



Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills

Planning for Life After High School

A Handbook for:

- ▶ Students
- ▶ School Counselors
- ▶ Teachers
- ▶ Parents

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Message from State Superintendent Tony Evers



All students deserve to graduate from high school feeling hopeful about their future and ready for further educational opportunities and the workforce. It is our mission to prepare Wisconsin's students to become contributing members of their communities and the world by connecting youth to the resources necessary for a successful transition. For students with disabilities, this can be accomplished with comprehensive advance planning for life after high school. The purpose of this handbook, "Opening Doors to

Self-Determination Skills," is to assist youth and their families to navigate through this planning process.

Students, planning for your life after high school is an integral piece of a quality education. We want you to graduate school with feelings of hope about opportunities for the future. This handbook has been created to assist you to develop advocacy skills so you can prepare for your transition from high school. The handbook provides valuable information and resources for you to learn more about your rights, wishes, needs, and strengths in planning for your future. It is a tool for your success.

Remember, you have many people who will support you in your planning; in the end, you will make the decisions. Being well informed and well prepared will help ensure you have a happy and successful life after high school.

Good luck as you continue to plan your future!

Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent

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Overview of Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills

Students leave high school and go in many different directions. Some choose to go right into the workforce (see Opening Doors to Employment). Some go into the military service. Still others go on to postsecondary education (see Opening Doors for Postsecondary Education and Training). You have all these options too. It is important to begin planning early for whatever path you choose. Regardless of which option you choose, you must identify the skills and supports you will need to reach your goals.

This handbook deals with the skills you will need no matter what option you choose after high school, self-determination & self-advocacy skills.

Self-determination is a mix of skills you will use throughout your life which include your personal beliefs and values and skills that empower you to make choices and take control of your life according to your own interests, needs, and abilities.

Self-advocacy is the process of speaking for yourself and knowledge of your rights, wishes, needs, and strengths.

The common thread is knowing yourself and gaining empowerment through this knowledge.

When working on self-determination and self-advocacy skills, you should think about the following:

- Knowing your strengths (in and out of school)
- Knowing the areas you need to work on (in and out of school)
- Knowing your interests (in and out of school)
- Knowing what kinds of support you might need and who could provide that support
- Making your own choices and decisions
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities
- Planning for your future

Although eighth, ninth and tenth grades are still early in your school career, they are important times to begin thinking about and planning for those things you will be looking forward to after graduation. You may want to continue your education (see Opening Doors for Postsecondary Education and Training) or enter the workforce (see Opening Doors to Employment). Both of these options require self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

This handbook is designed as a guide to help students with disabilities take another step in preparing for “life after high school.” The activities in this handbook should be done with your parent, teacher, or guidance counselor.

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Time Line for Developing Self-Determination Skills

Pre-High School (starting in elementary school)

- Know your strengths (what you are good at).
- Know your areas of need (where you need help).
- Know your interests (what you like).
- Know what kind of support you need to be successful.
- Learn how to make choices.
- Be a part of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, at first by introducing IEP members and describing yourself (interests, likes, dislikes).
- Share a list of accommodations you need with general education teachers.
- Participate in clubs, sports, and other activities kids your age are in.
- Begin to understand your own disability and what it means to your learning.
- Choose a time and place to study and do homework at home each day.
- Help out with family chores (making dinner, shopping, cleaning your room).
- Volunteer and help out in your local community.
- Enjoy who you are! Learn about yourself. You are more than your disability.

Ninth Grade

- Continue with activities from pre-high school.
- Attend your class scheduling meeting with your guidance counselor or teacher. Share information about yourself (likes, interests, needs) and what courses you would like to take.
- Be able to describe your disability and how it affects your learning.
- Be able to describe needed academic accommodations (lecture outline, extended test taking, note taker, books on tape, etc.).

Ninth Grade (cont'd)

- Stay involved in school and community activities that interest you.
- Make sure you know what you need to graduate and keep track of your grades and credits.
- Share your future goals with family members, teachers, and guidance counselors.
- Keep volunteering in the community and/or find a part-time job.

