



**ACADEMIC AND  
CAREER PLANS  
BEST PRACTICES**

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## BACKGROUND

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Research has demonstrated that students who develop a career plan and receive career counseling in high school not only are more successful than their peers in academic courses, but they also are less likely to drop out and enjoy greater success post-high school.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Academic and Career Plans (ACPs) allow students to personalize their education in order to make themselves eligible for greater opportunities post graduation. These ACPs are planning tools that guide students in academic and career decisions so as to focus on particular career goals, while leveraging available resources and academic offerings in the pursuit of their goals. Some school systems use sophisticated online tools that provide interest surveys, skills assessments, and the ability to explore potential occupations and career clusters to assist students in their decisions. Others use a more traditional approach, where counselors or other school staff members provide students with information and advisement, and paper copies are stored in student files.

## BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED

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In February 2009, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) adopted revised accreditation standards requiring that an ACP be developed for each seventh grade student and completed by the fall of the student's eighth grade year. The standards further state that the plan must be reviewed and updated, if necessary, before the student enters the ninth and eleventh grades.

In the fall of 2009, The Virginia Department of Education asked the Center for Innovative Technology to examine whether other U.S. states mandate ACPs and, if so, how they approach creating individualized academic and career plans for their students.

CIT analyzed the academic and career planning programs and practices at the state and district level in various states. Best practices were identified and CIT segmented the practices into the following topic areas, which represent key elements of a full-scale implementation effort. This report represents a summary of the findings from these analyses.

### Implementation

- A partnership that involves a student, his/her parents and a school counselor makes for a relevant personalized plan.
- Be creative when trying to fit in advisory periods and career exploration! Some ideas include: academies, career exploration classes, Frosh Success class, and lunch advisory sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> ACT, Inc. "The path to Career Success: High School Achievement, Certainty of Career Choice, and College Readiness Make a Difference." *Act.org*. ACT, Inc., 2009. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/PathCareerSuccess.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> D'Achiardi-Ressler, Catalina. "The Impact of Using the Kuder® Career Planning System: School." *Kuder.com*. Kuder, Inc., July 2008. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <[http://www.kuder.com/news/Vol6\\_No4/Impact.html](http://www.kuder.com/news/Vol6_No4/Impact.html)

<sup>3</sup> Lapan, Richard, Norman Gysbers, and Gregory Petroski. "Helping Seventh Graders Be Safe And Successful: A Statewide Study Of The Impact Of Comprehensive Guidance And Counseling Programs." *Findarticles.com*. CBS Interactive, Inc. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0KOC/is\\_3\\_6/ai\\_100732135/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KOC/is_3_6/ai_100732135/)

<sup>4</sup> Mayston, David. "Assessing the Benefits of Career Guidance." *Derby.ac.uk*. University of Derby, 2002. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <[http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/assessing\\_the\\_benefits2002.pdf](http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/assessing_the_benefits2002.pdf)

- Let the students “drive” the process and consider implementing student-directed career plans. A more involved student will result in a more enthusiastic student who will stick with the process.
- Ensure divisions have funding to implement and maintain programs.
- Solicit buy-in from the administrative level. Without support from administrators, counselors will find themselves overwhelmed and ineffective and will struggle without administrative support.
- Overcome resistance from stakeholders through extensive statewide outreach efforts, technical assistance and professional development.
- Provide resources and support to schools, but allow flexibility to modify for a regional best fit.
- (In contrast to the previous practice) Be consistently “Mandate-Heavy” and give clear direction to schools. This will ensure consistent data that will be maintainable in the long run.

### Tools and Resources

- Consider incorporating a tool that combines several resources for career planning (including interest inventory and discovery activity), podcasts, financial aid, life after high school, and resources for parents, counselors and educators.
- Explore different learning formats for career planning courses. (i.e., Alabama requires all students to have an online learning experience prior to high school graduation.) Incorporate career planning and an interest and skills assessment component, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.
- Provide access to resource materials and lesson plans online and build a catalog of resources. Make available special resources to train non-counselor advisors.
- Implement a statewide system that is a one-stop shop for exploration of career pathways and career planning tracking and training.
- Develop partnerships with state universities to improve the program.
- Communicate regularly with local counterparts (i.e., Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, CTE Directors) to make them aware of what is available and what is required.

### Training/Development

- Include the counselors’ association in the planning and professional development delivered to the field.
- Support the staffing of “career specialists” whose duty it is to focus on advising students on career planning activities.
- Encourage counselors to take part in professional development focused on career planning.

- Share information with state universities so that counselors and teachers-in-training understand the importance and nature of career planning.
- Provide several methods of training for districts. Design training that is incremental and that is available on an ongoing basis.

### Sustainability

- In times of shrinking budgets, capitalize on partnerships with other state agencies or higher education to provide resources for all students in the state. There can be many shared stakeholders with goals to better improve a state's workforce.
- Implement a program with a state standard so the data will require less management.
- Plan for sustainability and maintain appropriate funding.
- Consider using aggregate data in order to improve the career planning process continually.

### Other

- Let the ACP grow with the student. Provide access to the plan for a period of time after exiting high school.
- Adopt standards and benchmarks to measure the programs' success and status.
- Get parents engaged by encouraging them to build their own academic and career plans.
- Think of creative solutions for districts with fewer resources. For example, if a middle school has insufficient equipment, suggest a field trip to a nearby high school that has sufficient resources and include computer lab time for career planning.
- Have all team members across core academic classes take ownership of small pieces of the required attributes and be responsible for integrating the ACP into course content.

Center for Innovative Technology would like to thank the many states that participated in this survey.

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