

Individual Student Planning in the United States: Rationale, Practices, and Results

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The first part of the article provides an overview of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in the United States. Next, individual student planning, a major guidance and counseling program component, is described, followed by a discussion of why individual student planning is important in the lives of students. Then examples of individual student planning practices are provided. The article closes with a presentation of evidence of the impact of these practices on critical markers of student success, including academic achievement.

Guidance and counseling has been part of the United States' educational system — kindergarten through grade 12 — since the early 1900s. During the early years, teachers were appointed to the position of vocational counselor. They were given a list of duties to perform, in addition to their regular full-time teaching duties. No formal organizational structure was provided other than the list of duties (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

As the decades of the 1900s unfolded, more and more full-time

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counselors were added to schools along with other personnel such as nurses, attendance workers, school psychologists, and school social workers. By the 1930s, it was apparent that a new organizational structure was needed. The new structure was called pupil personnel services. For school counselors, the list of duties remained, but now the duties were organized around six basic services: orientation, assessment, information, counseling, placement, and follow-up (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

In the 1970s, the call came to reorient guidance and counseling from what had become an ancillary set of services delivered by a school counselor to a comprehensive developmental program. The call for reorientation came from diverse sources, including (a) a renewed interest in career guidance (and its theoretical base, career development), (b) a renewed interest in developmental guidance and counseling, (c) concern about the efficacy of the prevailing services approach to guidance and counseling in schools, and (d) concern about accountability and evaluation (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

In the first decade of the 21st century, comprehensive programs are rapidly replacing the traditional position-service orientation. Comprehensive programs are becoming the major way of organizing and managing guidance and counseling in the schools of the United States. Early work on developing comprehensive guidance and counseling programs was done by Gysbers and Moore (1974, 1981) and later by Gysbers and Henderson (2006), Myrick (2003), and Johnson and Johnson (2001). The idea of a comprehensive guidance program was endorsed by the American School Counselor Association (2005) with the publication of their national model.

The first part of this article provides an overview of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that are being implemented in the

schools of the United States. Then the individual student planning component of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program is described, showing how it fits into and interacts with the other program components — guidance curriculum, responsive services, and system support. Next, a rationale is presented that describes why the individual student planning component of an overall comprehensive guidance and counseling program is critical for students' success in school. This rationale is followed by a presentation of examples of current practices as well as findings from several research studies that provide evidence of the impact of these practices on critical markers of student success in schools, including academic achievement.

Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs

The comprehensive guidance and counseling program framework currently being adopted or adapted for use in the schools of the United States consists of four elements, including (a) content, (b) organizational framework, (c) resources, and (d) development, management, and accountability (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). The program concept for guidance and counseling is based on the following assumptions:

1. All students need specific knowledge and skills that are the instructional responsibility of guidance and counseling programs.
2. All students need assistance with their personal, educational, and career planning.
3. Some students require special assistance in dealing with developmental problems and immediate crises and in removing barriers to learning.
4. Guidance and counseling programs require management and evaluation activities in order to continually improve. In addition, other educational programs in schools, and the staff involved, require support that can best be supplied by the guidance and counseling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

Content

The content element identifies competencies (knowledge and skills) considered important for students to master in a comprehensive guidance program. Competencies are usually organized by grade level (kindergarten through grade 12) or grade level groupings (elementary, middle, and high school). Competencies are often grouped by domains such as career, academic, and personal/social.

Organizational Framework

The organizational framework contains three structural components (definition, rationale, assumptions). The program definition includes the mission statement of the guidance and counseling program and its centrality within a school district's total educational program. The rationale describes the importance of guidance and counseling as an equal partner in the educational system and provides reasons why students need to acquire the competencies that will accrue to them as a result of their participation in a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Finally, assumptions provide the principles that shape and guide the program.

The second section of the organizational framework consists of the four program components, including guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. These four program components are the delivery system for all of the guidance and counseling activities provided to students and their parents.

The *guidance curriculum* component contains structured activities in kindergarten through grade 12 that provide all students with opportunities to master guidance competencies drawn from the content element of the program. In the *individual student planning* component of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program, activities are

provided to assist students in understanding and periodically monitoring their career, academic, and personal/social development. In the *responsive services* component of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program, individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, and referral are ongoing. This component organizes guidance techniques to respond to individual concerns and needs; it is also supportive of the guidance curriculum and individual student planning components. The last program component is called *system support*. Research and development activities, school counselor professional development, staff/community public relations, community outreach, and program management are examples of the many activities school counselors are involved in to support the comprehensive guidance and counseling program as well as other educational programs in schools.

