Take Action: Making Goals Happen
A Goal Attainment Instructional Program

Reference Citation

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ChoiceMaker Curriculum Goals

The *Take Action: Making Goals Happen* instructional program enables students to attain four ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Transition Curriculum goals and 27 objectives. Specifically, *Take Action* enables students to attain these goals:

> Goal G. Begin meeting & introduce participants
> Goal H. Review past goals & performance
> Goal I. Ask questions if don't understand
> Goal J. Ask for feedback

Description

Goal attainment represents the keystone self-determination behavior. Educators use the *Take Action* lessons to teach students both with and without disabilities the crucial skills for attaining their goals. The lesson package consists of a student video, teacher lessons manual, and student worksheets. Students learn to break their long-term goals into short-term goals that can be accomplished in a short time period. Lessons teach students to plan how they will attain their goal by deciding: a standard for goal performance, a means to get feedback on performance, what motivates effort, goal attainment strategies, needed support, and schedule. This plan leads to student action, evaluation, and adjustment. The lessons can be applied to any goal or project including students' IEP goals.

Once the IEP meeting concludes, *Take Action* teaches students how to attain their own IEP goals. Students typically learn the Take Action goal attainment process after 10-hours of instruction over two weeks. Once learned, educators and parents need to provide students the opportunity to meet weekly to develop plans to achieve their IEP goals after evaluating progress made the previous week. This process will produce a student-centered, living IEP document and process, but more importantly, an IEP process that students own.

Take Action overview. The *Take Action* lesson package provides a tool for educators to teach students a simple and effective goal attainment process. The *Take Action* lessons begin with a 10-minute video (Martin, Huber Marshall, Maxson, & Hallahan, 1999) that demonstrates the Take Action process. This process teaches students to develop a plan to obtain their goals by deciding: (a) standard for goal performance, (b) a means to get performance feedback, (c) what motivates them to do it, (d) the strategies they will use, (e) needed supports, and (f) schedules. After students develop the plan, they implement the plan components, evaluate their performance, and then make any needed adjustments if the goal was not obtained. Once learned, students can apply the take action process to any goal.
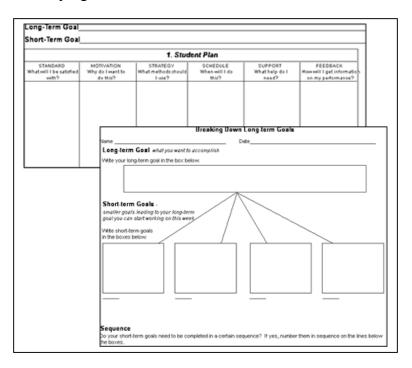
Take Action teaches students a self-regulatory process to attain goals. This involves breaking down the goal attainment process into teacher components, including: (a) identifying proximal (short-term) goals framed as action, (b) identifying standards to determine when goal has been

attained, (c) identifying strategies, schedules, and source of motivation to continue working on goals, (d) self-evaluation of performance in relation to identified standards, and (e) determining major factors associated with progress or lack of progress.

The Take Action Process

1. Break long-term goal into short-term goals
2. Plan
3. Act
4. Evaluate
5. Adjust

Take Action provides the materials and exercises to teach a goal attainment process in seven lessons. Once students complete the lessons, teachers must provide ample opportunities for practicing the goal attainment process with numerous settings until the process becomes generalized across settings and maintained across time. Educators may use a six-question format or a simpler three-question format to teach their students.

Six question format. The six-question format teaches students how to accomplish their long-term goals. It consists of eight lessons and typically takes eight to 10 hours of instruction across two to three weeks. Students learn to first break their long-range goal into smaller, reachable specific or short-term steps that can be accomplished in a week. Next the students answer six questions to establish a plan: (a) Standard: What will I be satisfied with? (b) Feedback: How will I get feedback on my performance? (d) Motivation: Why do I want to do this? (d) Strategy: What methods will I use? (e) Support: What help do I need? and (f) Schedule: When will I do it? At the end of a week, students answer a set of evaluation questions and then make any needed adjustment in the six parts of the plan or with the goal itself.

