



**John L. Luckner,** EdD, is professor and coordinator of the deaf education teacher preparation program in the School of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley.

# fostering skills in self-advocacy:

## a key to access in school and beyond

*By John L. Luckner and Sharon J. Becker*

Self-advocacy occurs when deaf or hard of hearing individuals explain to hearing teachers, classmates, bosses, and officemates the nature of their hearing loss, their language skills, and the accommodations they require in order to effectively do their work, participate in conversations, and get involved in other activities.

Self-advocacy may be especially important for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and attend schools with predominately hearing peers and teachers. Similarly, it may be critical for deaf and hard of hearing adults who work with hearing coworkers. Self-advocacy may be like learning arithmetic; the skills for it may not come easily to some people. Therefore, self-advocacy should be taught while students are in school, giving them multiple opportunities to understand and practice their skills prior to entering postsecondary education and the world of work.

### **What is Self-Advocacy?**

Self-advocacy has been defined as “the extent to which a student can identify the supports that he or she needs to succeed and communicate that information to others, including teachers and employers” (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Educators and researchers have indicated that self-advocacy skills are vital for deaf and hard of hearing students to succeed in school, postsecondary education, and work environments (Bullard, 2003; English, 1997; Fiedler & Danneker, 2007; Garay, 2003; Hammer, 2004; Luckner & Stewart, 2003; Schreiner, 2007; Spencer & Marschark, 2010; Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2007).

Despite this widespread agreement, self-advocacy skills and opportunities to self-advocate are frequently not included in the instruction of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Garay, 2003; Ingraham & Anderson, 2001; Velaski-Sebald, 2005). The consequence can be severe—students who are unable to advocate for themselves may end up unemployed, underemployed, and unable to live independently (Bowe, 2003; Wheeler-Scruggs, 2002).

*Photo by John T. Consoli*

**Right:** One of the four components in the framework to develop students' self-advocacy is leadership. Students should be able to lead their own meetings and make presentations.



**Sharon J. Becker**, MA, is a doctoral student in the School of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado and has been a teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing for over 20 years.

The authors welcome questions and comments about this article at [john.luckner@unco.edu](mailto:john.luckner@unco.edu) and [sjoybeck@gmail.com](mailto:sjoybeck@gmail.com).

### **To Teach Self-Advocacy A Conceptual Model for Planning and Assessment**

Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) conducted an extensive literature review of self-advocacy and solicited input from more than 30 professionals to develop a conceptual framework. Based on four components, the framework has been modified by us for use with deaf and hard of hearing students. Using this framework, educators can develop a guide for planning and assessment. The components of the framework are:

- **Knowledge of self**—Students should develop an understanding of their interests, preferences, strengths, and needs. Simultaneously, they should be able to explain their hearing loss, be aware of the potential impact of their hearing loss on their academic and social lives, and be able to identify strategies that enhance their performance.
- **Knowledge of rights**—Students should know their rights as citizens, as individuals with a hearing loss, and as students receiving education under state and federal laws.

• **Communication**—Students should be able to interact effectively with individuals and small groups using appropriate body language, negotiation, persuasion, compromise, and, when necessary, assertion.

• **Leadership**—Students should be able to function in groups, lead their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) or transition meetings, make presentations about hearing loss, and mentor younger students.

### Promoting Self-Advocacy Teaching Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge and skills in self-advocacy may be gained when professionals provide explicit instruction, set up role playing opportunities, and structure occasions to practice. Each of these educational activities is described below.

**Explicit instruction.** When providing explicit instruction, Archer and Hughes (2011) suggest using three processes to show students what they are expected to learn, to give them opportunities to practice the skill under conditions that promote high levels of success, and to provide an opportunity to demonstrate that they can perform the skill independently. The processes are:

1. Modeling or demonstrating the skills (the *I do* stage, in which the teacher models skills)
2. Providing guided practice (the *we do* stage, in which the teacher and the students practice skills together)
3. Providing unprompted practice (the *you do* stage, in which the students demonstrate skills unaccompanied)

**Role play.** Prior to situations that require students to use self-advocacy skills, educators and students talk through scenarios and use role play to practice the appropriate skills. Examples of role play include acting through situations that involve school and situations that involve transition. School

role play might prompt students to cope with such emergencies as the battery of his or her cochlear implant dying or a general education teacher who consistently chooses not to wear the frequency modulation (FM) system. Transition role play, on the other hand, might include a student choosing a plan of study to become a car mechanic, scheduling an interpreter for a medical appointment, or making plans to move out of the family home.