Resources

The third element of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program is resources. Three kinds of resources are required: personnel resources, financial resources, and political resources. Personnel resources include school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, and business and labor personnel. In addition, for a guidance and counseling program to function effectively, adequate financial support and a budget for providing materials and equipment are crucial. Support also includes appropriate facilities provided by the district to house the program.

Development, Management, and Accountability

The element of development, management, and accountability of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program includes five transition phases (planning, designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing) required to fully operationalize the program. This element also includes the various management tasks that need to be completed in

each transition phase to enable the change process to unfold smoothly and efficiently. Finally, this element describes how a comprehensive guidance and counseling program is accountable through program, personnel, and results evaluation.

Individual Student Planning

What Is Individual Student Planning?

Our children must learn to understand and plan their life with a view beyond graduation. Keys to the success of this effort are the empowerment of young people to take control of their future; the strong relationship built between student, teacher/counselor and involved parents; and the accountability and responsibility that the students take on to meet their goals. No student is overlooked or lost; each has the opportunity to plan for and work towards a future that he or she believes in. These skills are essential preparation for the workplace that they will be entering. (P. E. Miller, cited in Severn, 2004, p. 24)

The purpose of the individual student planning component of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program is to provide all students with guidance and counseling activities to assist them to positively assess, plan for, and then monitor and manage their personal-social, academic, and career development (Cohen, 2001). The point of the activities is to have students focus on their current and future goals by developing life career plans (personal plans of study) drawing on the strengths-based content embedded in the guidance curriculum.

The foundation for student planning is established during the elementary school years through guidance curriculum activities. Self-concept development, the acquisition of learning-to-learn skills, interpersonal-relationship skill development, decision-making skill building, and awareness and beginning exploration of educational and

occupational possibilities are examples of topics that are addressed. Topics such as these continue to be part of the guidance curriculum component during middle school and high school, providing new information and experiences to enable students to regularly update, monitor, and manage their plans effectively.

Building on the foundation provided in elementary school, beginning planning for the future occurs during the middle school years through the individual student planning component. During this period, students' plans focus on high school course selection, taking into account graduation requirements and the requirements of their postsecondary educational and occupational goals. Guidance curriculum activities continue to support and guide the planning process.

During the high school years, plans developed in the middle school are reviewed and updated periodically in accordance with students' postsecondary personal, educational, and career goals. The individual student planning component provides time for regular individual work with students as well as group sessions focusing on individual student planning. Guidance curriculum activities continue to support student planning by giving emphasis to the development and use of decision-making, goal-setting, and planning skills. The importance and relevance of basic academic and career and technical skills are stressed. The goal is for students' plans to become pathways or guides through which students can use the past and present to anticipate and prepare for the future.

Individual student planning is implemented through such strategies as the following:

- *Individual appraisal.* School counselors help students to assess and interpret their abilities, interests, skills, and achievement.

- *Individual advisement.* School counselors help students use self-appraisal information along with personal/social, academic, career, and labor market information to plan for and realize their personal, social, academic, and career goals.
- *Transition planning.* School counselors and other education personnel help students make the transition from school to work or to additional education and training.

Students' plans that are developed as a result of individual student planning activities come in a variety of formats. One format is the traditional 4-year high school plan. It focuses on high school course selection consistent with meeting high school graduation and post-secondary education goal requirements. Another format being used increasingly is the student portfolio either in a paper or electronic form (Davis, 1997). The portfolio, which is much more comprehensive than a 4-year plan, helps students record and document their work, their education and training, personal experiences, and acquired skills. Portfolios may have a part of job performance with sections presenting personal, educational, and work-record information and primary job skills. Another part often presents work interests, traits, and attitudes; special training or skills; favorite classes, training programs, subjects, and educational activities; and social/leisure activities. Still another format is the career passport. It contains some of the same information found in the portfolio, but is less detailed and concentrates more on information needed for job interviews and job applications.

When students leave school, they take their life career plan folders (paper or electronic) with them. Whether they go to work or continue their education, the folder and the accompanying competency lists are available for additional goal-setting, decision-making, and planning activities. Information in the folder can assist them in a variety of job-seeking and job-keeping activities, including filling out application

forms, writing résumés, developing curriculum vitae, or preparing for job advancement. As new experiences occur, these can be analyzed and added to the appropriate sections of the folder. Thus the individual life career plan folder with accompanying competency lists can become an ongoing goal-setting and planning vehicle for individuals as long as they wish to use it.