Tenth Grade

- Continue with activities from ninth grade.
- Learn more about whether assistive technology can help you reach your goals.
- Participate more in your IEP. Bring a list of your goals to your meeting. Invite a support person to come and let them know how they can support you. Listen to others and share what you know about yourself. Make sure your IEP includes written transition plans/goals.
- Identify more specific interests, skills, and needs related to your goals in the areas of work, future living, and being a part of the community.
- Visit colleges and/or training places for future careers. Adjust your short-term goals to have the skills you need for your future places.
- Visit or “shadow” jobs and businesses in order to learn more about what you may want to do and what skills are needed. Add this information to your long and short-term goals.
- Learn how to get where you want to go. Learn how to use public transportation or work on getting your driver’s license and learn about car insurance and other costs.
- Learn about support services available once you graduate from high school (e.g., adult service agencies, student assistance centers in postsecondary education).
- Continue to learn how to be the “expert” about you!

Time Line for Developing Self-Determination Skills (cont'd)

Eleventh/Twelfth Grades

- Continue with activities from ninth and tenth grades.
- Make sure you are on track for graduation.
- Talk to people with disabilities who have recently graduated and ask them for tips for a smooth transition.
- Invite people to your IEP meeting (e.g., an employer, a friend who understands your goals, etc.). Remember this meeting is about planning for your future. You know yourself best!
- Invite the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) counselor to your IEP as well as other adult agency representatives.
- Share your goals/dreams with your IEP case manager/guidance counselor/teacher prior to your meeting. If you decide not to attend your meeting, choose someone to represent you and your goals.
- Attend your IEP meetings and start each meeting by introducing yourself and sharing information about you (e.g., information on how your disability impacts your learning, goals for life after high school, etc.).
- Present to your history/civics class a presentation about disability issues/laws.
- Maintain an “exit” portfolio including information on your strengths, areas to improve or learn, goals, choices for learning/accommodations, etc.
- Be a “mentor” or support person to a younger person with a disability.
- Set career goals. Have a plan A and a plan B.
- Ask people to write letters of recommendations about you and your skills.
- Finalize plans for independent living. Remember you may be able to stay in school through age 21.
- Keep copies of your latest evaluation and IEP in a safe place! This is your proof/documentation for adult services.
- Make sure you know what services you will be “eligible” for. Remember, you will no longer be “entitled” to receive services. You will now need to be “eligible” for services.

Note: As you learn more about yourself and gather more information, your answers to the questions above will change.



After High School, the Rules Change

Laws and Responsibilities

The following chart describes general differences in various areas between public high school and employment in the adult service world.

| High School | Adult Services |
|---|---|
| Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); free and appropriate public education (FAPE) | Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) |
| School services are an entitlement (from ages 3-21 or until regular high school diploma requirements are met). | Adult services are based on eligibility which may be different for each agency. |
| School attendance is mandatory. | Consumers decide to use an adult service agency to support them in their employment goals. |
| School districts are required to identify students with disabilities through free evaluations and the individualized education program (IEP) process. | Consumers are responsible for disclosing and providing documentation of a disability. They must be self-advocates (see Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills). |
| Students receive special education and related services to address needs based on identified disability. | Consumers apply for services needed through various adult service agencies. |
| Services include individually designed instruction, modifications, and accommodations based on IEP. | Services are individually designed through Individual Plans for Employment or a similar individualized plan developed with the consumer. |
| Progress toward IEP goals is monitored and communicated to the parent(s) and/or student. | Progress toward employment goals are monitored by the consumer and adult service provider. Self-advocacy is a must. |
| Schools assist in connecting the student with the community support agencies if so identified as a transition need according to the IEP. | Consumers must request services needed and identify what agencies would best meet their needs. |

BOTTOM LINE: After high school services are based on eligibility, and you need to find the services and provide proof that accommodations are necessary! This isn't high school, but you can be prepared. Complete the next planning sheet to learn how you can "know yourself."



Knowing Yourself

What are your strengths?

What are your areas of need? _

What “works for you?”

What does “not work for you?”