#### Structuring practice opportunities.

Students can practice using self-advocacy knowledge and skills during their IEP meetings. A four-level incremental approach for student involvement in IEP meetings, adapted from Mason, McGahee-Kovac, and Johnson (2004), allows students to address levels of opportunity as well as progress through levels in accordance with their age, capability, and opportunities for practice:

- *Level 1*—Students introduce everyone at the meeting to each other.
- *Level 2*—Students present their goals for the future.
- *Level 3*—Students explain their disability, share their individual strengths and challenges, and explain beneficial accommodations.
- *Level 4*—Students lead and close the meeting.

#### Putting It Together Teaching the Critical Skill of Self-Advocacy

Teaching self-advocacy should begin during elementary school, and specific self-advocacy goals should be embedded in IEPs to ensure that instructional opportunities for practice take place. Successful self-advocates overcome barriers, educate others, and make positive transitions to adult life. What more can we want for our students?

## An Educator's Guide: Self-Advocacy Resources

Hands & Voices,  
[www.handsandvoices.org/needs/pdf\\_imgs/selfadvocacy.pdf](http://www.handsandvoices.org/needs/pdf_imgs/selfadvocacy.pdf)

Hearing Loss Association of America, [www.hearingloss.org/content/advocacy-people-hearing-loss](http://www.hearingloss.org/content/advocacy-people-hearing-loss)

PepNet, [www.pepnet.org/resources/faq19](http://www.pepnet.org/resources/faq19)

National Association of the Deaf, [www.nad.org/issues/about-law-and-advocacy-center/advocacy-tips](http://www.nad.org/issues/about-law-and-advocacy-center/advocacy-tips)

Informal Inventory of Independence and Self-Advocacy Skills for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students, [www.handsandvoices.org/pdf/SAIInventory.pdf](http://www.handsandvoices.org/pdf/SAIInventory.pdf)

Phonak's Guide to Access Planning, [www.phonakonline.com/MyGap/GapMain.html](http://www.phonakonline.com/MyGap/GapMain.html)

Self-Determination Synthesis Project, UNC Charlotte, NC, [http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd\\_lesson\\_plans.asp](http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd_lesson_plans.asp)

Me! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy, [www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy.html](http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy.html)

# Self-Advocacy Competencies for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Developed by examining the work of Clark and Scheele (2005), the Douglas County School District (2009), the Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Student Family Support Services (2010), and the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's (2006) K-12 program, the chart below allows students to be evaluated on knowledge and skill competencies for each component necessary for successful self-advocacy.

|   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>KNOWLEDGE OF SELF</b>  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <i>Individual</i>   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands strengths and weaknesses  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Identifies interests and goals  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands his/her hearing loss  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type/degree of his/her hearing loss</li> <li>• Potential impact of his/her hearing loss on communication and learning</li> <li>• Technology, amplification, and assistive listening devices</li> <li>• Responsible for care of technology, amplification, and assistive listening devices</li> </ul> |   |   |   |   |   |
| Evaluates postsecondary options with respect to skill level and personal goals  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <i>Environmental</i>  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands impact of the environment on learning (e.g., noise, distance, attention, fatigue)   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands classroom factors that may help or hinder learning  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands accommodations  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands modifications   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Cultural awareness and preferences  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS</b>  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Indicates basic wants and needs   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the concept/definition of self-advocacy   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the concepts of laws and rights   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands how laws and rights apply to self   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the basics and implications of the IDEA   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the basics and implications of the ADA  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the roles and responsibilities of the interpreter/transliterators   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the services, accommodations, and modifications listed on his/her IEP   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands the roles and responsibilities of the members of the educational team   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands public accommodations and how to access them  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understands where complaints and suggestions can be directed to school personnel, various government agencies, or consumer groups   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Knowledge of local and national resources available to support the rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>COMMUNICATION</b>  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Responds to meaningful information  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Attends to/participates in classroom discussions and respects other students' input (i.e., proper eye contact, turn-taking, social greetings)   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Follows directions and class rules to share information/communicate during instruction  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Monitors understanding and uses strategies to aid in comprehension  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Explains his/her hearing loss, potential impact, use of equipment, accommodations, and modifications  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Awareness of and identification of barriers to communication  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Effectively works with interpreters/transliterators   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Demonstrates communication repair strategies  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Effectively uses other access options (e.g., CAN, CART, peer notes)   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Expresses communication, academic and social rights, needs, and wants appropriately   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Accesses communication in the community   |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>LEADERSHIP</b>   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Participates in goal-setting conferences  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Participates in IEP meetings  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Participates in transition planning   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Makes presentations to groups (e.g., students, parents, preservice teachers, teachers, community members)   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mentors younger students  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1 = <i>Date selected</i> 2 = <i>Not observed or not applicable</i> 3 = <i>Inconsistent</i> 4 = <i>Consistent</i> 5 = <i>Generalized</i>   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Professionals on the Importance of Self-Advocacy

