identify their abilities, limitations, and preferences so they can choose persons to become part of their supported decision-making network and then move towards self-determination. It's very important for a student to be aware of their abilities, limitations, and preferences, because everything that they want to do in life should center around those three: Their abilities, their limitations, and their preferences, based on what they want to do in the future.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Jonathan, a question that's come in in the chat box, to stay with this concept is can you elaborate a little bit more on how can supported decision-making coexist with guardianship?

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Sure. Every state that has a guardianship law essentially says the same thing. That the guardian's job is to maximize the independence, some use the phrase self-determination, of the ward, of the person under guardianship. So if the job of the guardian is to maximize the person's self-determination, then the guardian should be setting up Supported Decision-Making methods. There's been a lot of development around guardianship law recently. A person I work with, Morgan Whitlatch, led a movement to get the law in Washington, D.C. changed to recognize that a guardian's job is not to simply make decisions, whether it's in the best interests of the person under guardianship. I mean, if you think about it, if you make decisions based only on your best interests, you would never eat ice cream. You would never drink a beer. You would never take a day off of work or go on vacation. Those are not necessarily in your best

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interests. Therefore, a guardian should not be making every single decision based solely on the best interests of the person. To the contrary, we should be looking at a person's expressed interests, what that person wants to do, and help that person achieve it. That is the essence of supported decision-making and self-determination. Setting your own goals and making your own life choice, whether or not a third party thinks it's in a person's best interests. Therefore, if a guardian's job under law is to maximize independence and self-determination, it seems to me the guardian by definition the guardian should be helping the person make decisions consistent with that person's own interests and own preferences. And if a person has limitations in making decisions, then supported decision-making is a great way to do just that. So, in other words, being a guardian is not a license to be making decisions instead of someone. It should, in the rare times it's appropriate and used, be an opportunity to make decisions with a person while providing that person the support he or she wants and needs.

MICHAEL MORRIS: And if you look at the next question, and I'm going to add a second part to this, but does a school system violate the rights of the child or family by urging guardianship as a best practice? And then I would add a second part in your answer of really what the goal of a guardian is, isn't there some affirmative responsibility? Maybe not legal, but more of an ethical responsibility to think about how might we help, as you said, engage the individual in decision-making and potentially help them build independent decision-making skills whereby one would want to move to eventually remove the guardian? So I know those are, but let's take one at a time. What about the school system? Is it violating the law by recommending to parents to look at guardianship for your son or daughter?

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Looking at this at the extreme example first. I know of no school that has this, by the way. But if a school had a written policy that says every child in special education at the age of 18, his or her parents will be advised to seek guardianship, then yes, absolutely. There's zero doubt in my mind that would violate IDEA because it is the antithesis of building independence.

But I think the question here is urging it as a best practice. Whether the school were to say, we really think you should seek guardianship because your child's got limitations in decision making. If that happens at 18, it bothers me a lot because what has the school been doing for the prior two years to overcome that problem? Why has the school not informed the parent that this is a problem that should be addressed? Why have there been no supports and services put in to maximize independence? If the answer to those questions is: Well, we haven't done anything. Then yes, they probably violated rights because they have known of a problem and have done nothing to fix it. With that said, there are undoubtedly times where a school is not wrong in recommending guardianship if they have made every attempt to get past, to ameliorate the problems caused by the disability. If a school in truly good faith, after attempting every other method, and to me that's a very important thing. I always ask, what else have you tried

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before someone seeks guardianship. If they exhausted other methods and truly did evaluations and determined this person has no interest in making decisions or has a limitation in it, you should seek guardianship and it should be the least restrictive guardianship, then no, I don't think that violates rights. But that's a lot of steps before the recommendation is made. So short version, it should never be a first option. Guardianship is a tool. Use the right tool in the right way at the right time and fix things and use it the wrong way and you're on America's Nastiest Home Videos. Use your tools wisely, and never make guardianship the first choice out of the box. If that's the policy, you are probably not violating rights.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Right. And then go to the second part, not the question up on the screen. And that is, is there any affirmative responsibility or role in a guardian to actually move them out of their role? To actually work with the individual or work with others in support of the individual so that the guardianship, which would be the most restrictive option, might no longer be necessary? So is there, I guess legally there is not such a role for a guardian. But what is your view?

JONATHAN MARTINIS: I never thought of it that way, but if you look at IDEA as requiring schools to maximize independent living skills, if a student is in school until 22 and a guardianship was put in that was appropriate when the person was 18, but it is no longer appropriate at 20, then maybe a school should be working to improve the student's independent living skills to the point where guardianship is not necessary. I tell people all the time, the best way to get out of guardianship is not to get in. It is incredibly difficult to get out of guardianship. Unfortunately, based upon the wording of most laws, you have to prove that the person has been restored, or cured, if you will, of the disability. I represent people now and getting out is significantly harder than getting in.

But I would imagine, if you're in, and you're in as the result of lack of independent living skills or some kind of decision-making skills, then those are the exact same things that the school should be focusing on getting past because they are likely causing limitations in education. So directly or indirectly, the school should be providing the services and supports needed to maximize independence and to the extent that guardianship is no longer appropriate, to get out of it.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Let me quickly go to the next question as we begin to run out of time and this is for Pamela. What have you learned from your experiences in the D.C. public schools from your skills training that have been offered? And it says here K through 12, but you started even in pre-K, that prepares the student for enhanced self direction and self-determination?

