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Education Alignment and Accountability in an Era of Convergence: Policy Insights from States with Individual Learning Plans and Policies

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Abstract: In response to the rising demand for market-responsive education reform across the U.S., since 1998 more than twenty states have created Individual Learning or Graduation Plan (ILP/IGP) state policies. Using extensive policy document analyses and stakeholder interview data from four early-adopting ILP/IGP states, the goal of this four-state case study was twofold. First, to determine the extent to which states are leveraging federal and state resources to align their ILP initiatives with other policies aimed at fostering education innovation and assisting economic recovery. The second goal was to develop policy recommendations for making intergovernmental investments to strengthen performance outcomes in education and workforce development in ILP/IGP states. The federal interest in equal protection and improving equity for special populations including youth

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with disabilities stimulated and animated the investigation. Several key findings emerged across the four states. First, to date limited fiscal investments in professional development and systematic data collection have constrained ILP-IGP implementation and evaluation efforts. Second, the opportunity to align and leverage the state investment with federal programs and other state employment and education initiatives was largely unexplored in these states. Recommendations for state policy improvements include aligning ILP policies with state plans for improving outcomes in federal programs for students confronting economic, language, and disability challenges.

Keywords: Educational policy, individual transition plans, personal empowerment, state education agencies, state programs.

Estandarización y rendición de cuentas en la educación en una era de convergencia: reflexiones sobre las políticas de estados con planes de aprendizaje individuales

Abstract: En respuesta a la creciente demanda de una reforma educativa que dé cuenta de las necesidades de mercado en los Estados Unidos, desde el año 1998 más de veinte estados han creado políticas estatales con planes de aprendizaje o graduación individuales (ILP por su sigla en inglés). Utilizando un análisis extensivo de documentos de política e información obtenida a través de entrevistas a participantes de cuatro estados que implementaron tempranamente planes IPG, el objetivo de este estudio de caso fue doble. En primer lugar, determinar el grado en que los estados están acomodando recursos federales y estatales para alinear sus iniciativas ILP con otras políticas que intentan promover la innovación educativa y ayudar a la recuperación económica. El segundo objetivo fue el de desarrollar recomendaciones de política para realizar inversiones intergubernamentales tendientes a fortalecer los resultados de rendimiento en educación y el desarrollo de quienes trabajan en estados con planes ILP. El interés federal en la protección igualitaria y en la mejora del valor para las poblaciones con necesidades especiales, incluidos los jóvenes con discapacidades, estimularon y animaron esta investigación. Numerosos hallazgos clave emergieron en los cuatro estados. Primero, hasta la fecha, las inversiones fiscales en el desarrollo profesional y en la recolección sistemática de información han limitado la implementación y los esfuerzos de evaluación de los planes ILP/IGP. Segundo, la oportunidad de alinear y acomodar la inversión estatal con los programas federales y otras iniciativas de empleo y educación de los estados fue en gran parte inexplorada en estos estados. Las recomendaciones para la mejora en la política de los estados incluyen el alineamiento de las políticas ILP con los planes para mejorar los resultados en los programas federales de los estudiantes que enfrentan desafíos económicos, de lenguaje y discapacidades.

Palabras clave: política educativa; planes individuales de transición; empoderamiento personal; agencias educativas de los estados; programas estatales.

Padronização e responsabilidade na educação em uma era de convergência: Reflexões sobre as políticas de estados com planos individuais de aprendizagem.

Resumo: Em resposta à crescente procura de reforma educacional que leve em conta as necessidades do mercado nos Estados Unidos desde 1998, mais de vinte estados têm estabelecido planos estaduais de políticas de graduação ou de aprendizagem individual (ILP por a sigla em inglês). Usando uma extensa análise de documentos de política e informações obtidas através de entrevistas com participantes de quatro estados que implementaram planos iniciais ILP, o objetivo deste estudo de caso foi duplo. O primeiro objetivo foi determinar a medida em que os estados estão usando recursos federais e estaduais para alinhar suas políticas com iniciativas ILP com outras que visam promover a inovação na educação e ajudar a recuperação econômica. O segundo objetivo foi desenvolver recomendações de políticas para realizar investimentos destinados a

fortalecer os resultados de desempenho intergovernamentais em educação e o desenvolvimento das pessoas que trabalham em estados com planos de ILP. O interesse federal na proteção igualitária e a melhora da equidade para populações especiais, incluindo jovens com deficiência estimulou e encorajou esta pesquisa. Várias descobertas importantes surgiram nos quatro estados. Primeiro, até hoje, o investimento fiscal no desenvolvimento profissional e na coleta sistemática de dados têm limitado os esforços de implementação e avaliação dos planos de ILP. Segundo, a oportunidade de alinhar e acomodar os investimentos estaduais com outros programas federais e outras iniciativas de emprego e de educação dos estados foram em grande parte inexploradas nesses estados. Recomendações para melhorar a política de estados incluem o alinhamento da política de ILP com planos para melhorar os resultados em programas federais para estudantes que estejam enfrentando desafios econômicos, de linguagem e deficiência.

Palavras-chave: política de educação; planos de transição individual; capacitação pessoal; agências de educação; estados, programas estaduais.

Introduction

In times of economic uncertainty, the interest in education and educational policy is both heightened and shared widely by local, state, and national policymakers. From living rooms to statehouses to the White House, questions abound regarding job creation and the requisite educational policies and programs needed for stimulating economic growth and enhancing human resource development. In this paper we examine the alignment of state and federal investments in four states employing student-centered learning innovation policies, specifically Individual Learning and/or Graduation Plans (ILPs).

For education and workforce development professionals, the present economic and educational policy circumstances raise two related questions: (a) To what extent is the current federal education investment (i.e., both the stimulus package and formula grant programs) aligned with education and workforce investment policies at the state level? and (b) What lessons can be learned from states making aligned intergovernmental investments in education innovation and economic recovery?

To address these questions, we review the rapidly evolving economic policy imperatives that call for a closer alignment between educational investments and the knowledge and skill priorities of the 21st century global economy. Beginning in 2007 with the America Competes Act, we consider how federal education and workforce development policy has increasingly focused on performance accountability requirements on improving the economic outcomes for individuals and communities confronting substantial challenges. To address these priorities at the state and local level, the Education Commission of the States (2007) reports that approximately twenty states have adopted individual learning or graduation plan policies. A series of systematic policy document analyses and in-depth interviews with state policy implementers in four states provided key information and data addressing the research questions identified above.

