



Introduction to Self-Direction

In Summit Learning, students are constantly setting and achieving goals — both short-term daily or weekly goals and longer-term college and career goals.

To achieve these goals, students develop a set of strategies that they can use in any context, and teachers learn how to coach and offer targeted support to students through this process; its called the Self-Directed Learning Cycle. Our research has shown that teachers who integrate this cycle into their teaching see shifts in student behavior and mindsets, including increased confidence, student talk about learning, student control, decision-making, and responsibility for learning.

Students set goals, select strategies that will allow them to meet those goals, apply these strategies, and then determine if their plan of action worked. This cycle of learning can be applied to any task in the adult world and is developed across all aspects of Summit Learning. Depending on their fluency with the Self-Directed Learning Cycle and/or the challenge of the materials they're seeking to learn, students need various levels of support. Teachers and mentors provide targeted support, as students learn how to be self-directed learners, through small-group workshops and 1:1 interventions.

The Self-Directed Learning Cycle



Set Goal: Set a goal.

Plan: Develop a plan to achieve that goal.

Learn: Learn what you need to know.

Show: Show evidence of what you have learned.

Reflect: Reflect on the process.



Summit Learning Self-Direction has the following key characteristics:

Self-directed learning is practiced throughout the day with Summit Learning

Students are able to practice self-direction in all parts of the school day, receiving guidance during Mentoring and apply this multifaceted skill in class through their projects.

Much of the content of 1:1 mentoring conversations is focused on academic and personal goals. In collaboration with their mentor, students consider how they can plan and stay on track in their classes; they reflect on which Cognitive Skills and Habits of Success they need to focus on for the week, month, and year, and discuss how their actions in and outside of class will impact their individual development.

In class, students work to build self-direction as they complete checkpoints and their final product through projects. Students set goals on everything from their Cognitive Skill performance to when they will hand in checkpoints or final products for feedback.

Watch how students practice Self-Direction to set goals and deeply understand content.





Roles in Self-Direction

Students

Students commit to setting goals and developing strategies for their learning, based on the skills they develop through everyday practice of the Self-Directed Learning Cycle. They understand that they can apply the cycle learning about subjects that are interesting to them now and in the future. Over time, students develop the confidence to set learning goals and make better decisions about studying, project-completion, and test-taking. They are better equipped to reflect on the effectiveness of their weekly and monthly actions, and are more likely to proactively share these reflections with their mentor, parents, and peers.

Teachers

Through Summer Training and other professional development opportunities, teachers develop a deep understanding of the Self-Directed Learning Cycle and learn how to teach the cycle to students, modifying each step with supports for students as needed. Sometimes, this means allowing students to go down a path the teacher doesn't see as the most efficient, but also being available to rigorously reflect with students about the decisions they made and the impact of those decisions on their learning goals. Teachers adjust supports during the learning process based on student data (quizzes and grades) and adapt or remove them when a student has demonstrated progress toward mastering content.

Summit Learning Platform

The Summit Learning Platform is a tool that helps organize the Summit Learning curriculum and support the different parts of the Summit Learning instructional approach. The [Platform](#) supports students through the different steps of their projects and serves as the portal through which students submit each assignment.

Once students become familiar with how Summit Learning works, the Platform enables them to understand what they need to work on and what they need to do to progress and improve. Teachers reported increased engagement (e.g. more time on task, more work completed, higher levels of motivation and ownership) from both struggling and advanced students.

Read about how students at [Fairview Park City Schools](#) are owning their learning with the Summit Learning Program.