



What is the research base of individual learning plans at the high school level and its impact on student outcomes? (February 2010)

The information provided addresses the origins and effectiveness of Individual Learning Plans (ILP) for all high school students. Although the use of ILPs may build upon the well established Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students with learning disabilities, it is not explicitly linked to that practice in the resources reviewed.

The use of Individual Learning Plans for all high school students appears to be based on the move towards creating more student-centered, personalized learning environments with one key goal to foster student engagement and subsequently improve academic outcomes. Additionally, by encouraging students to link their goals to course pathways and participation in other activities, the strategy is designed to counter many students' perception that what they learn in school is not relevant in real world situations.

Individual Learning Plans (or Personalized Learning Plans) are tools often employed as part of a comprehensive counseling program. Although there is significant variation among states and districts that have adopted this strategy, the variation is often a matter of degree. Most plans address three areas: academic, career, and personal/social development. Some plans are more career-focused than others, while some target particular groups of students and some emphasize community service. Many plans include provisions for real world experiences, multiple pathways for learning, family involvement, alignment with standards and ongoing monitoring for postsecondary planning. Individual learning plans differ from individual learning records in that learning records point to the past, whereas learning plans identify goals and point to the future. There is also variation in who leads ILP activities. Some programs have counselors to lead the activities and student conferences; others have teachers who conduct these activities as a regular feature of advisory classes.

Currently, there is no research linking the use of Individual Learning Plans to student outcomes such as academic achievement, graduation or dropout rates.

Below are descriptions of individual learning plans from five different states. Of the plans included, Florida and Washington's learning plans appear to be the most similar to an IEP. This information is followed by additional identified resources related to this topic.

Descriptions of Individual Learning Plans in Five States

Washington State

Student Learning Plan (SLP) – The goal of the SLP is to assure that students are on track for graduation and provide regular communication to parents about students' academic progress.

Target Population – There are a number of different learning plans available for students. A plan may target all students (e.g., High School and Beyond Plan) whereas another (Student Learning Plan) may be required for all students in grades 8-12 who were not successful in a content area on the state standardized assessment (Washington Assessment of Student Learning – WASL), at risk of not meeting academic targets and show signs that they may not be on track to graduate (e.g., credit deficiencies or absences). SLPs are maintained until students meet WASL standards.

Key elements include:

- Input from student, teachers and parents
- Strategies to improve student knowledge and skills in areas where they have performed poorly
- Strategies to help parents work with students to improve their skills
- Ongoing contact with parents

Washington has an Electronic Individual Learning Plan tool that is designed to facilitate the process of creating learning plans for students, help educators identify student needs, track and manage student learning, and support effective implementation of SPLs to increase student achievement.

Florida

Student Learning Plan (SLP) – The goal is to help low-performing students attain proficiency in reading/ELA and mathematics. Instruction is tailored to meet the unique educational needs of students and provide opportunities for collaboration between parents, schools and districts.

Target Population – Students who have not met state and district proficiency levels in reading/ELA and mathematics.

Key elements include:

- Plan based on student academic performance and assessment data
- Specific, measurable goals
- State-approved providers of supplemental educational services (SES providers)
- Individualized instructional program and strategies tailored to meet unique student needs
- Schedule for frequent monitoring
- Timeline for improving student achievement

Kentucky

Individual Learning Plan – This is similar to the Individual Graduation Plans that are used in some districts and designed to help students think about and plan for their future. It is geared towards career exploration and post-secondary planning.

Target population – All students in grades 6 through 12.

Key elements include:

- Career Exploration – students select career clusters and explore the career opportunities available in these clusters
- Development of a 4-year plan for high school and post secondary options
- Documentation of activities and achievements
- Tracking achievement and career and educational exploration
- Parental involvement – parents can log on to the web-enabled ILP site to learn more about their child's goals, record comments and communicate with the child's advisor

Kentucky has an electronic system that allows them to link student information from a number of sources and to integrate student data (e.g., demographic information, state assessment results). The electronic system also allows for relevant data to be brought directly into the system, the automatic creation of an ILP for new students and tracking of students if they change schools. The data is readily available for students, teachers and parents.

Vermont

Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) are designed to recognize individual student learning styles, background and interests and allow students to play an active role in guiding their own learning experience. PLPs target individual

student goals as well as Vermont's general learning standards allowing multiple pathways to learning while also demonstrating individual competencies and proficiency for common learning standards. Vermont has developed several PLP models which share common elements.

Target population – All high school students.