Educational Policy and Economic Imperatives: The National Perspective

Since his inauguration President Obama has made two particularly compelling arguments for the vital role of education in the nation's economic recovery. In his first State of the Union address he asked “. . . every American to commit to at least 1 year or more of higher education or career training” (Remarks of President Obama, 2009a).

Second, in launching the American Graduation Initiative last July, which was subsequently integrated with the health care reform legislation, the President articulated some key national education policy goals:

I set a goal for America: by 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world . . . the American Graduation Initiative . . . will reform and strengthen community colleges from coast to coast so that they get the resources students and schools need – and the results workers and businesses demand. Through this plan, we seek to help an additional five million Americans earn degrees and certificates in the next decade (Remarks of President Obama, 2009b).

These ambitious goals for improving postsecondary education attainment are shared and supported by several foundations (e.g., Lumina, Gates, Nellie Mae, KnowledgeWorks), as well as major, ARRA-linked investments by the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation). Consistent with the long-standing federal role in education policy, ensuring equitable access to postsecondary education for individuals from under-served backgrounds is a primary goal for many of these initiatives.

The economic imperative for increasing the educational attainment of all of the nation's youth and adults, but especially for individuals from challenging economic backgrounds, is underscored in a recent report by the McKinsey Group (2009):

In 2008, a persistent gap in academic achievement between children in the United States and their counterparts in other countries deprived the U.S. economy of as much as \$2.3 trillion in economic output (16% of GDP). Moreover, the annual cost of the academic performance gaps based on race, income, and regional differences is larger than the U.S. recession of 1981–82.

Thus, one important dimension of nation's economic recovery includes clearly framed strategies for raising the educational attainment and performance of students in both middle and high school and postsecondary education settings. Moreover, the successful transition from school to college settings is a critical aspect of both the state and federal policy agendas.

So why is education policy viewed widely as an important public policy instrument when considering economic and workforce development challenges? As Elmore reminds us, education is an exceptionally versatile political good (1994, p. 139). Historically, numerous studies have consistently confirmed that increased educational attainment has both private benefits (e.g., higher earnings, increased job security) and public returns (e.g., better health, lower crime, tax contributions). Further, education investments can be designed to achieve any combination of three popular objectives (e.g., achieving equity, enhancing human development, and/or allocating resources for common needs—nutrition, well-prepared teachers)—all of which hold relatively high importance in a recession. That said, varied fiscal commitments for federal and state education investments must be highly efficient, especially when both public and personal investments are constrained, so the comparative advantages are more clearly identified for all parties.

In the continuing recessionary context, all levels of government (federal, state, and local) are seeking to expand and extend their influence in education policy. The near-term educational goals of the President and Congress are echoed by Governors, local school boards and parents and increasingly focused on achieving common or universal outcomes deemed critical to economic progress (e.g., postsecondary education attainment as well as education aimed in high demand and high wage sectors such as health care, information technology, energy conservation, and environmental quality).

In reviewing the comparative influence of federal, state and local government in education, Elmore noted some time ago, “All levels of government, regardless of their comparative advantage,

have a political interest in education; and that interest is expressed in policy; once policy is made, it creates interdependency among levels of government that become just as important as the law of comparative advantage in determining which functions will be performed where,” (1984, p. 127). Without question, the recession heightens the importance of examining intergovernmental influences and interactions on the converging federal and state education policy goals and priorities described below.

Expanding Federal Investments: Targeted Resources with Performance Accountability

Since signing the ARRA in February 2009 (\$787 billion) approximately \$840 million, roughly 10% of the stimulus initiative has been invested in improving K-12 systems and advancing access to higher education through 20 U.S. Department of Education programs. As Table 1 indicates, a major portion of the federal education investments are anchored in improving the educational outcomes and higher education access for students who’s economic or disability status suggests they require additional resources and/or personalized or individually-focused learning opportunities. Beyond the Department of Education programs described in Table 1, the FY 2009 ARRA package included \$540 million for Title IV, Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998.

While the proposed 31% increase in the Administration’s FY 11 budget signals a continuing commitment to improving the college and career readiness of all learners, the state-level performance accountability expectations accompanying these investments are noteworthy.

Table 1.

The Profile of Recent Federal Education Investment, billions

Selected Education Programs	FY 2009 ARRA	FY 09	FY 10	FY 11 (President’s Budget)
NCLB/ESEA, Title I, Part A	10.0 b	6.6 b	6.6 b	6.6 b
IDEA, Parts B and C	12.1	12.3	12.3	12.6
Pell Grants	17.1	19.4	27.0	34.9
Direct Student Loans	--	1.4	5.2	--
Race to the Top and Innovation Fund	4.9	--	--	2.5
Total, all Education Programs	49.6 ¹	66.4	59.2	77.8

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Fiscal Year 2011 President’s Budget Request. U.S. Department of Education, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Budget.

Since the 1993 enactment of the Government Performance Results Act, each federal program has developed goals, objectives, and measures for monitoring the implementation and impact of federal programs. Over the past two decades, each reauthorization of federal education, training, and employment policy has seen an expansion or refinement of the accountability and performance indicators that state and local recipients of federal funds are required to address. The common or similar performance indicators used in several education and workforce development programs are identified in Table 4.

¹ Does not include \$48.6 billion in state fiscal stabilization funds.

Table 2.

Performance Measures for Selected Federal Education and Labor Programs

Performance Measures or Indicators	IDEA State Performance Plan Indicators	NCLB Accountability Plan Indicators	Perkins Career and Technical Education Act Core Performance Indicators	Workforce Investment Act, Youth Program Performance Indicators
High school graduation/diploma	X	X	X	X
Dropout rates	X	X		
Attainment of work readiness or occupational/technical skills			X	X
Placement and retention in postsecondary education, advanced training, military service, employment, or qualified apprenticeships	X			X
Parental involvement	X			
Post high school transition goals and plans in students' IEP	X			

Enacted by Congress in 2007 (prior to the recession), the America Competes Act (P.L. 110-69), noted the importance of longitudinal and interagency data systems at the local and state level. The America Competes Act (ACA) expanded and aligned the program performance data collection expectations across the programs listed in Table 2 above. The goals of the ACA include: strengthening education opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, increasing the nation's research investment, and building an innovation infrastructure that uses data to guide improvements and accountability in education. To address these goals in education and workplace settings, states are charged with developing Statewide P-16 Education Data Systems. These systems are to serve several important functions for state and local policy makers and local leaders. More specifically, the states' data systems will:

- Identify factors that correlate to students' ability to successfully engage in and complete postsecondary level general education coursework without the need for prior developmental coursework;
- Identify factors to increase the percentage of low-income and minority students who are academically prepared to enter and successfully complete postsecondary-level general education coursework; and
- Use the data in the system to otherwise inform education policy and practice in order to better align State academic content standards, and curricula, with the demands of postsecondary education, the 21st century workforce, and the Armed Forces.