Educational and career decision-making, planning, and goal-setting are primarily the responsibility of students and their parents or guardians. Parent and guardian involvement in the activities of the individual student planning component is essential to students' successful development and implementation of their education and career plans. For student planning to be effective, parents or guardians need timely and accurate information as guidance and counseling activities are implemented.

The plans that students develop and use are both processes and instruments. As processes, students' plans evolve throughout the school years, responding to the successive learning activities in the overall school program as well as to the guidance activities provided through the guidance curriculum and individual planning components of the guidance program. As instruments, plans provide structured ways for students to gather, analyze, synthesize, and organize self, educational, and occupational information. As processes, plans are vehicles through which this information is incorporated into short- and long-range goal-setting, decision-making, and planning activities. As instruments, plans are not tracks to be plotted and followed routinely; they are, instead, blueprints for life quests (Gysbers, 1985).

Why Is Individual Student Planning Important?

Individual student planning is not a new idea. A major goal of guidance and counseling over the years has been to assist students to think about and plan for their futures. However, no specific structure

was provided for individual student planning. That lack changed when Gysbers and Moore (1981) introduced the idea that individual student planning should be a major component of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs along with guidance curriculum, responsive services, and system support. To facilitate the application of this component to practice, Gysbers (1985) developed a training module “Create and Use an Individual Career Development Plan” to train professional school counselors on how to assist students in their career planning.

In the 1990s, the importance of individual student planning was demonstrated by a study of young people in Indiana titled *High Hopes Long Odds: Next Steps*. The study found that:

The difference in the high school experiences of students with plans for 4 years of high school courses and career plans versus students without such counselor-assisted plans was so great that providing help with these plans must be offered at every school. (Orfield & Paul, 1994, p. 11)

Is individual student planning still important today? Will it be important in the future? Pellitteri, Stern, Shelton, and Muller-Ackerman (2006) answered these questions with this statement:

Many students are unaware of how critical this skill, goal setting and planning, is to a full, rewarding, and successful life ... goals give us our bearing and point us in a purposeful direction. (pp. 209–210)

Rule and Bishop (2006) suggested that “Goals, or purposes, are the energizing fabric of daily living” (p. 76).

To illustrate the importance of individual student planning, several states have passed legislation requiring or recommending that individual student planning activities take place in schools. For example, in 1996

and 1997, the state of Utah (Utah State Board of Education, 1997; Utah State Government, 1996) translated the idea of individual plans for students into state law and state board of education policy, requiring that all students develop and implement personalized student education/occupation plans. The state of Washington passed a law similar to the rule passed by the state of Utah that encourages schools to help students develop and use plans of study (Washington State Legislature, 2006). In addition, the state of Missouri (Missouri School Improvement Program, 2005) and the state of Kentucky (Kentucky Department of Education, 2008) require that an individual student planning system be in place in schools no later than eighth grade and that it include the necessary planning forms and procedures.

At about the same time that Utah passed legislation to require individual student planning, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (1996) published a report titled *Breaking Ranks*. In it they recommended that each student in high school develop and use a personal plan for progress. The importance of individual student planning was emphasized again with the publication of *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP, 2004). Recommendation 12 of *Breaking Ranks II* stated the following:

Each student will have a Personal Plan for Progress that will be reviewed often to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards. (NASSP, 2004, p. 84)

The idea behind personalized learning is that it “allows the student to understand who he or she is, what adult roles seem most desirable, and how to get from here to there in the most productive way” (NASSP, 2004, p. 169).

Breaking Ranks in the Middle (NASSP, 2006) also emphasized individual student planning. The report recommended that sixth or seventh graders and their parents be introduced to planning for their education and beyond. The report stressed the need for students to meet frequently and meaningfully with an adult to plan and review their development.

The American College Testing Program (2005) also focused on the importance of individual student planning in *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*. This organization recommended that career and educational planning service be provided to all students. Furthermore, parents must be involved in key educational and postsecondary planning.

In addition, Bottoms and Young (2008) stated that students need a vision of the future, one that helps them see clear connections between what they are doing in school and the knowledge they will need in the future. They need a plan:

By the time students complete the middle grades they should have a six-year career development plan covering four years of high school and two years beyond. At this early state, forum participants emphasized that students need to see clear connections between the course content they are being asked to learn in school and the skills and knowledge they will need in their careers. (Bottoms & Young, 2008, p. 2)

What Does Individual Student Planning Look Like in Action?

