

# Fact Sheet



## Individualized Learning Plans

### What is an ILP?

An **individualized learning plan** (ILP) is both a document and a process that students use – with support from school counselors, teachers, and parents – to define their career goals and post-secondary plans in order to inform the student’s decisions about their courses and activities throughout high school. 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.

### What is a Quality ILP?

Based upon several years of research investigating the nature and use of ILPs in states across the U.S., the National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) and its partners<sup>1</sup> have developed the following definition of quality ILPs:

- A document consisting of: (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 the relevance of school and 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 skill building activities.

### Quality ILP Activities



### The Findings

The ILP research studies by NCWD/Youth and its partners indicate that ILPs show promise as an effective strategy for delivering quality career development opportunities that improve several student outcomes. Students who were more engaged in ILP activities reported stronger goal-setting skills, increased motivation to attend school, and increased academic self-efficacy which leads to better academic achievement, stress and health management, and readiness to engage in career decision-making. Teachers, school counselors, and family members highly value ILPs and believe that it helps students become more focused learners who complete more challenging coursework in order to reach their self-defined career and life goals.

### How and When are Individualized Learning Plans Used?

Promising practices for engaging in ILPs include regularly scheduled activities conducted during advisory periods. ILPs appear to be more effective when they are regularly reviewed and updated beginning in middle school and continuing through and beyond high school. In this way, ILP activities occur regularly throughout the academic year rather than just once per year. As a process, quality ILP activities provide opportunities for youth to engage in three phases of skill development: self exploration, career exploration, and career planning and manage-

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ment. Self-exploration activities develop students' ability to identify career interests, skills, and work values. Career exploration activities develop students' ability to connect their interests, skills, and values to a range of career options, identify the school courses and employability skills needed to enter careers of interest, and identify corresponding post-secondary pathways. Career planning and management activities help students develop a range of skills related to acquiring job search skills needed to secure employment; developing career readiness skills (both generalizable, i.e. soft, and career-specific skills); and developing the traits, work habits, and behaviors needed to navigate career changes and pursue growth opportunities throughout a lifetime.

Increasingly, schools are relying on web-based career information systems to support the implementation of ILP activities. Web-based career information systems incorporate ILPs as an ePortfolio that allows youth to catalogue, store, and share various ILP and career development activities. States are beginning to develop and use grade-level benchmarks to docu-

ment the competencies youth should acquire through ILP activities as a way to track the impact ILPs have on academic and post-school indicators.

An individualized learning plan is not the same as the federally-mandated individualized education program (IEP) for students receiving special education services. Students with disabilities and their families can use the ILP as a tool in developing the transition planning sections of the IEP.

## What information is included in an individualized learning plan?

The individualized learning plan documents a range of information specific to the student and his or her school and state that students, parents, and school personnel can use to guide decision making and monitor the student's progress toward goals. The ILP may include the following information *specific to the student*: skills, abilities, hobbies, and accomplishments; current and past classes and activities; grades and test scores; examples of student work; results from career, college, and interest assessments; personal goal

statements; activities designed to develop the student's self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning and management skills; college and financial planning activities; and contact information for parents, advisors, teachers, mentors, and other supportive adults. For students with disabilities, the ILP may also include plans for providing accommodations the student and his/her family view as necessary to achieving future career goals.

To ensure the student's plans for high school and beyond align with available options, development of the plan involves reviewing *school and state specific information*, including high school graduation requirements, high school course options, and post-secondary education and training programs. It is important to help students learn how to search for local job opportunities and find community-based resources and services relevant to their personal needs.

More information and resources on implementing quality individualized learning plans are available online at: [www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp).

<sup>i</sup> NCWD/Youth's partners in the ILP research studies include: the Institute for Educational Leadership Center for Workforce Development, Boston University School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison Center on Education and Work, University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration, PACER Center, Social Dynamics, LLC, and Altarum Institute. The research studies were funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.