Within the state P-16 data systems the following data elements will be collected at the school and postsecondary levels:

School

1. A unique statewide student identifier that does not permit a student to be individually identified by users of the system;
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information;
3. Student-level information about the points at which students exit, transfer in, transfer out, drop out, or complete P-16 education programs; and
4. The capacity to communicate with higher education data systems

Postsecondary Education

1. Information regarding the extent to which students transition successfully from secondary school to postsecondary education, including whether students enroll in remedial coursework; and
2. Other information determined necessary to address alignment and adequate preparation for success in postsecondary education.

The creation of data systems with the capacity to monitor the progress of individual learners is a major transformation in the education and workforce development communities. Over the past decade these data-intensive policies, along with significant advances in information technology tools, has brought data driven decision-making to the forefront of both public policy and leading professional practice. Data warehouses filled with administrative, assessment and fiscal data in central offices can be accessed by educators, workforce development professionals, students, parents, and advocates (as well as policymakers) and analyzed rapidly to address critical questions. For the nation's increasingly diverse population and rapidly changing economy, these signature questions have major consequences in the day-to-day development of both individual and community futures — a diverse set of questions like:

- Are recent graduates from this high school with similar backgrounds successful in particular colleges and/or certain college majors?
- For students who continue to live in this community, how much are their job prospects and annual earnings improved by going to college?
- Do students leaving college early (without a degree or certificate) have higher earnings than recent graduates with a high school diploma? If so, what is the earnings differential and will these earnings support an individual living independently or a young family?
- What are the post-school success rates of low-income, ELL, and students with disabilities leaving this school or community, and how can they be improved?
- Given the most recent 5-year data profile for our region (employment patterns, educational attainment, and population demographics), which education and workforce development programs need to be developed and/or expanded to support new economic growth opportunities?

Individual-Centered Student Learning Innovations: Federal and State Policy Connections

Individually or personally-centered learning innovations, such as Individual Learning Plans (ILP) or Individual Graduation Plans (IGP), have arrived on the K-12 education landscape over the past decade. The rising popularity of student-centered innovations is a product of the nation's civil rights policies and the equal protection clauses of 14th Amendment, as well as more than 50 years of research under-pinning human development and learning theory. The recurring theme emerging from the policy evaluation and research literature is the over-riding influence of individual characteristics and differences in any learning endeavor.

In the National Research Council's (1999) seminal synthesis of learning research, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, the National Academy Panel noted:

Effective instruction begins with what learners bring to the setting; this includes cultural practices and beliefs, as well as knowledge of academic content. A focus on the degree to which environments are learner centered is consistent with the evidence showing that learners use their current knowledge to construct new knowledge and that what they know and believe at the moment affects how they interpret new information (p. xvi).

Equally important, the Panel argued learners become better learners when they self-evaluate and assess what they are learning:

Learners are most successful if they are mindful of themselves as learners and thinkers. A learner's self-awareness as a learner and the role of appraisal strategies keep learning on target or help keep the learner asking if s/he understands. Learners can become independent learners who are capable of sustaining their own learning—in essence, this is how human beings become life-long learners (p. xiv).

The remainder of this section provides an historical and contemporary summary of the federal policies featuring individually-focused treatments or considerations in education and workplace settings, as well as review of recent national and State policy initiatives supporting personalization of teaching and learning.

Emergence of Federal IEP Policy

The history of education policy in the U.S. reveals longstanding debates on the most appropriate and effective strategies for educating children and youth with and without disabilities. Historically, states and local school boards have controlled matters such as curriculum content, graduation standards, and teacher qualifications, but the need to ensure equitable education for all individuals has been a foundational federal interest for nearly a century. Beginning with vocational rehabilitation legislation following World War I, the federal government has required states to develop plans for the delivery of services and programs in a number of areas, including rehabilitation, mental health, special education, and employment training. For individuals whose participation in community life and the economy required special services or accommodations that were not universally available in states and communities, Federal laws were enacted under the equal protection provisions of the Constitution (14th Amendment). As the following sections describe, these laws ensured that eligible adults and youth were able to access special services (e.g., assessments, counseling services) and additional resources (e.g., assistive devices, financial aid for college or employment training programs). These services and resources were designed to assist them in overcoming barriers attributable to individualized and unique conditions and circumstances.

In the field of education, the provision of individualized educational plans (IEP) and a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) was extended to all children with disabilities, ages 0-21, in 1975 under the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). The 2004 Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act expanded the IEP provisions to include secondary education and transition planning services beginning at age 14. Currently, students with disabilities account for 8.8% of the under 15-year-old population, and 10.4% of the 15 to 24-year-old population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). These students must have an IEP that includes provisions for secondary education and transition services starting by the time they are 14 years old.

The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
- Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and

- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

Under the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments transition services are available to eligible youth and adults with disabilities, including individuals with significant disabilities. Eligible vocational rehabilitation clients receive an *individualized plan for employment*, as noted earlier, which could include a range of education, training, and support services. Under Title IV transition services for school age youth with disabilities include:

. . . a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Under the Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Section 129(c)(1), local workforce development boards administer youth programs to economically disadvantaged and under-represented youth (including youth with disabilities). Each Youth Program uses an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) that must:

1. Provide an objective assessment of each youth participant, that meets the requirements of WIA section 129(c)(1)(A), and includes a review of the academic and occupational skill levels, as well as the service needs, of each youth;
2. Develop an individual service strategy for each youth participant that meets the requirements of WIA section 129(c)(1)(B), including identifying an age-appropriate career goal and consideration of the assessment results for each youth; and
3. Provide preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities, provide linkages between academic and occupational learning, provide preparation for employment, and provide effective connections to intermediary organizations that provide strong links to the job market and employers.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, 2000.