What does individual student planning look like in action? Four examples follow. The first example is from the Granite School District in Utah (Granite School District Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program, 2006). The Granite School District has implemented the Utah State requirement that every student of grades 7–12 have a

Student Education and Occupation Plan (SEOP). The second example is from the Franklin Pierce School District in Washington. The Franklin Pierce School District developed an individual student planning system that has evolved into a statewide system titled *Navigation 101* (Severn, 2004). The third example is from the state of Kentucky (Kentucky Department of Education, 2008). It is a Web-enabled individual learning plan. The fourth and final example is from the state of Nebraska and is called Personal Learning Plans (Nebraska Department of Education, 2008).

Granite School District—Utah

In the Granite School District, the SEOP is the form and the process through which individual student planning unfolds. The goal is to assist students in grades 7–12 to plan, monitor, and manage their own learning as well as their personal and career development. Students can set, review, and evaluate their educational, personal, and career goals, connecting them to activities that help them achieve their goals. The SEOP process is career guidance and counseling in action.

School counselors in the Granite School District have set a goal they call the 3 × 4 plan. With the 3 × 4 plan, in every middle and high school, school counselors or other educational personnel will have three individual SEOP planning meetings with each student (every school year), with at least one meeting with a parent or guardian in attendance. They will also conduct four classroom guidance activities, one activity each term for each grade level, grades 7–12 (Granite School District Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program, 2006).

The key to putting the 3 × 4 plan into full operation is calendaring. Calendaring individual student planning in the Granite District began with the decision about what percentage of time school counselors should devote to the planning process at the middle school and high

school levels. Then, that percentage of school counselors' time was translated into days of the school year and into the class periods available. Next the ratio of school counselors to students was added to determine how much time each school counselor could spend with each student and in preparing for individual sessions. In the 2005–2006 school year, 95% of the students met at least once with their school counselor, and 52% of the parents involved met at least once with their adolescent and a school counselor (Granite School District Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program, 2006).

Franklin Pierce School District–Washington (Navigation 101)

According to Severn (2004), the foundation of individual student planning is the guidance curriculum. The guidance curriculum part of *Navigation 101* uses an advisor-advisee system in which teachers and school counselors meet twice a month with groups of 20 students. The *Navigation 101* coursework includes these topics:

- discussion and analysis of students' test results,
- various assessments of personal interests and aptitudes,
- goal-setting skill development,
- planning for each year's high school course selection and personal goals,
- independent living skills lessons, such as how to budget and how to balance a checkbook,
- information about how the post-secondary education and training system works and how to access it, and
- development of a student portfolio and planning for annual, student-led planning conferences with their parents or guardians and their *Navigation* teacher. (Severn, 2004, p. 10)

The individual student planning part of *Navigation 101* begins in grade 6 when students develop a portfolio. In the spring, conferences

are held with students and parents or guardians to review students' plans and progress. Students plan and lead these conferences. They discuss what they have done and then describe their future plans. When the conferences end, all individuals involved sign the students' plans (Severn, 2004).

Kentucky Department of Education

Beginning in the 2006–2007 school year, a new online education planning tool was made available to middle and high school students in Kentucky. It is called the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). According to the Kentucky Department of Education (2008), the ILP provides individuals with a plan for transitioning to the next level of learning so that they are ready to perform at a high level in their chosen career. The Department states that the ILP gives new relevance to what students learn in school and provides connectedness to post-secondary education or to the work world.

The ILP Web-enabled system provides students with several opportunities:

- Explore careers beginning in grade 6;
- Find careers that match their skills and interests;
- Create education plans;
- Establish personal goals and revisit these as they progress through school;
- Create, maintain, and change résumés;
- Track and reflect on their community services experiences, work experiences, career-planning activities, and extra-curricular and organization activities.

Nebraska Department of Education

Personal Learning Plans (PLP) in Nebraska (Nebraska Department

of Education, 2008) are students' plans of coursework and other activities organized to help them meet their learning, earning, and living goals. A major goal of the PLP is to help students personalize their educational experiences, looking forward to post-secondary education or work upon graduation. School counselors, teachers, and parents all work together to help students maximize their educational experiences.

What Is the Impact of Individual Student Planning?

Many local school districts in the United States, guided by state recommendations, are implementing comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that focus on individual student planning activities. What is the impact of these programs overall and individual student planning activities particularly? What follows are brief reports of a number of recent studies that indicate a substantial impact on student success in schools, including on academic achievement.

Franklin Pierce School District—Washington (Navigation 101)

Evaluation studies of *Navigation 101*, the combination of guidance curriculum and individual student planning, in the Franklin Pierce School District found the following results:

- A 10% increase in the number of students who progress from grade 9 to grade 10 on time.
- An 8% decline in students receiving an F in one or more classes.
- Dramatic increases in the number of students enrolling in rigorous, demanding classes: 28% increase in students requesting pre-calculus classes, 240% increase in students requesting physics classes, and 180% increase in students requesting chemistry classes.
- A school-wide transition to a more student-centered, individualized way of thinking about education.

