

How Individual Plans of Study Can Support Students' College and Career Readiness and Success

Regional Educational Laboratory Central

Individual Plans of Study (IPS) are education and career plans that are tailored to each student's personal interests and skills and help guide and focus their efforts throughout middle and high school. IPS-related activities focus on:



IPS are both a product and a process. While each student will take a different path to achieve their personal college and/or career goals, IPS are intended to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to help them accomplish those goals.

IPS At A Glance



Self-exploration (students learn about their personal strengths and interests)

- School time dedicated to IPS activities
- Personal strengths and learning style inventories
- Career interest assessments
- Discussions with educators and counselors to identify life goals



College and career planning and goal setting (students develop plans to achieve their college and/or career goals)

- Identify college and career goals and steps needed to accomplish them
- Multi-year class plan aligned with goals
- Post-high school plan (e.g., workforce, military, college)
- Student-led conference to report on goal progress



Career exploration (students learn about careers that may fit their strengths and interests)

- College and career fairs
- Guest speakers at school
- Job shadowing
- Career-based field trips



Workforce competency and skill development (students participate in activities to help achieve their college and/or career goals)

- Employability skills lessons
- Work-based learning (e.g., internships)
- Dual/concurrent enrollment (i.e., earn college credit in high school)
- Portfolio to document accomplishments and college and/or career readiness

While no rigorous studies have directly examined IPS as a whole, research examining associated practices suggests that when IPS are implemented with the support of adults and regularly reviewed, they may increase students’ academic engagement, sense of agency, acquisition of career-relevant knowledge and skills, and drive to accomplish college and career goals.^{3,4,5}

IPS-related activities such as college and career goal setting and work-based learning experiences such as completing a career and technical education (CTE) pathway have also been linked to improved outcomes during high school (such as academic achievement and completion of rigorous coursework)^{4,5,6,7,8,9} and post-high school outcomes (such as college enrollment).^{6,7,8,10,11}



Endnotes

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- ¹⁰ Belasco, A. S. (2013). Creating college opportunity: School counselors and their influence on postsecondary enrollment. *Research in Higher Education*, 54(7), 781-804. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1039149>
- ¹¹ Mann, A., Denis, V. & Percy, C. (2021). Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19. *OECD Education Working Papers*, 24. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en



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