

REL PACIFIC ASK-A-REL RESPONSE

Individualized Learning Plans November 2014

INQUIRY

What are best practices for designing and implementing individualized student learning plans?

As a first step in providing the requested information, REL Pacific reviewed prior Ask-a-REL reports related to the topic of individualized learning plans using the REL Reference Desk. Five reports were found which related to this topic; however, the most recent was from 2010. In order to ensure that the most up to date resources were used, and in order to identify more recent models and exemplars for implementing individualized student learning plans, REL Pacific conducted a web-based search for informational resources to identify current trends and guidance. All of the resources identified in this response were published after 2010.

The resources included in this response are organized into two sections: Research and policies regarding individualized plans and models and guides for implementing individualized plans.

Descriptions of the resources are quoted from the publication abstract (Abstract) or the publication itself (Introduction or Excerpt). An abstract is always provided (verbatim from the source) when available. However, if additional text in the resource provides important information not contained in the author's abstract, the additional information has also been excerpted.

SEARCH TERMS USED

Best practices; individual academic and career plan*; individual* graduation plan*; individual* learning; individual* learning plans; learning plan* (2010-2019); learning plan example; learning plan research; personal* learning plan; personal plans of study; student learning plans

DATABASES SEARCHED

ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals, Google Scholar, and the Question Point database

Resources identified in the search are listed below. The hyperlink to each resource is provided. Descriptions of programs and articles have been reproduced verbatim from their respective websites or abstracts.

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

The provided resources were found via web-based searches. The first set of criteria applied favored publications in peer-reviewed research journals; however, few peer reviewed articles were found, and so policy pieces were then reviewed for inclusion. The requestor noted that guidance for and examples of ILPs are of interest, and so practice guides and implementation resources were included also. Preference was given to sources published within the last 5 years. Resources included also had to be available online and in English.

REL Pacific Ask-a-REL Response: Individualized Learning Plans

Resources included in this document were last accessed in November 2014. URLs, descriptions, and content included in this document were current at that time.

Descriptions of the resources were quoted from the publication abstract (Abstract), the publication itself (Excerpt), or the publication's host website (Description, Program Description). An abstract was always used when available. However, if there was no abstract for a resource a relevant excerpt was pulled directly from the source to provide basic information.

RESULTING ARTICLES

1. National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth. (2013, February). *Using individualized learning plans to produce college and career ready high school graduates*. (Policy Brief No 6). Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/PolicyBrief_issue_6.pdf

Source: Google, National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability

Excerpt (p. 1): Based upon several years of research investigating the nature and use of ILPs in states across the United States, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) has merged the commonalities to provide a working definition of a quality ILP. The contents of this policy brief are intended to address a litany of issues relevant to moving forward a quality ILP initiative.

The purpose of this policy brief is to share recommendations generated as a result of ILP research studies by NCWD/Youth, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), and its partners. This policy brief includes separate but complementary recommendations for state officials, district/school officials, educators, organizations interested in supporting family engagement in schools, special education administrators and support organizations, national organizations, disability organizations, and Federal officials.

(p. 3): . . . ILPs should be considered a promising strategy when the ILPs:

- Are implemented beginning in middle school and continue through and beyond high school graduation.
- Include using web-based career information systems that incorporate ILPs as an ePortfolio. An ePortfolio is a feature often found in online career information systems that allows the student to catalogue, store, and share various ILP and career development activities.
- Include family engagement activities.
- Incorporate quality career development opportunities that include: (a) self-exploration of interests, values, and skills; (b) career exploration of various career options and the post-secondary pathways needed to reach those careers; (c) developing career planning and management skills; and, (d) engaging in workbased learning and developing career readiness skills (e.g., social-emotional learning, soft skills, leadership skills, etc.).
- Promote personalized learning by: (a) including advisory periods in the weekly class schedule to allow time for ILP activities; and (b) ensuring that students have at least one adult advisor they stay with throughout the high school years.