In addition, the system revealed a new way of creating school schedules, in which students register first, and then school officials plan

the class schedule to respond to students' preferences (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2008).

Utah

Nelson and Gardner (1998) were commissioned to study the impact of Utah students attending schools that had, relatively more fully than others, implemented a comprehensive program. Some provocative findings included the following. Students attending high schools with more fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs scored higher on every subtest of the American College Testing than did students attending high schools that were not providing these programs. Students in high-implementation schools were more likely to meet with their parents and school counselors to plan their educational courses of studies. These students were also more likely to both enroll in and pass more advanced mathematics and science courses. In addition, these students enrolled in more career and technical education courses. Finally, they were much more satisfied with the guidance and career planning services they were receiving in their schools.

In 2007, another study was completed concerning the nature and impact of Utah's comprehensive guidance and counseling program (Nelson, Fox, Haslam, & Gardner, 2007). The findings of the 2007 study substantiated the findings of the 1998 study. For example, students in high-implementation schools took greater numbers of higher-level English, mathematics and technology courses, attained higher levels of academic achievement, and made better decisions about education and career planning than did students attending lower-implementation schools.

Missouri

In the fall of 2005, Missouri school counselors and school administrators completed an Internet survey in which they rated the

extent to which the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program had been implemented in their school buildings during the 2004–2005 school year. Completing this survey were 617 school counselors and 141 school administrators from approximately one-third of the school districts in Missouri. The sample was representative of Missouri’s ethnic, cultural, geographic, population, and socioeconomic diversity. The results of the survey indicated the degree of guidance program implementation in each school building involved in the study.

The study found that when school counselors in Missouri worked in schools that had more fully implemented guidance programs, they made significant contributions to overall student success, including to student academic achievement:

- Students had higher grade 10 Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) mathematics scores.
- Students had higher grade 11 MAP communications arts scores.
- More students were likely to attend school.
- Fewer students had discipline problems.
- Fewer students received out-of-school suspensions.

In addition to these findings, the study also estimated how well high schools were progressing in their efforts to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). To do this, a variable was created that was a ratio of the number of NCLB categories a high school met, divided by the total number of NCLB categories that the high school was required to meet by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. While this variable might make it more difficult for high schools that had more NCLB categories to meet, the researchers statistically controlled for this by entering enrollment size and percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch before examining the effects of guidance program implementation.

While the trend was in a positive direction, overall guidance program implementation did not significantly predict the AYP variable. However, and very importantly, high schools that provided students educational and career planning services (individual student planning) as part of comprehensive guidance programs had significantly higher AYP scores. Helping students to explore and develop educational and career goals accounted for an additional 3% of how well high schools were meeting the AYP requirements of NCLB (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007).

Some Final Points

Individual student planning is not a stand-alone activity. It is an integral part of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. The guidance curriculum provides students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to consider their next steps personally, educationally, and occupationally. In turn, individual student planning activities help students organize and focus this knowledge and these skills and dispositions as they plan for the future. The guidance curriculum and individual student planning components support each other.

The connection between the guidance curriculum and individual student planning are clearly demonstrated by the five key elements of the state of Washington's *Navigation 101* program. The five key elements include:

- *Personalizing* — guidance curriculum content;
- *Planning* — developing and using portfolios;
- *Demonstrating* — student-led conferences with parents, teachers, and school counselors;
- *Empowering* — student-driven scheduling;
- *Evaluating* — helping students understand what they are accomplishing (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2007).

Note that the first element is the guidance curriculum. It is first because the guidance curriculum provides students with the foundation to do planning. In turn, this allows students to demonstrate their ability to plan, empowers them to select appropriate coursework, and helps them understand and evaluate their accomplishments.

It is also clear that when individual student planning is fully implemented as a major component of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs, student success, including student academic achievement, is enhanced. Why? Because the processes of goal setting and planning in individual student planning provides students with purpose and direction. Why? Because through individual student planning, students work closely with school counselors and teachers who “care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (Wingspread Declaration on School Connections, 2004). As a result, they are more successful in school.

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美國的學生生涯規劃：理念、實踐與成果

本文首先概述美國的綜合督導與諮商計劃，接着介紹督導與諮商計劃的一個主要成分——學生生涯規劃，論說為何學生生涯規劃對學生的生命如此重要，並提供實踐例子。最後，文章舉出研究證據，說明學生生涯規劃措施如何有助學生的各項重要成就指標（包括學業成績）。