Emergence of State ILP/IGP Policy

Over the past decade these federal education and workforce development policies have stimulated policy debates in some states about expanding, in principle or in full replication, the individual learning or education plan for all secondary education students. In February 2007, the Education Commission of the States released in their State Notes the results of a 50-state survey on this topic². They reported:

Some states (~20) require all students at the beginning of their high school careers to identify the courses they will complete by the end of grade 12, and if the state has differentiated diplomas, the diploma the student will complete. A few states likewise require

² Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington and West Virginia

students to include in their learning plan what they anticipate they will do the first year after graduation from high school. This database does not include state policies that require only students identified at risk of not completing high school to develop an individual graduation plan.

As part of an analysis of states' secondary school redesign activities, the Council of Chief State School Officers (2007) identified states that were particularly active in using individual learning plans. In this study, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) were defined as,

. . . personalized student education plans that include information such as high school courses, post-secondary education and career interests, and extracurricular activities. State approaches to developing and implementing ILPs are as varied as the information that goes into them. But even with those differences, common purposes and similar challenges drive states to require their students to complete ILPs.

The emergence of these state-level policies was also stimulated by high school reform and redesign rhetoric of the past decade. Beginning in the mid-1990s a number of national and state commissions promulgated middle and high school reforms that emphasized the development of "individual or personal education plans." The creation of smaller and personalized learning environments guided by individual plans was deemed the primary antidote for addressing a number of challenges: personalizing large, "shopping mall" high schools; addressing the alternative learning styles of students from increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; creating flexibility in the face of a standards-driven mass education curriculum; reducing the dropout rate; and reducing the rising levels of remediation or developmental education in postsecondary education settings.

Prominent among these studies was the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (2004) *Breaking Ranks II* report, which argued for personalization of learning experiences in which "teachers should use a variety of instructional strategies that accommodate individual learning styles, and every student should have a Personal Adult Advocate and a Personal Plan for Progress." Subsequently, the NASSP's *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (2006) report proposed that all middle schools adopt a set of nine core strategies, including: Implement a comprehensive advisory or other program that ensures that each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to meet with an adult to plan and assess the student's academic, personal, and social development (p. 4).

The urgency of re-structuring middle school, high school, and college level learning experiences to focus on economy is crucial from sociological and psychological perspectives as well. As Lois Weis (2008) and her colleagues noted,

As the economy grows ever more tight, the school (K–16) is increasingly important in relation to life choices and outcomes, and researchers who focus on youth culture, often in and out of school contexts, can no longer afford to ignore such traditional educational institutions. If school credentials do not "guarantee" social mobility, they are certainly the sine qua non of such mobility in the New Economy.

More specifically, Weis argues that: (a) youth education practices are problematic if they are separate from the structural reality of the economic context, (b) the definition for success in school for all students must be linked to economic and social possibilities, and (c) new approaches to developing youth identities must be grounded in an examination of blended in-school and out-of-school learning and development practices.

As similar recommendations emerged in reports from diverse stakeholders both inside and outside the secondary education sector, several state legislatures and governors adopted policies and programs with an individual learning and/or graduation plan focus. Across these states policies encouraging individual learning plans seek to accomplish three goals: (a) explicitly prioritizing the development of both high school and post-high school plans, and (b) implicitly engaging individuals

in developing planning skills (e.g., self-assessment, career assessment, goal setting, reflection and analysis), and (c) directly supporting educational organizations in developing processes (e.g., professional development for educators, changing graduation requirements, building or improving postsecondary transition programs, etc.) that, in turn, generate individualized career and college planning knowledge, behaviors and dispositions.

Analyzing State Level Individualized Learning Policies: Research Questions and Methods

The goal of this four-state case study was twofold. First, to determine to what extent states are leveraging federal and state resources to align their ILP initiatives with other policies aimed at fostering education innovation and economic recovery. The second goal was to develop recommendations for how states could make intergovernmental investments to strengthen their performance outcomes in education and workforce development.

In 2008 the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) Research Team selected seven states for in-depth case studies from among the more than twenty states identified by the Education Commission of the States (2007). Purposefully selected based on the size, scope and maturity of the states' ILP policy, the seven states offered a comprehensive portrait of the challenges, benefits, and unique opportunities created by adopting leading individual-centered student learning policies. A series of research questions guided this qualitative case study of state policy innovations:

1. What is the range and variation in state and/or local policies and practices on ILPs or IGPs?
2. What steps or measures are being taken by individual states to implement and monitor these innovations?
3. What data currently exist documenting the implementation, value, and/or effectiveness of ILPs or IGPs?
4. How are states going about the process of evaluating the value, worth, and/or effectiveness of ILPs or IGPs?
5. To what extent are ILP or IGP policy innovations aligned with other education policies with similar purposes?

Porter's Policy Attributes Theory (Porter, 1994) posits that the effectiveness of state education policy is grounded in five key attributes of policy design and implementation: (a) *consistency*, the extent to which all components of the system are aligned, (b) *specificity*, the extent to which states provide clear and detailed guidance for teachers and students, (c) *authority*, the degree to which a policy has the support of key institutions or individuals, (d) *power*, the rewards and sanctions, and (e) *stability*, the extent to which policies and practices remain in place over time. While states' ILP and IGP policies are a relatively new addition to the policy landscape, the policy attributes theory was selected because its roots, like the origins of ILP policies, are grounded in the school improvement efforts initiated in the 1990s.

Initially, the seven states' ILP policies were evaluated by researching the state department websites. The 2007-09 approved state plans for several federal programs were downloaded and content analyzed for key words and phrases related to the ILP/IGP policies (e.g., college and career planning, high school graduation, guidance and counseling, etc.). State plans for the following federal programs were searched and coded for descriptions of connections with ILP/IGP policies: Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind, Perkins Career and Technical Education Act Amendments, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Workforce Investment Act.

Detailed searches of state government and state education agencies websites were conducted to identify and capture the key policies and implementation details for each ILP-IGP policy. State statutes and policies, handbooks, resource guides, program directories and other key information resources were downloaded, summarized, and analyzed by members of the research team. Subsequently, extended interviews were conducted with staff in several offices of the state department of education or workforce development regarding various aspects of the policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

By selecting these seven states, the research team was able to consider states with substantial differences in four key education policy attributes: consistency (the policy design and implementation features, including connections to special education policies), specificity (precision in local action required, including the grade(s) of implementation), power (funding status--incentive/competitive/formula-driven funding or no funding), and stability (date of initial policy implementation).

