



Assessing Educator Perceptions and Needs Regarding Guardianship and Supported Decision-Making

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Background

As students with disabilities approach adulthood, families are typically faced with the question of how to handle decision-making for them as legal adults. Options include:

- **Guardianship** is a legal process by which the courts take authority for decision-making away from the person with an intellectual disability and give it to parents or other interested parties.
- **Supported decision-making (SDM)** is a process by which a supportive network of individuals helps the person with a disability make his or her own legally-enforceable decisions.

This process is usually started at school with the distribution of materials regarding transition planning.

Objectives

Specific research questions are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions, levels of understanding, and attitudes about guardianship vs. SDM among educators who serve children with disabilities?
2. What, if any, information do educators wish to receive about guardianship and/or SDM?
3. What is the preferred method of delivery for the desired information?

Methods

Study Design. A cross-sectional study has been done to gather information from educators and related professionals by using an online anonymous self-administered survey.

Participants and Setting. Educators and related professionals who have previously worked with the Community Support Network (CSN) at WIHD.

Recruitment. An introductory email and link to the online project survey (SurveyMonkey) was sent to CSN's established email distribution list as well as via CSN's Facebook page and Twitter account. A reminder email was sent one month after introductory email. Survey was available for two months thru April of 2020.

Data Collection Methods. Investigators used SurveyMonkey to develop and distribute the online project survey. A sample of survey questions are shown below.

Data Analysis. Demographic data were first summarized; frequencies of responses to the survey questions were then calculated for the overall group.

This study has been approved by the IRB at New York Medical College.

Community Partner



Naomi Brickel, MSED
 Director, Community Support Network (CSN), Westchester Institute for Human Development

Results

A total of 38 participants completed the survey as of April 2020:

- 81.6% were educators or related professionals who work with individuals with disabilities
- 61.1% were involved in the transition planning process
- 48.7% were both educators and parents of individuals with disabilities
- 59.4% were between 40 and 59 years of age; 37.7% were 60+
- 94.3% were female
- 91.2% were white

- 32.3% have worked within the education system for 0-19 years; 67.7% have 20+
- 67.7% worked in a high school setting
- 75.7% worked in the public school system

When asked if additional information was desired, 46% of participants wanted information on guardianship, 57.1% wanted information on SDM. Most requested this information via online resources/link (72.7%), brochures (50.0%), and webinar (40.9%).

Figure 1. Participant level of understanding (n=38)

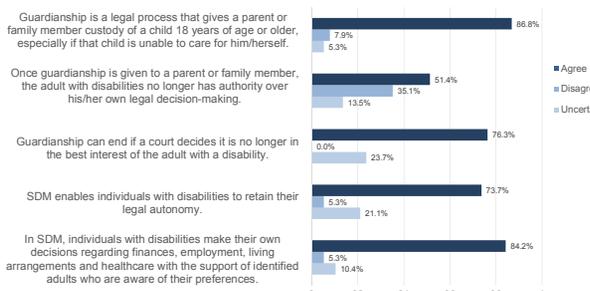
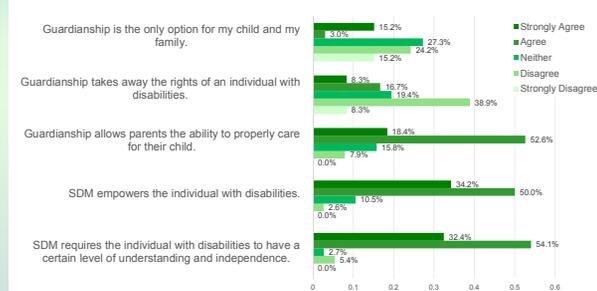


Figure 2. Participant perceptions/attitudes (n=38)



Discussion

Educators who have previously served or engaged with WIHD's CSN have some understanding about guardianship and SDM; however, many participants did not realize that once a guardian is appointed, the individual with disabilities no longer has legal capacity. In addition, almost half of the participants disagreed with the notion that guardianship takes away the individual's rights to make decisions. These findings indicate a lack of understanding of the legal construct of guardianship, which is especially of concern considering that the sample was predominantly comprised of educators working in public high school settings, one-third of whom have greater than 20 years of experience. Participants appeared open to the idea that SDM empowers individuals, provided that the individual has a certain level of understanding and/or independence. Approximately half of the participants were interested in receiving more information regarding guardianship and SDM, primarily via online resources and/or brochures. Given the misperception regarding guardianship, this presents an opportunity for further education on this topic as well as SDM.