Three question format. This simpler format teaches students how to attain their daily goals. In comparison to the six-question goal attainment format, the three-question format requires mastery of fewer goal attainment concepts and terms, and asks the students to do less writing. Depending upon the student's acquisition speed, teaching requires six to 10 hours of instruction across a week or two. With the daily goal format students don't break long-term goals into short-term

objectives, but rather use goals that can be accomplished daily. The students answer three questions to accomplish their daily plan: (a) Strategy: What methods will I use? (b) Support: What help do I need? and (d) Schedule: When will I do it? Students learn to evaluate and adjust their plans daily instead of weekly.

Sample lesson description. The following bullets briefly describe a few of the *Take Action* lessons. At the end of the lessons, students demonstrate mastery through a variety of activities, including brief exams.

> *Lesson 1.* Introduces the *Take Action* process. In this first lesson students learn the four major parts of the take action process: plan, act, evaluate, and adjust. Students complete a brief quiz at the end of this lesson to demonstrate their knowledge of the four take action steps. Students also begin the process of breaking down a goal into into basic parts.

> *Lesson 2.* This lesson introduces students to the plan parts. The lesson begins with students watching a 10-minute video entitled *Take Action*, which shows students developing plans and working on attaining their own goals. Next, students learn four plan parts: standard, motivation, strategy, and schedule. Numerous exercises teach students the meaning of each of the plan parts. Once again students complete a brief quiz to demonstrate mastery.

> *Lesson 3.* Students learn the last two plan parts and start learning how to develop a complete plan. Hands-on activities demonstrate each plan part. One of the concluding activities is for students to match the question being asked to the correct part of the plan.

> *Lesson 6.* Students learn the importance of evaluation and adjustment to goal attainment. To do this, they examine the evaluation and adjustments components of earlier plans.

Need for Teaching Students Goal Attainment Skills

Mithaug, Mithaug, Agran, Martin, and Wehmeyer (2007) consider goal attainment as the most important self-determination component. Yet, youth who receive special education services possess far fewer goal attainment and other self-determination skills than do secondary general education students who are not disabled. Goal oriented performance involves a two-step process where students first set goals based upon their interests, skills, and limits. Second, individuals develop plans, then take action on the plans to achieve their goals (Martin, Huber Marshall, & DePry, 2008). Active involvement in goal setting may add purposefulness to life, and self-directed goal setting often facilitates improved performance (Bandura, 1997; Mithaug, Mithaug,, Agran, Martin,, & Wehmeyer, 2003).

Goal setting facilitates performance increases because goals specify the requirements for success and prompts self-monitoring toward the desired outcome (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000). Goals impact performance by influencing what students attend to, how they mobilize their effort, and how they persist in working toward attaining the goal (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). However, for students with learning problems, goal setting by itself may not yield these beneficial gains unless students with disabilities receive explicit goal attainment instruction (Mithaug, et al., 2003).

Research Documenting Effectiveness

A growing number of studies have documented the effectiveness of the Take Action goal attainment instructional program. German, Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2000) undertook a study to determine the effectiveness of *Take Action* in teaching goal attainment to six students with mild to moderate mental retardation. After completing the modified lessons that come with the Take Action instructional program, all the students had significant increases in the attainment of specific daily goals. During baseline, students achieved from 0 to 25% of their daily goals. After instruction in the take action process, students attained 80 to 100% of their goals.

Walden (2002) demonstrated that university students with learning disabilities could learn the *Take Action* goal attainment process. He showed that even college students lost their acquired skills over time if they did not continue working with the take action process, and that the skills did not generalize to a novel task. Walden's (2002) findings strongly suggest the need for continued practice with the *Take Action* process. He showed that the lesson package itself was insufficient in teaching generalization and maintenance of the *Take Action* process.

Martin, Marshall, and El-Kazimi (2007) reported on using Take Action with 101 middle school students (with and without disabilities) in four sections of eighth grade English. Using a multiple baseline design across class sections, Take Action increased students' self-determination assessment scores, the number of long-term goals set and attained, and students with IEPs experienced the largest growth gains. Students reported after the study ended that Take Action assisted them in planning and accomplishing the goals.

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