As Table 3 indicates, the key features of the ILP policies in these states reflected a range of key policy attributes. The policy design features included state mandates with and without funding, with and without professional development supports, and with and without connections to special education policies. The state implementation options examined in the analysis included incentive funding, competitive local funding, and no designated state or federal funding. The seven states examined were implementing the program between two and ten years with some states implementing ILPs in grade 6 or grade 8.

The results of the website searches and interviews were organized according to seven criteria drawn from the Policy Attributes Theory (Porter, 1994) described earlier: year individual learning plans were initiated, grade when individual learning plans are initiated, state level administrative office in charge of individual learning plans, connection to career pathways, formal curriculum used, funding, and connection to special education. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The seven-member research team reviewed the compiled state ILP policy information and rank ordered the seven states examined in the initial analysis phase. Each research team member independently rated the information available from each state on the five key ILP/IGP policy attributes (Porter, 1994) described earlier. Through a consensus building process, the research team reached agreement on studying four states intensively: Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina and Washington. The consensus dialogue confirmed these four states as having advanced ILP/IGP policy attributes for consistency, specificity, power, and stability. Thus, these states were deemed the richest case study opportunities for examining leading state policies.

In August, 2010, state officials in seven states, including the four case study states, were invited to update and verify the data analysis presented herein, and to address specific questions about the alignment of state ILP policies with the state's plan and policies for implementing the federal IEP provisions. Several state officials updated the information presented in Tables 3 and 4; however, most state officials chose not to respond to a short survey seeking information about any policies or recommended practices for aligning ILPs with the IEP assessment and transition planning provisions.

Table 3.
Key Features of Individual Learning Plan Policies in Seven States

State	Date of ILP Implementation	Grade ILP Begins	State Level Oversight	Federal and State Funding	Support and Training	Connection to Special Education
Delaware Student Success Plan (SSP)	2005	6 th	Conducts onsite audits of student plans to establish compliance	State uses Federal College Access Grant funds for state level coordinating staff and for <i>Career Cruising</i> online career information system	State provides technical assistance and training on software, advisory and curriculum	IEP and SSP are combined in the IEP transition plan
Kentucky Individual Graduation Plan (IGP)	2002	6 th	State monitors IGP completion annually; Evaluation based on changes in graduation rate and post-secondary remediation	Completely funded through state funds	Training conducted every fall; Professional development meetings held throughout the year	Each student must have an IGP, regardless of disability status; Parts of IGP used to meet IEP transition requirements
Idaho Individual Graduation Plan (IGP)	1997	8 th	Mandate not enforced through sanctions; Level of compliance used to determine technical assistance needs	State funds support one state staff member to monitor progress and provide technical assistance	State level staff provide technical assistance identified during school	Each student must have an IGP regardless of disability status; IEP and IGP developed concurrently; parents can “opt-out” of IGP
Louisiana 5 Year Education Plan (FYEP)	1998	6 th	Completion of plans is monitored during Perkins compliance monitoring; data used to create annual legislative reports	Funding provided for state level assistance and LAePortal; Funding sources include federal Perkins CTE grant, state high school redesign funds, and funds from an off-shore oil settlement	Initial training for implementation, now training on updates and changes	IEP and FYEP are integrated
New Mexico Next Step Plan (NSP)	2004	8 th	Schools submit completed plans to state on an annual basis for randomly selected review; Review reported to legislature	Non-funded state mandate	Perkins used to conduct initial training including introduction to NSP, Career Clusters and using the state suggested template	IEPs serve as the NSP for students with disabilities
South Carolina Individual Graduation Plan (IGP)	2006	8 th	Schools submit accountability reports to state twice a year; Reports used gauge the degree to which career awareness and development activities have been implement into the school environments.	State fully funds online career information system and 5 state-level FTEs. State also provides funds to districts to support the hiring of career specialists in the majority of middle and high schools.	Regional workshops for counselors and/or career specialists held two to three times a year; training also provided via educational television, the annual Education and Business Summit, and other venues.	Each student must have an IGP, regardless of disability status
Washington High School and Beyond Plan (HSB)	2006	6 th	Implementation and oversight of HSB is under local control; Schools elect to participate in the Navigation 101 grant curriculum	State grants startup costs to schools who chose to participate in HSB curriculum program (Navigation101); curriculum not required	Navigation training and technical assistance available for participants; districts provide all training for HSB implementation	Each student must have an HSB plan, regardless of disability status

Findings: ILP Policy Implementation in Four States

In this section, brief narratives describe the state policies and the implementation of the policies to date.

Louisiana

In 1997, Louisiana legislators adopted the Career Options Law. The law requires that middle school students participate in career exploration, and create a 5-Year Education Plan in 8th grade. According to interviews conducted by researchers, the law was developed to more closely link education opportunities with Louisiana employment needs. To this end, the state Board of Regents, community and technical colleges, and Departments of Labor and Economic Development assisted in the development the policy and its continued implementation. Most recently, legislators voted in changes that will affect the implementation of the law and provide strategies for decreasing the disproportionately high dropout rate in Louisiana. The Louisiana Student College and Career Act, adopted in summer of 2009, outlines flexible curriculum and graduation guidelines aimed at increasing high school graduation and career and college readiness. In addition, the name of the plan has been changed to reflect this goal. Students are now required to complete an Individual Graduation Plan. (Details on the Career Options Law can be found at: <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/7516.pdf>)

The Career and Technical Education office in the Department of Education is responsible for the oversight of the program. Every five years, each parish is required to submit a sample of student IGPs. This data is linked with data from the Department of Labor to gather outcome measures. The information is used to create an annual evaluation and assessment report to the legislature. Additionally, plans are reviewed during Perkins monitoring. IGP supervisors within the state department are funded through federal Perkins dollars. In addition to federal funds used for administration, monies garnered through an off-shore oil settlement and state high school redesign funds are used to fund an on-line career information system, which assists students in career exploration and planning activities and serves as a digital platform for the IGP. The LAePortal system enables students to explore Career Clusters, build a portfolio or resume, learn about high school graduation requirements, research job opportunities, and create their IGP. School administrators have access to LAePortal, but can also use other online career information systems for the implementation of the ILP. However most schools use LAePortal and the state suggested 5-year plan template.

