



School Counselor Playbook

Unlocking Career Success



This playbook provides ways in which school counselors and school teams can blur the lines between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. School counselors play a significant role to Raise the Bar for student success by developing an *education-to-workforce system* focusing on Unlocking Career Success.

Step 1

Identify Student Goals

Step 2

Support Student Self-Reflection

Step 3

Connect Learning Experiences

Step 4

Plan for Post High School

Identify student goals

Postsecondary and career planning helps students identify their interests and strengths and take steps to achieve their future goals. Students benefit from annual school-led processes that help them customize their learning, broaden their perspective, and support the attainment of their goals. When helping students define and achieve their goals, consider how to:



Support students to develop a postsecondary and career plan that includes education and career goals, encourages short- and longer-term steps to achieve student goals, provides opportunities for iteration and reflection, and includes input from multiple stakeholders including the student, their family, and other mentors.



Unlock student potential through the four keys to Unlocking Career Success which include dual enrollment coursework in academic and technical subjects, participation in work-based learning, attainment of an industry-recognized credential, and career advising and navigation.



Prepare students for the transition beyond high school by helping to educate students and families about career pathways, related labor market information, and postsecondary opportunities to accomplish their goals, which can include registered apprenticeship or industry credential programs, as well as two- and four-year degree programs.

Tools to define and achieve postsecondary and career goals:

Support Career Exploration

The American School Counselor Association's Career Conversation Starters can facilitate productive conversations with students and parents. The ASVAB Career Exploration Program provides tools to help students make informed decisions based on their unique skills. Advance CTE's Student Interest Survey for Career Clusters® can help students identify career clusters of interest, which are broader occupational groupings, and may be helpful in assisting students with choosing between multiple career pathway programs. Smart Futures provides surveys, activities, and skill-building tools to provide students with the self-awareness needed to identify realistic career goals.

Require Individualized Learning Plans

Help students explore careers, identify their goals, interests, and strengths, and capture that data within an individualized learning plan (ILP). The Colorado Department of Education provides the Individual Career and Academic Plan, a comprehensive resource on individualized student planning. Another career development resource, the Promoting Quality Individualized Learning Plans throughout the Lifespan, provides examples of ILP implementation for multiple age groups and settings.

Share the Value of Career-Connected Education

Clearly communicate the value of career-connected learning. In Illinois, Mundelein High School's Pathways Handbook provides a student and family-facing handbook that explains what pathways are, why they matter, and other helpful tools. Counselors in Georgia use an infographic to help communicate the difference between vocational education and modern career, technical, and agricultural education. Academies of Shakopee (MN) in Minnesota has a library of videos and other engagement tools for high school career academies to empower students to explore careers without limiting options.



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Support student self-reflection

Student advisement is an iterative process that involves multiple conversations, engagements, and other supports throughout a student's educational journey. Opportunities for individual and group reflection, including the use of technology, can help students better understand their career interests and passions. When supporting student self-reflection, consider how to:



Leverage technology and data systems to support student engagement and capture students' input and reflections, which can include postsecondary and career planning tools, labor market information, and school-based communication tools that can be used to share information with students and their families more effectively.



Engage students and families to ensure that families are taking proactive steps to plan for their children's future, which can include postsecondary and financial planning, developing an annual ILP, and educating families on the postsecondary options that are available to youth based on their career goals.



Address occupational segregation by focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within career pathway programs by exposing students to a range of career options that highlight in-demand, high-wage, and high-skill jobs and the career pathways to achieve them.

Tools to help students to self-reflect and discuss their needs:

Discuss High-Wage In-Demand Jobs

Provide information on high-wage and in-demand jobs and map the educational pathways to achieve these careers. My Colorado Journey centralizes education and career pathways resources, enabling users to find and explore careers in Colorado and take steps to achieve their goals. In Indiana, Hoosiers by the Numbers provides a dashboard to review labor market information by county and topic. In California, the Community College Salary Surfer provides an estimate of potential wages after students receive a credential in a certain career.

Celebrate & Uplift Student Choice

Celebrate the variety of choices students pursue in high school. The Yuma Union High School District celebrates student success through career and technical student organizations like the SkillsUSA state championships. Reach Higher Shasta hosts a college and career signing day that celebrates students who are pursuing different postsecondary options like registered apprenticeships, community colleges, and the military.

Engage Families & Guardians

Leverage national resources like Next Steps Webinars to empower families to learn about postsecondary options and answer parent questions about different careers, career pathway programs, types of education and training models, and registered apprenticeships. In Georgia, Brookwood High School hosts Informational Nights for Parents to support students' postsecondary and career goals with benchmarks at each grade level. In California, San Clemente High School hosts a Meet the Industry Night, an annual event that brings together students, parents, and industry partners.



