

Supporting Use of Electronic Portfolios and Education and Career Goal-Setting Within the Context of Individual Plans of Study

Factsheet

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Individual Plans of Study (IPS) are education and career plans tailored to each student's personal interests and skills. IPS activities focus on developing skills that support self-exploration, career-exploration, career planning and management, and success in life after high school.^{1,2} Portable electronic portfolios and education and career goal-setting are fundamental components of IPS. Education and career goal-setting involves students in identifying their career(s) of interest and the education and experiential pathway(s) necessary to enter and succeed in them; setting short- and long-term plans for achieving their goals; and tracking and documenting their progress through comprehensive and intentional electronic portfolios.

REL Central is supporting the Kansas State Department of Education and schools and districts in Kansas to improve the implementation of, and increase student participation in, promising IPS practices. This fact sheet summarizes research linking use of electronic portfolios and education and career goal-setting with student outcomes and provides examples of research-based recommendations for implementing these practices.

REL Central conducted a scan of literature to identify examples of electronic (e-)portfolio and education and

career goal setting implementation recommendations and outcomes. The scan was conducted using Google Scholar and does not represent a systematic literature review. The information presented should be interpreted with caution, as the quality of the evidence in the descriptions below have not been reviewed. While no rigorous studies have directly examined outcomes associated with IPS as a whole, research suggests that use of electronic portfolios and education and career-goal setting show promise in supporting students' college and career readiness and success.^a



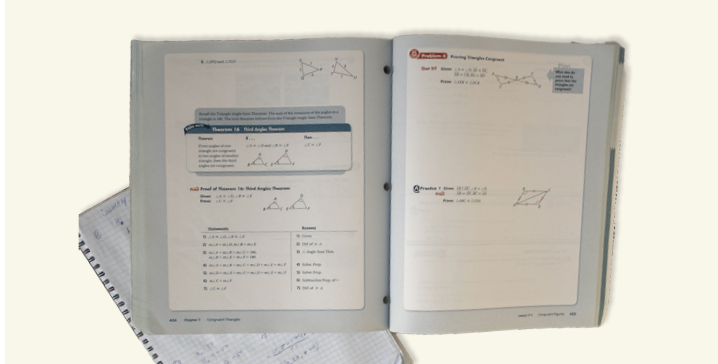
^a A limited number of studies were found that used a quasi-experimental design or randomized controlled trial to provide information on the strength of the relationships between use of electronic portfolios and goal setting with student outcomes. Additional research is needed to better understand impact of IPS on student outcomes.

Electronic Portfolios^{3,4,5}

In Kansas, students use electronic portfolios to document their IPS journey. Electronic portfolios include documents and artifacts that provide evidence of students' college and career readiness and serve as a record of all IPS-related activities, including career interest assessments, postsecondary planning, and coursework and activities aligned with their career interests. Electronic portfolios are used in Kansas and several other states to collect results from personal strengths inventories, resumes, transcripts, personal statements or biographies, and records of career-aligned activities such as work and volunteer experiences. While descriptive research on the use of electronic portfolios within higher education contexts suggests this as a promising practice, research examining their use in the context of IPS is not currently available.

As part of a comprehensive documentation of their college and career readiness, Kansas⁴ students are encouraged to incorporate work-based learning artifacts into their portfolios, including:

- Work samples
- Writing or research samples
- Personal reflections
- Supervisor evaluations
- Employability skills assessment results
- Industry-recognized certifications



Outcomes Associated with Electronic Portfolio Use

Improved Engagement in Learning⁹

Reflecting on educational experiences can increase students' engagement with the coursework and activities that are most relevant to them. This reflection provides opportunities for students to make connections between these experiences and their personal interests.

Improved Awareness of Growth and Abilities^{7,8,9}

Documenting learning artifacts and experiences helps students self-reflect and evaluate their progress toward reaching their educational goals. As a result, students are more aware of how experiences have affected them and are better able to identify areas for potential improvement.

Increased Confidence^{6,7}

When creating electronic portfolios, students reflect on their experiences and communicate their growth with peers, which can result in increased confidence in their career preparation. Similarly, research suggests electronic portfolios may help students feel more prepared for the job interview process.