Beginning in sixth grade, Louisiana students participate in a career exploration process that includes at least six career development activities a year. During this time, students are exposed to a number of different post-secondary options through community service projects, guest speakers, and new technologies. Students use this information to declare a high school area of concentration or major in the eighth grade. Each high school is required to offer at least one state approved career major. The major, along with post-secondary goals and high school course plans, are used to create a student's IGP. School counselors are responsible for assisting students in creating the plan and each plan must be reviewed and signed by a parent or guardian on an annual basis. The plan is created in eighth grade and is updated annually until graduation.

New Mexico

In 2003, New Mexico legislation began requiring that students complete a Next Step Plan (NSP) each year starting in eighth grade prior to graduating from high school. Students create

interim plans from eighth to eleventh grade and a final NSP during the twelfth grade. According to interviews conducted with state officials, the catalyst for the NSP legislation was the P-20 initiative and the focus on transition periods along this spectrum. According to the Legislative Education committee, state leaders are also concerned with the relatively low graduation rate among New Mexico high school students (i.e., only 66.1% in 2009 using a four-year-cohort formula) and the lack of rigor and focus in the state's graduation requirements. In New Mexico, the Public Education Department (PED) worked closely with the Department of Labor to develop the NSP initiative. Recently, legislators passed a law requiring students to complete a NSP beginning in the sixth grade. (Details regarding the NSP can be found at:

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/Humanities/NextStepPlan/index.html>)

The Humanities Bureau in the PED is responsible for the implementation of the NSP policy. Legislation requires the department to monitor and evaluate the plans. Schools submit copies of the plan to the PED and they are randomly selected for review. According to an interview conducted with department officials, they would also like to eventually review NSP policy *within* the classroom. Additionally, the department is in the process of implementing a P-20 data warehouse that will allow them to track students from high school to post-secondary institutions. The NSP is currently an unfunded mandate, but the PED provided training for schools at the onset of the policy. The department has also used Perkins funding to provide regional planning including an introduction to the plan, Career Clusters (the state has chosen seven) and the state template. The template is a suggested format, although many schools are using formats they have created, and sharing them with other schools.

Beginning in the eighth grade, all students in New Mexico, including those who attend state accredited private and charter schools, must complete their first interim NSP. In some cases an IEP can be substituted for a NSP. Before the plan is completed, advisors consult with parents and students to identify academic goals that are in line with student interests and meet state graduation requirements. A parent or guardian is required to review and sign the plan on an annual basis and encouraged to participate in its development. During the consultation with advisors students are informed of Career Cluster course options, Advanced Placement opportunities, and career options. The consultation time is also used to monitor students' progress towards meeting graduation requirements. The final NSP is completed during the twelfth grade year, prior to graduation. In the final plan, students must show a commitment or intent to make a commitment to a specific post-secondary plan. This could include an acceptance letter from a university or military, or a statement from the student about their plans.

South Carolina

In 2005, the South Carolina Legislature passed the Education and Economic Development Act. Among the requirements of the EEDA is an Individual Graduation Plan. The IGP is a yearly requirement for students, but not a graduation requirement. In addition, the EEDA requires career awareness, counseling, and interest inventories for students starting in grade six. In the eighth grade, students must complete their first IGP. The plan is required annually until graduation. According to interviews with state officials, the impetus for the IGP policy was business and industry concerns that labor market demand for skilled workers in South Carolina was not being met. In addition, lawmakers cited continuously low graduation rates among South Carolina high school students. Toward this end, business and industry leaders, along with secondary and postsecondary representatives helped to draft the EEDA and currently assist in the management of its implementation through the EEDA Coordinating Council (Details describing the EEDA initiative are available at: <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Technology-Services/old/dts/EEDAProject.html>)

The legislature named an EEDA coordinating council that includes leaders from business, the legislature and secondary and post-secondary education. The council provides guidance to the Department of Education relative to accountability and implementation of the EEDA. The SCDE Office of Regional Services is responsible for overseeing the implementation of each component of the Act, including the IGP policy. Because the state has secured an electronic IGP system, data pertaining to IGP completion rates, parental participation, and postsecondary plans are readily available. Additionally, at least twice a year, schools submit to the SCDE a local report summarizing the scope of their career development activities.

The EEDA legislation provided funding for five FTE positions in the Department of Education. Additionally appropriations were made for training and hiring “career specialists” at each middle and high school. Specialists work under the guidance of a counselor and assist students and parents in understanding the role of career development activities in the students’ secondary experiences. EEDA appropriations also include funds for an on-line career information system. The Kuder online career information system was selected as the platform for the electronic IGP system.

Beginning in the eighth grade, students select a career cluster on and create an IGP in consultation with a parent or guardian and a school counselor. At least annually after that, students must meet with counselors to identify and/or modify academic and career goals in their IGP. Before the end of the tenth grade, students must declare an area of academic focus within their selected career cluster. Throughout high school, schools are required to provide students with guidance activities and career awareness programs that align career and academic education. The plan must include course-taking intentions, experience based career oriented learning activities, and monitor progress towards meeting graduation requirements.

Washington

In 2001, the Washington State Board of Education required that students complete a High School and Beyond plan. Each student must have a HSB plan that includes plans for high school course taking and plans for one year beyond high school. The policy indicates a student must create the plan by the ninth. However, the HSB plan must be completed before a student can graduate, and generally the plan is created for the first time in eighth grade. Students who fail to meet performance standards on the state assessments must also create a Student Learning Plan, which identifies how the student will meet academic standards prior to graduation. These policies are a key component of the SBE’s mission to prepare all students for life after high school, regardless of the pathway they chose to take. (Details regarding the High School and Beyond graduation requirement can be found at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/graduationrequirements/Requirement-HighSchoolBeyond.aspx>)

Washington has a strong history of local control over school policy. As such, limited state policy provisions have been promulgated for the implementation of HSB plans. The implementation is a district-by-district responsibility. Plans collected as part of this study indicated a fair amount of variation. The Office of District and School Improvement helps schools with HSB implementation, but few supplemental resources are provided. An exception is Navigation 101, a HSB curriculum that is an optional resource for schools. Many schools implement this curriculum, which has three years of start-up grant funds available from the state if schools chose to participate. Navigation 101 is a guidance curriculum resource. The online feature is a privately produced product that is available to grantees under a state contract. Schools participating in Nav101 are required to get parents’ signatures on plans, an additional requirement not found in general HSB policy. Nav101 participating schools must also conduct student led conferences, and use student

course taking requests to inform course offerings and master schedules. Currently, 154 schools participate in Nav101.