What are your interests?

What is your dream?

What is important to you?

Rank in order (1, 2, 3, etc.) the areas you want to work on now for your future

Career/Job (See Opening Doors to Employment)

Housing

Social/Free time

Finances

Postsecondary Education (see Opening Doors for Postsecondary Education and Training)

Transportation

Part of knowing yourself includes accepting yourself for who you are and understanding your rights and responsibilities.

Although 9th grade is early in your school career or you may feel too “busy” to deal with things while in high school, it is an important time to begin thinking about and planning for those things you will be looking forward to after graduating from high school. While still in school you are in a “safe” place to make mistakes and learn from them with support from your family, friends, teachers, guidance counselor, and administrators.

You may find people who tell you that your choices are not realistic or possible for you. Remember that you know yourself best. Learn about yourself, what choices there are, and who can support you with your choices. We all need help. Asking people you trust for support or help is important when working toward your goals. Believe in yourself!

While in school, how can you be involved in your IEP?

Now that you have a general idea about yourself and how laws change once you leave high school, you are ready to look at how you can start to accept who you are while you recognize your rights and responsibilities.

Check off two areas where you think you can start, right now, to be involved in your IEP.

- ☐ Sharing information with my case manager, family, friends, teachers, etc. before the meeting about my strengths, weaknesses, interests, preferences, and needs.
- ☐ Inviting a support person of my choice to my IEP meeting. Keep in mind a support person is someone who you trust to listen to you and help you with reaching your goals.
- ☐ Introducing all the people at my IEP meeting to each other.
- ☐ Sharing my goals at my IEP meeting.
- ☐ Finding a support person to share my goals for me at my meeting because I am just not quite ready yet, but I know it is important for this information to be shared.
- ☐ Other



While in school, how can you let people know what accommodations/modifications you need?

Keep in mind that a **reasonable accommodation or modification** helps a person with a disability to have equal access; it “levels the playing field.” Accommodations are not a favor or ways to give you an unfair advantage.

Check off one area where you think you can start right now. Remember after high school it is up to you to do this on your own.

- ☐ Sharing my learning “profile” created by my IEP team members, including myself, with all my teachers in person.
- ☐ Asking my special education case manager or another support person to go with me as I share my learning “profile.”
- ☐ Attaching a personalized note from me to my learning “profile” that my IEP case manager will share with teachers.
- ☐ Other



Knowing Yourself (cont'd)

While in school, how can you learn about services that are available after leaving high school?

Ask a support person (teacher, guidance counselor, administrator, assistant) to help you find contact names, phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, etc., on two adult service agencies.

| | Contact Name | Address | Phone Number | E-mail |
|--|--------------|---------|--------------|--------|
| Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) | | | | |
| Postsecondary Education | | | | |
| Adult Service Agency (employment) | | | | |
| Adult Service Agency (housing) | | | | |
| Community Recreation (clubs, activities, etc.) | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

Planning

So far you have started to know yourself by completing the planning sheets. This section deals with planning which means learning how to set goals, plan actions to reach goals, and revise goals along the way. You may think you have plenty of time to set goals. Keep in mind, if you don't set personal goals, others may start planning your future for you. Don't let others plan for you or guess what you want, you can do this!

Possible Goal Areas/Follow Your Dreams!

First, goals must be “measurable.” For example - In three years I’ll earn my high school diploma. I will turn in three late math assignments by the end of the week.

Next, goals must be “observable.” How will you know when you reach your goal? For example, what will it look like when you find a job/ career you are interested in?

Finally, goals can be short-term (3-11 months), long-term (1-4 years), or very long-term (5 or more years). Your short-term goals should be related to your long-term goals. For example, long-term goal: to be able to get to work on my own. Short-term goal: while in high school I will learn how to use public transportation, access agency transportation services, or complete coursework needed for getting my driver’s license.

Goals that prepare you for your future life could be in the areas of:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| Employment (job / career) | Recreation/ Leisure |
| Education (high school/ postsecondary) | Personal/ Social |
| Housing | Transportation |

Go through the next planning sheets to help you learn how to set goals for your future. Remember, goals change as you learn more about yourself and the world around you. Share your dreams with others and listen to their thoughts too. The final decision is yours!