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School counselors can help students connect their career goals to what they are learning in the classroom and outside of school. Intentional partnerships with community-based organizations and non-profit service providers, that utilize wrap-around supports for students and their families can help students leverage out-of-school time more intentionally. When connecting in-school and out-of-school learning, consider how to:



Develop partnerships with out-of-school learning providers to help students enroll in high-quality and meaningful work-based learning experiences that occur after school and over the summer, which can include coordination with employers, non-profit organizations, childcare centers, youth organizations, and may leverage summer youth employment programs.



Create flexibility in student course schedules to allow youth to participate in work-based learning experiences alongside rigorous academic and technical coursework, enroll in summer learning and/or summer youth employment programs, and ensure that these learning experiences are captured on an academic record/transcript.



Consider blended advisement models that evolve over the course of the high school experience, create time during the school day to provide whole group and individualized student advisement based on the academic, social, and emotional needs of students, and use professional and faculty mentors strategically.

Tools to connect in-school and out-of-school learning:

Create Advising Cohorts

In Connecticut, Westbrook High School's Advisory Structure includes dedicated cohorts of students that move through the high school experience together with lesson plans and other resources with support for student advisors within each cohort. Leverage proven models such as the Linked Learning Alliance, an education model that many schools have adopted that supports a shared advisement structure as demonstrated in Oakland, CA. In Oregon, the ASPIRE Mentoring Program offers students education and mentoring opportunities including 1:1 and group mentoring, activities or events that focus on career exploration, career and college research, admissions applications, scholarships, and financial aid.

Connect Academics to Careers

In California, Cajon Valley's World of Work is a school-based initiative that embeds student self-exploration and career exploration within traditional lesson plans. The digital tool Pathful provides learners with a network of industry professionals and matches teachers and students with industry professionals virtually. Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) are designed to work as an integral component of a career and technical education program to further support classroom instruction, and to create opportunities for students to build employability and career skills through hands-on demonstrations, and real life and/or work experiences.



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Plan for life after high school

Students have multiple options to pursue postsecondary education and training, including registered apprenticeship, industry certification programs, and two- and four-year degree programs. However, students and their families may not be aware of the options are available to them and how school counselors can support students to pursue their career goals. When supporting this preparation, consider how to:



Support students to transition which includes helping students understand and apply to the appropriate postsecondary option(s) that are available to them (e.g., registered apprenticeship, community and technical college, four-year institutions, military, and workforce) and to coordinate transition services and other student supports.



Support students' academic and social-emotional needs by engaging with local and state partners to bring together experienced organizations in the school community to help recruit and engage adults to serve as tutors, mentors, student success coaches, and postsecondary transition coaches.



Create multi-tiered systems of support within schools to help every student acquire the supports and services needed to be successful, which can include coordination with in-school youth programs operated by local workforce development boards and pre-employment transition services through the state vocational rehabilitation system.

Tools to support preparation for life after high school:

Support Social & Emotional Learning

Utilize evidence-based social and emotional learning content. During periods of student transition, school counselors can leverage resources that support student mental health like the American School Counselor Association's [Resources on Social/Emotional Development](#) and the U.S. Department of Education's [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs Toolkit](#) to ensure that students are successful in navigating the demands of postsecondary planning and choice.

Create Structured Planning Time

School counselors can work with their schools to create structured time for students and families to support their postsecondary plans. For students interested in attending college after graduation, this can be done through group college application sessions like the [Community College of Rhode Island's Enrollment Days](#), or helping students prepare for the SAT/PSAT, as in [Plano Independent School District](#), or supporting families in completing the FAFSA, like the [East Baton Rouge Parish FAFSA night](#). School counselors can also share resources, such as, the U.S. Department of Education's [College Scorecard](#) to help students and families make decisions about applications to colleges or universities.

Talk About Registered Apprenticeships

For students interested in entering the workforce upon graduation, school counselors can support students and families by providing information about registered apprenticeship opportunities through sources like the U.S. Department of Labor's [Earn While You Learn Today](#) and [Apprenticeship Finder](#). Both are useful tools for school counselors and students who would like to research apprenticeship jobs and available training programs in their community. School counselors can share [labor market information](#) or encourage youth to connect with the [local workforce development board](#) to help enroll in out-of-school time programs sponsored under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. School counselors can reference the Department of Labor's [YouthRules](#) for resources about youth labor rights when supporting youth employment opportunities.



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