Implementing Electronic Portfolios

Clearly State the Purpose and Benefits of Creating a Portfolio¹⁰

Students who understand the purpose and benefits of creating an electronic portfolio may feel more confident and motivated to create and use them. Highlighting the purpose of portfolios can help students feel that developing a portfolio is not just another task they must complete.

Provide Instructions and Feedback^{8,9,11}

Providing detailed instructions, rubrics, and strong examples can help students reflect on and improve the status and quality of their own portfolios and increase their ability to provide meaningful feedback on peers' portfolios. Students report one of the most valuable resources when developing a portfolio is receiving feedback from their instructors and peers.

Provide Class Time to Develop Portfolios^{9,10,12}

Students may be hesitant to develop electronic portfolios due to competing demands on their time, such as other assignments. Providing students time during class can provide them with opportunities to focus on the experiences they want to highlight in their portfolios.

Education and Career Goal-Setting^{13,14,15,16}

Education and career goal-setting underlie all aspects of IPS. Goal-setting theory suggests that individuals who set goals and track their progress are more likely to perform well on related tasks than individuals who do not set goals. Through IPS, students identify their personal strengths and career interests, are

provided opportunities to explore careers, learn about the educational and skill requirements of careers of interest, and make plans to achieve their goals. Across grade levels and subject areas, education and career planning helps students focus on specific goals, encourages students to seek academic challenges, and clarifies the connections between immediate tasks and future accomplishments.

Outcomes Associated with Goal-Setting

Increased Academic Engagement^{13,15,17}

Research suggests that students who set goals that are related to their personal interests and education and career plans are motivated to set more challenging goals and to meet their associated performance expectations. Students who set educational goals aligned to their personal interests are also more likely to pursue those goals and be more engaged in the learning process.

Improved Learning Competencies^{14,18,19,20}

Teaching students how to set goals and encouraging them to practice goal-setting in which they identify the short- and long-term milestones they want to achieve helps build essential skills that are sometimes named “learning-to-learn” skills, or considered an aspect of intrinsic motivation. In some studies, students engaging in regular goal-setting activities have improved their study behavior and level of participation in class. Additionally, students who set goals specifically related to their careers of interest have been shown to have greater self-efficacy in career-planning.

Increased secondary and postsecondary outcomes²¹

Research suggests that developing an individual plan of study, which includes goal-setting, may be more effective when students set goals with the support an adult (e.g., a parent or teacher) and regularly review their plan. For example, under these conditions students are more likely to complete a college preparatory curriculum, apply to college, and enroll in college.

Implementing Education and Career Goal-Setting

Encourage Students to Set Effective Goals^{15,18,22,23}

Students often begin learning about goal-setting in the context of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals or “SMART” goals. Effective goals may use the SMART format but can feature additional components summarized in the call-out box.



Create a Culture of Goal-Setting^{15,21,23,24}

Research suggests that the act of goal-setting alone is not associated with positive outcomes. Setting a singular goal should be a part of a broader culture that includes goal reflection, assessment, and progress tracking. Supportive adults in and out of school can build “goal-directed” relationships, which provide students with opportunities to speak freely about their goals. Teachers can embed goal-setting and reflection activities in their classrooms throughout the year that provide students opportunities to create smaller achievements that contribute to a longer-term goal.

Encourage Students to Set Personally-Relevant Goals^{17,18,21,24}

When student goals are relevant to students’ academic interests and the careers they want to pursue, they are more likely to attain them because the sustained effort is connected to building a life they want. When entire classrooms engage in goal-setting lessons, students are more likely to be engaged with the lessons when they can see their own career goals represented in the activity. When students have opportunities to regularly track progress on attaining their goals within school, they can reflect on their interests and make adjustments as they grow and change.

Effective goals often share these characteristics:

- Individual and specific to each student, who has the autonomy to set their own goals
- Oriented around mastery of a specific competency or skill
- Built upon personalized interests
- Balanced between what is meaningful and what is attainable; give students the opportunity to alter the perception of their skills by navigating that balance

Endnotes:

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