Assessing Your Future

Start with your dreams and visions (for example, if I knew that I could not fail, had the resources and supports I needed, and was totally supported by my family and friends, what would I do?). Talk with your parents, teachers, and guidance counselors to answer the following:

Imagine yourself five years from now...

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Where will you live? | |
| Where will you work? | |
| Who will be your friends? | |
| What will you do for fun? | |

Ten years from now...

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Where will you live? | |
| Where will you work? | |
| Who will be your friends? | |
| What will you do for fun? | |



Reach your goals one step at a time

Circle one goal area:

employment (job/career)

education (high school/postsecondary)

housing

recreation/leisure

personal/social

transportation

Identify one long-term goal for your area that you chose. For example, in the area of "recreation/leisure" my long-term goal is to make two new friends that I share common interests with and do not "hang out" with now before I graduate.

Area:


Long-Term Goal (1-4 years or more)

Next, identify three short-term goals related to your long-term goal. Remember short-term goals can be reached anywhere from 3-11 months. For example, a possible short-term goal that relates to my long-term goal of meeting new friends could be "in the next three months I will sit with a new person, at a different lunch table, and introduce myself."

Short-Term Goal

Short-Term Goal

Short-Term Goal

1. 
Long-term goal

4.
Short-term goal

3.
Short-term goal

2.
Short-term goal



Acting on your goals

Now that you have worked through the planning sheets on knowing yourself and planning, you are ready for the next step of gaining skills to assist you with being a self-determined person. The following planning sheet activities will help develop these skills so you can “act” as a self-determined person. Using self-determination skills will guide you as you work toward your goals so you get what you want or need in life.

“Acting” includes learning skills such as taking safe risks, communicating and getting resources and supports, negotiating, dealing with conflict, and constructive criticism. As a self-advocate, you will learn how to get what you want or need in life with the support of the people around you.

Making Choices and Decisions

Three points to keep in mind when making decisions are:

First, there are major (big) choices/decisions. For example, the location of your first apartment.

Next, there are minor (little) choices/decisions. For example, should you have fast food or pack your own lunch?

Finally, all choices/decisions have consequences which can be good or bad. For example, the rent may be cheaper for one apartment. Another apartment may cost a bit more, but it is on a bus line so you can travel to work and other places. Or fast food lunch is quick and you might enjoy the flavor. However, if you pack a lunch, you could save money.

There are five decision-making steps:

1. What is the decision you need to make? For example, is it okay to skip work to play in a basketball game?
2. What decisions could I make? For example, tell my boss I’m sick and play in the game; tell the team I’ll miss the game, because I have to go to work; or ask my boss if she can find someone to work for me that day, and I’ll go to work if she can’t.
3. Evaluate each choice. (What are pluses and minuses of each choice?)
4. Pick the best choice. Describe which choice you think is best for you.
5. Evaluate. Did you make the best choice for you?





Problem Solving

Think of a problem you either have right now or have had in the past. For example, “I do not understand my health assignment and it is due in two days.”

| Possible solution | Consequences |
|--|---|
| Ask the teacher for help. | The teacher could explain the directions. |
| Talk with a friend about the assignment. | My friend may or may not understand it. |
| Ignore it and don’t do the assignment. | I’ll fail and /or get a zero on the assignment. |
| a. | a. |
| b. | b. |
| c. | c. |

What will get in the way of solving the problem?

Who might help me solve this problem?

What is the best choice to get what I need?

Learning from your Experiences

Using self-determination skills is a life-long process. As you develop these skills, you will continually be “experiencing and learning.” As you set goals based on what you know about yourself, laws and responsibilities, and your future goals, you will always be comparing your outcomes (where you are) to your expected outcomes (where you want to be), realizing success and failure, and adjusting your plans and goals along the way.

Keep in mind that a self-determined person knows what they want, how to ask for it, and who to ask for help. Your goals will change and develop as you change and develop as a person.