2. Phelps, L., Durham, J., & Wills, J. (2011). Education alignment and accountability in an era of convergence: Policy insights from states with individual learning plans and policies. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 19(31)1. Available from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ956028.pdf>

Source: Google, National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability

Abstract: In response to the rising demand for market-responsive education reform across the U.S., since 1998 more than twenty states have created individual learning or graduation plan (ILP/IGP) state policies. Using extensive policy document analyses and stakeholder interview data from four early-adopting ILP/IGP states, the goal of this four-state case study was twofold. First, to determine the extent to which states are leveraging federal and state resources to align their ILP initiatives with other policies aimed at fostering education innovation and assisting economic recovery. The second goal was to develop policy recommendations for making intergovernmental investments to strengthen performance outcomes in education and workforce development in ILP/IGP states. The federal interest in equal protection and improving equity for special populations including youth with disabilities stimulated and animated the investigation. Several key findings emerged across the four states. First, to date limited fiscal investments in professional development and systematic data collection have constrained ILP-IGP implementation and evaluation efforts. Second, the opportunity to align and leverage the state investment with federal programs and other state employment and education initiatives was largely unexplored in these states. Recommendations for state policy improvements include aligning ILP policies with state plans for improving outcomes in federal programs for students confronting economic, language and disability challenges.

3. Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. (2011, June). *Student learning plans: Supporting every student's transition to college and career*. (Policy Brief). Cambridge, MA: Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. Retrieved from http://renniecenter.issuelab.org/resource/student_learning_plans_supporting_every_students_transition_to_college_and_career

Source: Google, National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability

Excerpt (p. 4): Our review found that the empirical research on the effectiveness of SLPs in improving academic achievement, graduation rates, or persistence in postsecondary education or work is limited. However, there is a growing body of research on the impact of SLPs on other student outcomes, such as motivation and engagement, goal setting, long-term planning, increased awareness of career options, and parental involvement in academic and career decisions.

(p. 8): Research suggests that regardless of the laws and regulations mandating SLPs, what is really critical to their effectiveness in improving student outcomes is how they are implemented and aligned with broader school and district goals. Researchers and practitioners have begun to identify a number of promising implementation strategies for SLPs that are more likely to lead to positive outcomes for students, including the following:

- Teacher commitment and positive student-teacher relationships are critical to successful implementation . . .
- Strong leadership, clear articulation of program objectives and professional development impact the level of teacher commitment. . .
- Adequate time must be provided for teachers and students to engage in planning activities. . .
- Implementation methods must be tailored to local conditions. . .
- Access to online career information systems, SLP curricula and other tools improve outcomes.
- Skill and interest assessments are important components of learning plan development. . .
- Learning plans must include both long-term and short-term goals and benchmarks. . .
- Career planning activities must be multifaceted and relevant to student interests and goals. . .

4. Bloom, T. & Kissane, E. (2011). Individualized Learning Plans: Improving student performance. Cincinnati, OH: Hobsons. Retrieved from http://www.mnschoolcounselors.org/Resources/Individual%20Learning%20Plans_Industry%20Report_053012.pdf

Source: ProQuest

Excerpt (p. 3): This report begins by giving background about the subject of statewide mandates for ILPs, particularly how national reform efforts have increased their popularity. The main part of the report, the Results section, captures the current status of state level college and career readiness initiatives by responding to the following questions:

What is each state's primary initiative for college and career planning for all students?

Which states mandate or encourage individualized learning plans for all students?

Which states mandate or encourage a guidance framework or other college and career readiness structure?

What agencies or entities are involved in these efforts?

To respond to the three aforementioned research questions, Hobsons did a complete search of each state's education department website to identify initiatives currently in place or under development. Information from education organizations and foundations and from research journals was used to supplement or confirm details about some states. The characteristics of each initiative were determined by evaluating plan templates, legislation and explanatory documents available online.

5. New Jersey Department of Education. (2014, April). *A guide for implementing personalized student learning plan (PSLP) programs*. Trenton, NJ: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/cte/pslp/PSLPGuide.pdf>

Source: ProQuest

Excerpt (pp. 3–4): In 2009, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) initiated a three-year Personalized Student Learning Plan (PSLP) Pilot Program to assist the Department in identifying effective strategies for implementing personalized student learning plans in New Jersey's schools. NJDOE contracted with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University to evaluate the pilot program. Throughout the course of the evaluation, the Heldrich Center collected data from sixteen pilot schools and outlined promising practices and lessons learned related to implementing PSLP programs. This guide leverages knowledge gained from the three year evaluation of the NJDOE PSLP Pilot Program and provides practical guidance for those who want to improve their current personalized learning strategies or begin the process of implementing a PSLP program.

