

Levels of Student Autonomy



Levels of Student Autonomy is a simple system that supports student independence and personalized learning. Establish and teach shared language around levels of student autonomy: guidance for how, where and with whom students can work. Then, students move up to the next level as they demonstrate that they are prepared for greater independence.

▶ 1: Establish and teach the language

Establish shared language around four (give or take) levels of student autonomy. Explore the language deeply as a team and with students. Post the levels in a central, public space.

Here is language adapted from SPARK School at Kyrene de las Manitas:

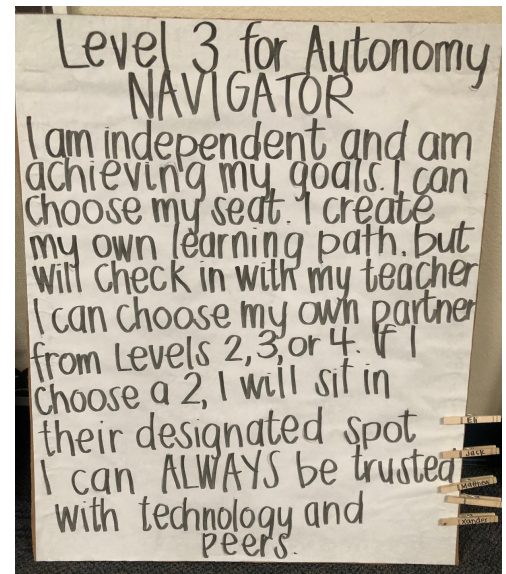
Level 4: Pathfinder	I am independent and exceeding my goals. I may choose my seat. I can create my path and advocate for myself by setting appointments with my teachers when I need support. I choose my own partners from Levels 1–4. I can always be trusted with technology and am a leader among my peers.
Level 3: Navigator	I am independent and am achieving my goals. I can choose my own seat. I create my own learning path but will check in with my teacher. I can choose my own partner from Levels 2, 3 or 4. If I choose a peer at a Level 2, I will sit in their designated spot. I can always be trusted with technology and peers.
Level 2: Surveyor	I am working on being independent to achieve my goals. I remain at my assigned seat. I follow the menu my teacher creates with me. I am given a cue to start my work. With my teacher's approval, I may choose to work with a partner from Levels 3 or 4. I am proving I can be trusted with technology.
Level 1: Explorer	I need support to achieve my goals, for now. My assigned spot is near my teacher. I stay in my assigned spot. I follow the menu my teacher creates. I am given a cue to start my work. I may only work with a partner my teacher assigns or approves.

▶ 2: Create a system for communication

Create a system for communicating to students and teachers which level each student is on. Your system might be public or private, digital or paper; there are advantages to each approach.

SPARK School uses a public paper system. Levels are described on chart paper. Students move their clothespins to the appropriate levels based on conferences with teachers, and learners may initiate these conferences at any point.

It's important to note that Levels of Student Autonomy is not a behavior management system. Students do not move up (or down) a level based on a single choice or behavior, for example. Instead, moving up a level typically requires weeks of focused effort for students. Additionally, the general trend for movement is "up." While students do occasionally move down a level, this is uncommon.



Level 3: Navigator sign at SPARK School

3: Facilitate regular goal-setting and reflection

Add regular reflection and goal-setting with respect to autonomy to students' daily or weekly routines. Four ways to do this might be:

- **Discussion and reflection:** Create a reliable structure for continuing to communicate about what autonomy means, discussing the value of autonomy in school and in the real world, and encouraging student reflection with respect to autonomy.
- **Shout-outs:** Facilitate student-led, values-based, end-of-day shout-outs: The last five minutes of each school day are devoted to students publicly recognizing their peers for living out the community's values (e.g., "I want to recognize Charlie for demonstrating autonomy this morning during problem-based learning time by...").
- **Journaling:** Offer daily or weekly journaling with respect to challenges and successes in demonstrating autonomy.
- **Family conferences:** Whether your family conferences are student-led or educator-led, ensure levels of student autonomy is a regular part of the discussion, and ensure student reflection and goal-setting with respect to autonomy is a key component of the conference.

4: Create a system for moving between levels

Students move up levels as they demonstrate they are ready for greater independence.

Consider helping students build their self-advocacy skills by encouraging them to self-identify when they are ready to move up a level and by inviting them to initiate the process with the educator team. You might create an "application," for example, and set up time to meet with students each week, at their request, to discuss their progress and readiness.

Visit education.asu.edu/lsaapp to download a customizable student application to move up a level of student autonomy.

This resource was inspired by the practices at SPARK School at Kyrene de las Manitas. SPARK School's practices were in turn inspired by Levels of Autonomy as implemented at Patrick Henry School (Chicago Public Schools). You can learn more about Patrick Henry School's implementation of Levels of Autonomy in [Developing Student Agency](#) from LEAP learning framework. <http://links.asu.edu/PHSLOA>