“If students do not learn to make choices based on their own interests and to experience and learn from the consequences of these choices in the structured environment of school, it is unlikely that they will be able to do so in response to the ever-changing demands of home, community, and work.”

~ Michael L. Wehmeyer  
(2007, p. 18)

“Clearly, the embedding of specific self-advocacy goals into an IEP is one of the strongest assurances that such instruction will take place and be monitored for accountability, just as teachers instruct and monitor other important student goals.”

~ Mary B. Schreiner  
(2007, p. 303)

### References

- Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Bowe, F. G. (2003). Transition for deaf and hard-of-hearing students: A blueprint for change. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 8(4), 486-493. doi.org/10.1093/deafed/eng024
- Bullard, C. (2003). *The itinerant teacher's handbook*. Hillsboro, OR: Butte Publications, Inc.
- Clark, G., & Scheele, L. (2005). *Informal inventory of independence and self-advocacy skills for deaf/hard of hearing students*. Retrieved from <http://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/selfAdvocacy.htm>
- Douglas County School District. (2009). *Self-advocacy skills for students who are deaf or hard of hearing*. Unpublished manuscript.
- English, K. M. (1997). *Self-advocacy for students who are deaf or hard of hearing*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Fiedler, C. R., & Danneker, J. E. (2007). Self-advocacy instruction: Bridging the research-to-practice gap. Focus on *Exceptional Children*, 39(8), 1-20.
- Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. D. (2012). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Garay, S. V. (2003). Listening to the voices of deaf students: Essential transition issues. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35(4), 44-48.
- Hammer, M. R. (2004). Using the self-advocacy strategy to increase student participation in IEP conferences. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 39(5), 295-300. doi:10.1177/10534512040390050601
- Ingraham, C., & Anderson, H. (2001). Self-determination, transition, and deaf-blind students. *Odyssey*, 2(3), 24 -25.
- Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Student Family Support Services. (2010). *The expanded core curriculum for students who are deaf or hard of hearing*. Retrieved November 6, 2012, from [http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=584:audiologydeaf-and-hard-of-hearing-education&catid=539:programs-a-services&Itemid=3099](http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=584:audiologydeaf-and-hard-of-hearing-education&catid=539:programs-a-services&Itemid=3099)
- Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. (2006). *Transition skills guidelines*. Retrieved November 18, 2012, from <http://www.gallaudet.edu/documents/clerc/tsg.pdf>
- Luckner, J. L., & Stewart, J. (2003). Self-assessments and other perceptions of successful adults who are deaf: An initial investigation. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 148(3), 243-250. doi.org/10.1353/aad.2003.0020
- Mason, C. Y., McGahee-Kovac, M., & Johnson, L. (2004). How to help students lead their IEP meetings. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36(3), 18-24.
- Schreiner, M. B. (2007). Effective self-advocacy: What students and special educators need to know. *Interventions in School and Clinic*, 42(5), 300-304. doi.org/10.1177/10534512070420050701
- Spencer, P. E., & Marschark, M. (2010). *Evidence-based practice in educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Test, D. W., Fowler, C. H., Wood, W. M., Brewer, D. M., & Eddy, S. (2005). A conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(1), 43-54. doi.org/10.1177/07419325050260010601
- Velaski-Sebald, A. M. (2005). *Teacher perceptions of self-determination for students who are deaf or hard of hearing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (2007). *Promoting self-determination in students with developmental disabilities*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Wheeler-Scruggs, K. (2002). Assessing the employment and independence of people who are deaf and low functioning. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 147(4), 11-17.