This guide provides a framework and strategies for school administrators and staff interested in learning how to implement a personalized student learning plan program at their schools. This guide consists of two parts. Part one consists of ten sections. The first section describes personalized student learning plans. The second describes the work that schools need to do in order to lay the groundwork for implementing PSLPs. Sections three through ten describe how to implement each of the core components that are necessary for PSLP program success. . .

The second part of the guide consists of several appendices. The appendices include an array of resources that have been developed and collected to help educators establish, implement, and manage PSLP program processes.

6. Solberg, V. S., Wills, J., & Osman, D. (2012). *Promoting quality individualized plans: A "how to guide" focused on the high school years*. Washington, DC: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp/how-to-guide>

Source: ProQuest

Excerpt (preface, p. 1): The Guide began as a result of a multiyear initiative that focused on exploring how students in 14 schools in four states – Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina and Washington– are using and benefiting from their ILPs. NCWD/Youth’s research indicates that engaging in ILPs provides access to quality career guidance activities and connects both college and career readiness goals by helping students create secondary and postsecondary course plans that allow them to pursue their career and life goals. The evidence indicates that students who become more competent in self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning and management are more motivated to attend school, become confident learners, actively set goals, and record better grades. In other words, efforts to prepare students to become career ready results in the social, emotional, and academic skills needed to become college ready.

. . . Based upon its research investigating the nature and use of ILPs in states across the United States, NCWD/Youth has merged the commonalities to provide the following working definition of a quality ILP:

A quality individualized learning plan is

- A document consisting of a student’s: (a) course taking and post-secondary plans aligned to career goals; and, (b) documentation of the range of college and career readiness skills he/she has developed.
- A process that enhances a student’s understanding of the relevance of school courses as well as out-of-school learning opportunities, and provides the student access to career development opportunities that incorporate self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning and management activities.

A lack of a whole-school buy-in for engaging in ILPs is another critical factor that study respondents reported has limited the potential impact of ILPs. In many of the schools studied, ILPs were relegated to one or two specialists who were responsible for implementation. The schools that participated in NCWD/Youth’s research attribute the challenge in gaining whole-school buy-in for implementing ILPs to a need for ILP curricula and implementation guidelines. This Guide was developed in response to requests for assistance in this area.

It is recognized that state requirements vary with respect to when students begin to develop ILPs with some beginning in elementary and middle school. This Guide centers on the high school years because NCWD/Youth’s overall project focused on investigating how and whether ILPs serve as an effective workforce development strategy that prepares youth to make effective post-school college and career transitions. This Guide will remain a work in progress as additions and deletions occur to reflect the latest ILP implementation resources identified. A key goal of the Guide is to help schools develop a bridge between college and career readiness efforts through the use of ILPs and help youth achieve prosperous and productive lives.

This Guide is intended to be as relevant as possible to a range of educators including school counselors, career and technical education educators and supervisors, special education educators and supervisors, and regular education teachers.

7. Fox, H.L. (2014). *Achieving their goals: Implementing an individualized learning plan process to build student success*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from <http://pathways.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ILP-Guide-Web.pdf>

Source: Google, Google Scholar, ProQuest (ERIC), and EBSCO.

Excerpt: (p.1) This guide begins with an overview of concepts and applications of ILPs, including segments on key concepts and definitions, benefits for students, related processes, and components pertaining to ILPs. Subsequently, this guide provides a four-phase process for implementing and evaluating ILPs, including the following a) engagement and commitment, (b) process development and alignment, (c) process implementation, and (d) continuous improvement. Finally, the guide concludes with a listing of additional resources and templates that can be customized for Illinois school districts as they implement their ILP processes.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide school districts with the knowledge necessary to successfully implement a high quality ILP process in schools and across districts. Specifically this guide provides:

- a framework for a high quality ILP process;
- a model for implementing/enhancing ILP processes; and
- tools, templates, and additional resources to support implementation/enhancement of ILPs at the school or district level.

8. United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. (2013). *Individualized learning plans across the U.S.* Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/odep/ilp/map/>.

Source: EBSCO

Excerpt: Many states have adopted policies that require all middle and/or high school students to develop and maintain an individualized learning plan in order to make schools more personalized and improve student outcomes. As part of the ILP Research Project, ODEP sought to determine the status of ILP implementation across the U.S. and compile the results into one, easy-to-use tool. The purpose of this Interactive Policy Map is to provide a snapshot of ILP implementation in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

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