Key elements include:

- Students are assigned to teacher advisors for all four years of high school
- Students participate in a small, multi-grade or single-grade peer group that works together for one to four years
- Ongoing goal-setting
- School and community based learning opportunities

Delaware

Student Success Plan (SSP) – This plan is designed to help students explore postsecondary options, set goals and develop a plan to achieve their goals. The plans are updated annually by the student's advisor.

Target population: All 8th and 9th grade students.

Key elements include:

- Provision of support services (after school or summer school programs)
- Students work one-on-one with an advisor who assists in the development of their SSP
- Ongoing monitoring
- An additional year of high school offered as an option for inclusion in the SSP

A central component of the SSP program is an interactive Web site that students use to learn about postsecondary options, set goals and create a personal and academic plan to achieve these goals.

Additional Resources:

Clarke, J. (2003). *Changing systems to personalize learning: Personalized learning*. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University.

The *Personalized Learning* workshop helps high school "change teams" (made up of teachers, students, administrators, and community members) answer questions and design programs that clarify students' purposes for learning so they can begin to use what they learn to enrich and direct their lives. With a focus on Personal Learning Plans (PLPs), portfolios, and student presentations, this workshop will guide you through designing a personalized learning project that you can present to your faculty and field-test in your school. (NHSC description)

Clarke, J., & Miles, S. (2003). *Changing systems to personalize learning: Introduction to the personalization workshops (Report No. ED 482 970)*. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University.

Changing Systems to Personalize Learning is a series of workshops designed to help high schools better understand and implement practices involving personalized learning. The series is based on 6 years of work with schools undertaking varying degrees of reform in an effort to meet students' diverse learning needs. (NHSC description)

Gibson, D., & Clarke, J. (2000). *Growing towards systemic change: Developing personal learning plans at Montpelier High School*. Providence, RI: LAB Northeast Islands Regional Educational Laboratory, Brown University.

This is a case study that documents the flow of such events as faculty development, school district initiatives, state and federal policies, student experience, and systems change in Montpelier (Vermont) High School over a

period of six years in an effort to identify factors that support reform. (NHSC description)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP). (2004). Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform. (Executive Summary). Washington, DC: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

This report discusses several ways to improve student outcomes including personalizing the student learning environment. Among the recommendations is the creation of a Personal Plan for Progress that takes student needs into consideration and allows students to play a role in creating their learning path. (NHSC description)

Littky, D., & Allen, F. (1999). Whole-school personalization, One student at a time. *Educational Leadership*, 57 (1), 24-29.

This article describes the personalized education philosophy being developed in one school in Rhode Island, which includes the use of individualized learning plans. (NHSC description)

Trotter, A. (2005). Tools help Washington teachers write learning plans. *Education Week*, 24 (23), 6.

This article describes how teachers are developing individualized learning plans for thousands of students that are not yet prepared for passing their 10th grade testing. (NHSC description)

[CCSSO Individual Learning Plans](#)

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provides information on the ways in which various states are creating ILP systems. Note: some of the links on the CCSSO site are not currently functional. (NHSC description)

[Personalized Student Learning Plan Resource Guide](#)

The New Jersey Department of Education is currently piloting a Personalized Student Learning Plan Program in 16 middle and high schools. They produced the resource guide (see link above) which summarizes the research conducted on personalized student learning plans in other states. Before implementing the pilot, they surveyed twelve states to collect information about types and formats of different plans (web-based or paper, grade levels). Their findings include the following:

- The student learning plan process and implementation systems were initiated in each state either by legislation or administrative code. Of the twelve states, four states implemented the student learning plan process as required by state legislation.
- Each state used various methods to implement the actual student learning plans in their local schools. The majority of states used a guidance and counseling program (9 states) and a few used a teacher/mentor advisory program (3 states).
- On average, most states took about 5 years to plan, research, develop and implement student learning plans statewide. Many states implemented a pilot project requiring various grade levels to comply with yearly benchmarks over a five-year time span. Other states recommended schools follow the program for a few years before requiring all schools to comply by a set date, generally 3 to 5 years.
- The states surveyed used a variety of funding sources to support their efforts. Sources included state monies, Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education federal funding, Higher Education Assistance Authority grants, National Governors Association funding, Gates Foundation grants, and U.S. Department of Labor funding.
- All of the state departments of education surveyed have developed stronger partnerships with state school administrators, teachers, counselors, parent associations, state agencies in higher education and workforce development, and local school districts as a result of implementing this school reform effort.

(NHSC description)

Topic: [Student Support Services/Systems](#)