In the eighth or ninth grade, students write their HSB plan and continue review and revise it throughout their high school careers. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction suggests that the plan should include students' personal stories, opportunities to identify learning styles, high school and post-secondary goals, and extracurricular activities. In addition, the Nav101 curriculum requires that students create a portfolio that includes goals and examples of good work. Nav101 also requires sessions with an advisory on a regular basis. An advisory is a regularly scheduled meeting time, usually 2 to 4 times per month. Students are matched with a trained advisor in the school. They tend to be mostly professional staff, although there may be others. Career development, college planning, and financial literacy are examples of curriculum that might be found in an advisory session. Participating schools offer advisory sessions on a varying basis, and advisor responsibilities are school dependent.

State-level Performance Indicators

Each of the four state ILP policies was enacted and implemented with a set of performance outcomes, measures or indicators, as noted in Table 4. In most states these performance oriented measures or outcomes specify how the ILP requirements are implemented and monitored (e.g., by students meeting new or different graduation or diploma requirements, by obtaining a parent signature on the ILP or IGP, by reporting certain curriculum changes or student attainment data to the SEA). Each of the state individual learning plan policies described above has unique goals and purposes for improving students' college and career readiness. In several states, the policies complement the federal special education and youth-focused workforce development policies associated with IEPs and ISSs, however, it is important to note the parallels and contrasts in performance measures and indicators with the federal requirements discussed in the next section.

In each of the four states, the ILPs measures are centered on expanding the rigor in high school graduation requirements so that higher proportions of students are prepared for college work, as well as careers. In all four states, the success of ILP-IGP policies are measured by increasing graduation rates, decreasing dropout rates, and broadening graduation expectations or standards to include career exploration and college readiness. Reflecting the broader emphasis on college and career readiness, the policies in all four states confirm that high school quality will be determined in large part by the success graduates attain when entering two-year and four-year colleges, the military, and/or job training and apprenticeship programs.

In two states, the involvement of parents in the review and/or endorsement of the high school completion or graduation plan is an essential aspect of the state policy, as it is the IEP policy for students with disabilities. In three states, expanded parental and community support for career and college planning activities in high school is anchoring the ILP-IGP innovations.

It is important to acknowledge that previously launched or concurrent state education policy initiatives (such as policies aimed at increasing reading or math scores, attendance rates, or teacher effectiveness) utilize similar performance indicators. The level of consistency or alignment of these policies and policy performance indicators with the ILP-IGP initiative was difficult to ascertain in each state, so it would be inappropriate to conclude that all six performance measures were equally important to documenting the policy impact or effect.

Table 4.

State-Level Individual Learning Plan Policy Measures

Performance Measures or Indicators	Louisiana (Career Options Act)	New Mexico (NM Senate Bill 0561, 2008)	South Carolina (Education and Economic Development Act)	Washington (High School and Beyond Plan Guidelines)
High school graduation/ diploma	Graduation requirements for the career major shall consist of requirements mandated by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for all high school students.	At the end of grades eight through eleven, each student shall prepare an interim next-step plan that sets forth the coursework for the grades remaining until high school graduation.	An IGP must include core academic subjects, which must include, but are not limited to, English, math, science, and social studies to ensure that requirements for graduation will be met	Graduation requirements consist of a High School and Beyond Plan and specific course requirements as mandated by the State Board of Education.
Dropout rates	Design teams shall evaluate the success of their programs based on tracking the number of dropouts in career major programs.	Students who do not meet or exceed expectations will be given individual attention and assistance through extended learning programs and individualized tutoring.	The [school] report card must contain other criteria including, but not limited to, information on promotion and retention ratios, disciplinary climate, dropout ratios, dropout reduction data.	Districts required to report annually to superintendent of public instruction dropout rates of students grades seven through twelve. (SB 2423, 2009)
Attainment of work readiness or occupational/technical skills	Louisiana's high schools shall consist of an academic major college preparatory courses and a career major comprised of challenging academic courses and modern vocational studies.	The department shall establish a procedure for students to be awarded credit through completion of specified career technical education courses for certain graduation requirements.	School districts shall organize high school curricula around a minimum of three [career] clusters of study and cluster majors. The curricula must be designed to provide a well-rounded education for students by fostering artistic creativity, critical thinking, and self-discipline through the teaching of academic content, knowledge, and skills that students will use in the workplace, further education, and life.	A student's plan should include the classes needed in preparation for a 2- to 4-year college, vocational or technical school, certificate program or the workforce.

Table 4 (continued)

Performance Measures or Indicators	Louisiana (Career Options Act)	New Mexico (NM Senate Bill 0561, 2008)	South Carolina (Education and Economic Development Act)	Washington (High School and Beyond Plan Guidelines)
Placement and retention in postsecondary education, advanced training, military service, employment, or qualified apprenticeships	Such a [career] major shall be linked to postsecondary options and shall prepare students to pursue either a degree or certification from a postsecondary institution, an industry based training or certification, an apprenticeship, the military, or immediate entrance into a career field.	The department shall establish a readiness assessment system to measure the readiness of every New Mexico high school student for success in higher education or a career no later than the 2008-2009 school year	High school students must be provided guidance and curricula that will enable them to complete successfully their individual graduation plans, preparing them for a seamless transition to relevant employment, further training, or postsecondary study.	The High School and Beyond Plan gets all students thinking about their future and how to get the most out of high school, so that they're ready to pursue their adult lives, no matter what direction they plan to take.
Parental involvement		Shall be filed with the principal of the student's high school and shall be signed by the student, the student's parent and the student's guidance counselor or other school official charged with coursework planning for the student	This system must promote the involvement and cooperative effort of parents, teachers, and school counselors in assisting students in making these choices, in setting career goals, and in developing individual graduation plans to achieve these goals.	
Post high school transition goals and plans in students' IEP	A Five Year Educational Plan. Such a plan shall include a sequence of courses which is consistent with the student's stated goals for one year after graduation.	"Final next-step plan" means a next-step plan that shows that the student has committed or intends to commit in the near future to a four-year college or university, a two-year college, a trade or vocational program, an internship or apprenticeship, military service or a job.		