Tips for Developing and Continuing to Use Self-Determination Skills

The following are recommended skills and steps needed in learning how to be a self-determined person. Check them off as you address each one! Remember this is a process that will go on the rest of your life.

How do I continue to develop and use self-determination skills?

- ☐ Learn what your interests, skills, and specific needs are (remember they continue to develop and change).
- ☐ Explain your disability as it relates to strengths (things you are good at) and weaknesses (things you need help with).
- ☐ Explain choices, decisions, and goals you have (where you want to live, work, and have fun).
- ☐ Use school as a “safe place” to make choices and sometimes receive negative consequences. Learn from bad choices! Learn what would be a better choice for you!
- ☐ At IEP meetings and when meeting with others, talk about what helps you learn (accommodations, modifications).
- ☐ Learn how to set short-term goals that lead toward your long-term goals.
- ☐ If someone says your goal(s) is “unrealistic,” listen and make a decision based on what you know about yourself.
- ☐ Know your legal rights as a person with a disability (IDEA, Section 504, Americans with Disabilities Act).
- ☐ Be part of your IEP meetings by sharing your interests and goals. Make sure transition plans are written into your IEP. Bring support people to your meetings!

What will help me with my self-determination?

The development of a personal mission statement.

A statement about yourself that will guide you toward your goals and help you feel positive when you begin to feel like you have too many barriers to reach your goals. Don't give up, check your mission statement, look at your goals, and ask your support people for help!

Sample of a mission statement:

“I am a good student, learning what I can from my classes, and leaving my negative attitudes at the door. I love my family and respect my mom, brother, and sisters. I would like to bring beauty to the world. I am doing that now through my yard work business.”

Write a brief, 4-5 sentence, personal mission statement about yourself.

My Personal Profile

Think about these questions as you begin to plan for your future.

1. I like to think about:

2. I am interested in:

3. I am best at:

4. I need the most help with:

5. How do people who know you describe you?

6. Help I have gotten in the past includes:

7. Problems with my current school schedule:

8. What I would like my current schedule to look like:

9. People who work with me need to know:

10. Things that work for me:

11. Things that do not work for me:

12. Some issues I have:

13. Some things I am going to do this year are:

14. People I can get help or information from are:

15. Places I can get help or information from are:

16. My strengths are in:

☐ a. Academic subjects ☐ b. Social/behavior ☐ c. Physical movement ☐ d. Communication ☐ e. Self-help

17. Areas I struggle in:

☐ a. Academic subjects ☐ b. Social/behavior ☐ c. Physical movement ☐ d. Communication ☐ e. Self-help

18. I believe in:

19. The things in life that are most important to me are:

(Adapted from Creative Employment Opportunities, Inc., Passport to Employment)

More Self-Determination Information

Definition of Terms

Self-Advocacy: means learning how to speak about your thoughts, goals, and needs in a positive, assertive way.

Self-Determination: is believing you can control your own life choices by knowing about yourself, setting goals, sharing goals, selecting support people/services, and making choices.

Support: Person is someone you trust who wants to assist you with reaching your future goals.

TIPS FOR USING SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS AT IEP MEETINGS

Before the Meeting

Meet with special education teacher to:

- Make sure you know the purpose/reason for the IEP meeting.
- Learn about laws (IDEA, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)).
- Get help with inviting people who support you (other teachers, staff in the cafeteria, etc.)
- Go over your goals for the future (what are you interested in, what are you good at/skills, and what do you like or dislike).
- Talk about assessments and information that has been collected about you.
- Think about what you might need to help you learn (accommodations/modifications).

During the Meeting

Choose a person to support you with:

- Introduce yourself and ask others at the meeting to share their name and role or reason for being at your IEP meeting.
- Share your ideas about your strengths, interests, and preferences (things you want to learn and do).
- Ask questions if you do not understand what someone is saying or you want to share your thoughts.
- Help the team with describing yourself and choosing goals and objectives.

