

Education and Career Planning in High School: A National Study of School and Student Characteristics and College-Going Behaviors

This study seeks to provide Arizona policymakers with national evidence about the education and career planning elements associated with students' college-going behaviors. As of 2020, 34 states, including Arizona, required students to develop an education and/or career plan (ECP; also known as an individualized learning plan) in order to graduate.¹ This correlational study used nationally representative data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 to examine the relationships between students' participation in three education and career planning activities during high school and their application, coursetaking, and enrollment behaviors associated with the transition to college. The education and career planning activities examined were developing an ECP upon first entering high school in grade 9, receiving support from an adult to develop an ECP in grade 9, and meeting with an adult in school at least once a year to review the ECP, which are the three core elements of Arizona's ECP policy. The study explored the extent to which students' self-reported participation in these activities predicted whether they submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), completed a college preparatory curriculum, applied to college, and enrolled in college. In addition, the analyses described the prevalence of education and career planning as a school requirement and a student experience during the study period.

Key findings

- **About 86 percent of public high schools nationwide required students to develop an ECP.**
- **Schools that required ECPs were more likely to be rural and had higher percentages of Black students and economically disadvantaged students than schools that did not require ECPs.**
- **About 62 percent of students developed an ECP in the fall of grade 9, but 44 percent of students received support from an adult to do so, and only 22 percent of students reviewed their ECP yearly with an adult in school.**
- **Developing an ECP in grade 9 alone, without adult support or yearly review, was not associated with submitting the FAFSA, completing a college preparatory curriculum, applying to college, or enrolling in college.** However, receiving support from an adult to develop an ECP in grade 9 was associated with completing a college preparatory curriculum, applying to college, and enrolling in college, depending on the source of adult support. Participating in yearly review with an adult in school was associated with submitting the FAFSA, applying to college, and enrolling in college.

1. Duffy, H. (2020, January 10). *Individual learning plans: Students creating their pathways to postsecondary success*. Roundup Blog Series. Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved September 20, 2021, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/blogs/swccr2-ilp.aspx>