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: That's an excellent question. We've learned several things in terms of the whole program that we put in place. Beginning with students first and foremost, we've realized that our students are more independent, more vocal in

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terms of their preferences. And many of our students now are beginning to look for challenges, knowing that they can always have the support of a network, should they have difficulty. So I mentioned briefly before about our students utilizing the higher end thinking questions of Bloom's Taxonomy. So many of our students are becoming more independent, they seek challenges. And then their teachers, many of the teachers are no longer writing simple lesson plans because they realize that their students are aware of their own learning styles and that students will ask for assistance. And when you walk into a classroom and you hear chatter or groups of students working together, it's because students have realized that in order for me to be successful now and a viable citizen within the community, I must be able to communicate and collaborate with others and seek assistance if I need it.

And you may think that I'm talking about the average student with a disability, a very average type IQ. And this even works for our students with intellectual disabilities and autism. The examples that I've given about the students going into the community happened to be one of our classes of students with autism. Not high functioning, but on the scale where you would think or one would think that students would have a great deal of difficulty expressing their preferences. But we've noticed that students realize that they are not alone and are willing to begin to plan for their future. So we're excited about what we see and excited about replicating this program and philosophy again to even some of our charter schools within the district. So we're excited.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Great. Let's go quickly to the last question, which is closing comments, maybe stay with you, Pamela. Keep it very concise because we have a few more things to get in. But your thoughts about future trends and directions of school districts and really focused in on building self-determined, self-directed lives, and understanding the importance of supported decision-making.

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: In terms of teacher trends, what we are finding is that in the beginning teachers were a little apprehensive about listening to a student when a student would approach them and say I need you to perhaps explain this in a different way because I need to see it visually as opposed to hearing it. But now we are looking at teachers asking students how would this work for you? How should I present this to you in the first few weeks of school? So we are beginning to see more collaboration between the teacher as well as the student. And in some instances we see students actually take over a class because the student could articulate what they're learning to their peers different from the way the teacher had. So we're excited that teachers as well as students are learning and parents are accepting of the fact that their child can come home and make a choice. And their child can articulate what it is they want to do. So in the upcoming years, we're looking forward to having more and more of our students and teachers utilize the process as students become more and more independent.

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MICHAEL MORRIS: Thank you, Pamela. Before I let Jonathan answer that question, let's go just, I want to do a quick infomercial. This is the first of a three-part webinar series about supported decision-making. If you go to the next slide you'll see that I hope you will join us and spread the word. May 14th, same time, 1-2:30 EST, we will have a focus on Supported Decision-Making and Medicaid with the home and community based services settings final rule, we'll have joining us Barbara Brent from the state director's national association DD services, Samantha Crane, director of public policy at Autistic Self Advocacy Network, and Jonathan Martinis, again legal director, Quality Trust.

We will also have, next slide, on June 18th, our final in this three-part series, Supported Decision-Making and the ABLE Act, achieving better life experience, June 18th, with Lisa Mills, public policy chair at Tash, Allison Wohl, executive director at APSE, and Jonathan again joining us. All of these webinars will be archived; all that information is available at supporteddecisionmaking.org. Again, this couldn't happen without the wonderful support of the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services. The views expressed today are not necessarily the views of the Administration for Community Living, but their support makes all of this possible. Jonathan, I am going to giving you the final word in terms of future trends related to the public school system, students with disabilities, and families.

JONATHAN MARTINIS: Thank you, Michael. And thank you, everyone, for listening in, and those of you who can attend the next two webinars, and can put up with hearing three times hearing my voice, you're among the blessed.

I think the future trend is a simple one. It's moving away from looking at what people are limited in doing and can't do and using that as an excuse to limit their potential, to looking at what people can do and increasing their potential. A quick story, I did a conference in California last month and met a mom who has three children, all of whom who have limitations in communication. And not even ten years ago, that would have been just assumed that they would never achieve, they would never learn, they could never be productive members of society. They can't talk. Therefore, they can't be one of us, and they would be put aside.

Well, she is working to make sure that they have every opportunity to communicate. And people learn, people around them learn to communicate with her children, and they learn her children's method of communication. And just like that, she empowered her children. She made her children a bigger part of society, because they were going to be listened to in the way that they communicate. Their limitations were not used to create further limitations. Their abilities were used to create increased opportunities. And I think that's the trend. And that's what Pamela said. We look to what people do well and we build on it. Because we all do things well and we all have challenges. Does anybody out here work in a career that they chose because they knew they weren't any good at

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it? Of course not. You chose your career because it interested you, because it matched your skill sets, because it was something you wanted to do. That's the trend for people with disabilities. Find what they are good at and build it. Find what they want to do and empower that, identify their skills, and enhance them. By doing that, we create greater self-determination and we create a gateway to the benefits that come with self-determination. So 20 years from now we don't have to say we lost another generation of people who could be self-determined, who could be independent. But instead, because we assumed they can't be, they are not. That's our goal and that's our charge.

MICHAEL MORRIS: Fantastic. I think we are over time. I want to thank Jonathan and Pamela for extraordinary insights and perspective today. Supported decision-making and public school system. Beginning in youth in transition but coming down to pre-K, each age group there are opportunities and school districts like in D.C. that are really taking this to heart, changing their curriculum, and as we learned today, moving from not just in the classroom but experiential learning where families can get involved to develop independent decision-making skills for their son or daughter.

Please do not miss out on our upcoming two webinars in May and June. Next month we tackle Medicaid and home and community-based waivers and how do supported decision-making issues come into play. And in June we attack the issues under the extraordinary new ABLE Act, achieving a better life experience act. Great presenters on both of those webinars. All of this and more you can find on www.supporteddecisionmaking.org. Thank you again, Administration for Community Living, HHS for providing the resources to make this possible. We hope you have added to your knowledge base and we may have changed a few people's minds. Changed thinking and behavior, and ultimately, as Jonathan said, give people with significant disabilities greater opportunity to have self-directed, self-determined lives.

Thank you for joining us and we hope we will be back with you next month. Take care, everyone. Bye-bye.