After the Meeting

Choose a person to support you with making sure your IEP is being followed by:

- Make sure you are getting the help you need (accommodations/modifications).
- Connect with support people to help you keep track of your grades and assignments.
- Learn more about how to reach your future goals (education, employment, living, and having fun).
- Know where you are with meeting your IEP goals.



Who would you like to invite to your next IEP meeting?

1. Name

Relationship to you

I would like to invite him/her because

2. Name

Relationship to you

I would like to invite him/her because

3. Name

Relationship to you

I would like to invite him/her because

4. Name

Relationship to you

I would like to invite him/her because

Person Centered Planning: What is it?

Adapted from Arc of Whatcom County

Person Centered Planning is a process of gathering information about goals and writing down steps for achieving or reaching these goals. Person Centered Planning is guided by the “dreams” of the person with the disability. This planning happens at IEP meetings, adult service agency meetings, or any meeting where future goals are shared and planned for.

There are times when a person’s dreams are called “unrealistic” before they are even explored or tried. Dreams tell us a lot about what we need for a satisfying life. Even if you choose not to follow your dream exactly, focus on your dream and it will help steer you down a path that matches your interests, skills, and needs.

Person Centered Planning relies on a circle of support, people who are committed and focused on helping you follow your dream. A facilitator assists you in guiding the circle of support or team through a process of discovery. This facilitator will write down the “who,” “what,” “when,” and “how” of your desired future. You are the center and focus of the plan, your input is needed!

Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator is not the one who guides the plan. You guide your plan and the facilitator is your assistant. The facilitator will remain neutral and help keep the process focused and moving. They do this by asking questions of you and assisting you with asking questions of the circle or team.

The facilitator is not an expert, just a guide. The goal in Person Centered Planning is for you and your team to become an independent planning team.

Role of the Family and Closest Friends

Family members and closest friends are the one constant in your life. School people will come and go, but family members and closest friends will always be a part of your life. The family and closest friends are the core members of the planning group. They know you very well. They are able to bring up issues that others might not. They also care about you greatly.

Family members and closest friends will help you explain interests, skills, and needs in order to make choices. The plan will often have steps that fall in the hands of the circle of members themselves. Other steps in your plan may need support from people outside of your family and closest friends.

Traditional Supports

Traditional supports are organizations, agencies, and institutions designed to support individuals with disabilities. Traditional supports may include the following: K-12 school systems (general and special education), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), County Mental Health Services, and/or Supported Employment Agencies. Explain your goals, listen to what services are available, and see if they have programs that can address your needs and goals.

Natural Supports

We all need support in our daily lives that keeps us working to meet our goals. This support can come in the form of encouragement, assistance, flexibility, etc. Natural supports are the people in the settings you are in.

In Person Centered Planning we look for ways to rely on natural supports for daily help. These may take the form of a co-worker, neighbor, or friend. People enjoy helping others and being relied on. They also know they can rely on you as well.

In the Person Centered Planning process we help you identify your strengths and ability to contribute and help or share with others. You share and assist your natural supports, and they share and assist you. It is a natural exchange!

Choice

Choice is at the center of Person Centered Planning. Choice happens at every stage of the Person Centered Planning process, from the very beginning as you choose to work on a Person Centered Plan to the final approval of the written plan.

With choice comes responsibility. As you make choices, you also take on responsibility to act on those choices. Your circle or team and you must trust each other to explore choices, make decisions, and live and learn from the consequences. Remember Person Centered Planning is a “process.” It does not have a definite end. We all set goals, reach some goals, and alter our original plans all through our life. Using self-determination skills and support people is the key to success in Person Centered Planning.

Helpful Websites

Great Lakes ADA and Accessible IT Center
www.adagreatlakes.org/

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov

U.S. Department of Justice ADA Home Page
www.ada.gov

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Center
www.eeoc.gov

U.S. Office of Civil Rights
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html

Transition Improvement Grant (TIG)
www.witig.org/

Self-Determination at Work
www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2001/apr/010416.selfdetermination.html

Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered
www.sabeusa.org/

National Disability Rights Network
www.napas.org/

Advocating Change Together
www.selfadvocacy.com

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP)
http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_spp-transition



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