Cross Case Analysis

Across these four leading ILP/IGP implementation states, three key themes emerged from the document analyses and interviews.

Limited Evidence Documenting ILP Implementation Efforts. Four to twelve years following initial policy implementation in the four states, only limited evidence is available documenting the extent of implementation and effectiveness of the four state ILP initiatives. In Washington, longitudinal data collected in one of the early-adopting school districts revealed that the High School and Beyond planning curriculum (which helps students reflect on their performance and then plan for the future) improved their academic performance and documented subsequent student enrollment in more challenging courses. In post-high school interviews, graduates attributed these results to discussions with their advisers.

In the other states, the modest level of local implementation appears linked to limited or no state funding, the absence of sanctions, and a lack of consistent policy implementation over time.

Few States Leverage Federal Funds to Expand ILP Investment. The state-level case studies revealed that just two of the four states are using federal funds to leverage and expand the investment in individual learning policies. As the current schema for performance measures in four federal educational and workforce development programs indicates (see Table 2), federal investments share some common outcome metrics with the ILP/IGP policies (e.g., high school graduation, reducing dropout rates, placement and retention in postsecondary education). The content analysis of state plans and interviews revealed that none of the four states used these federal funds to target improvements in the six ILP-IGP related performance measures.

Moreover, in this limited, four-state analysis it appears that state ILP policy implementation is substantially disconnected from other federal employment and education improvement efforts. Providing access to individual learning and graduation planning experiences could potentially strengthen the performance outcomes for four additional federal programs: workforce training (WIA Title I Youth Programs), successful closures for rehabilitation clients (RSA), programs and outcomes for students with disabilities (IDEA, Part B), or low-income students (NCLB, Title I). Several of the ILP performance indicators are well aligned with federal program indicators (e.g., raising graduation rates, reducing high school dropouts, improving parental involvement, and ensuring students are successfully placed in postsecondary education and/or employment) (See Table 2). However, the lack of connections to and interfaces with such federal requirements as developing career pathway policies and programs seems highly paradoxical.

In Louisiana, funds from the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act are used to support a state-wide team of Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) consultants who work closely with local school districts to provide professional development and technical assistance. Similarly, in New Mexico, Perkins funds have been used to support a series of regional Next Steps Plan workshops for school districts.

Longitudinal Student Data Systems Receive Some Attention. In two states (WA and SC) longitudinal student data systems are available or in the process of being created to link students' high school, post-secondary education, and post-high school employment records. When ILP implementation data records/systems are added (documenting students' post-high school plans, course completion data, and artifacts from students' portfolios) to these systems, it will be feasible to assess the impact of robust and intensive ILPs on graduate's success in settings beyond high school. Longitudinal and more comprehensive data sets will allow local leaders and state policymakers to: (a) understand more

completely the status of local education systems in preparing students for success in college and careers, and (b) analyze the pattern of educational intervention and student post-school outcomes to identify and target for improvement those practices not producing acceptable outcomes.

Discussion

This state-level policy analysis case study, drawn from four of more than twenty states presently using individual learning plans (ILPs), offers a glimpse of four states' progress in implementing student-centered learning innovations. Student-centered innovations, such as policies and practices in support of individual learning plans, are cited increasingly as central to: (a) raising student achievement (National Research Council, 1999; National Research Council, 2004), and (b) more powerful than other innovations (including curriculum innovations designed to improve cognitive outcomes) in increasing student learning (Cornelius-White, 2007; Lapan, Gysbers, & Kason, 2007).

As illustrated in Table 1, each of the four states (Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Washington) launched ILP initiatives with the over-riding purpose of redesigning high schools to address a rapidly emerging 21st century challenges: youth are exiting high school unprepared for post-secondary education and employment. State policymakers envisioned personal or individual learning plans, and the processes used to implement them, as helping to:

1. Motivate all students to complete their diplomas regardless of the challenging circumstances that many must overcome
2. Provide students with tools and resources for planning their futures;
3. Improve the relevance and rigor of the curriculum in schools;
4. Make the senior year more meaningful; and
5. Connect parents and students in new ways.

The emergence of state ILP initiatives is a direct response to the following principle of effective intervention, which is a major product recent high school innovation and reform proposals: *As the diversity and complexity of students' educational needs expand and/or change, routine or conventional teaching and student support practices are less likely to be effective, which, in turn, requires increased levels of personalization in education and transition settings.* (see *Eight Elements of High School Improvement: A Mapping Framework* [National High School Center, 2008], *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* [National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004]).

Our findings suggest that: (a) the ILP initiatives were launched with the over-riding purpose of redesigning high schools to address several rapidly emerging 21st century challenges, including improving the motivation for students to plan their future and strengthening the rigor and relevance of curricula; (b) at present, state ILP initiatives are not closely aligned with states' plans to address federal priorities aimed at improving equitable access to learning and employment opportunities for under-served populations; and (c) as federal, state, and local education priorities converge to address economic challenges, states with individual learning plan policies supported by longitudinal student data systems are well positioned to track the influence of person-centered and standards-aligned innovations on the post-high school success of all students.

The limited pattern of alignment and interaction with federal programs suggests other factors are at work in the state policy context. State leaders may be interested in establishing a state-centered program independent of federal support, one that demonstrates that state rather than federal leaders can address important or unique public policy problems in education. Home-grown state education policies can be an authentic expression of special or unique citizen priorities in a nation with wide variation in cultural and educational diversity. Others factors, such as strong

histories of local control of education, may also complicate the state-federal alignment question for state leaders.

The absence of intergovernmental alignment or integration on education matters is not surprising. Historically, some analysts note that states have been laboratories for innovation in a number of policy arenas, including education and employment training. Using a bottom-up view of federal policy innovation, new legislation is adopted once a significant portion of states report beneficial outcomes from a particular set of policy initiatives. With more than twenty states adopting ILP policies by 2008, the importance of addressing career and college readiness for all students was well documented on the emerging national landscape for state policy reforms. As noted in Table 2, the ILP policies in Louisiana and New Mexico are aligned with the IEP transition plan requirements. In these states — all students, not just students with disabilities — are developing postsecondary plans to enter college and the job market immediately following high school.

Two noteworthy observations can be made about the four selected ILP policy states. First, while the state policies and programs are tailored to address a variety of high school reform needs, all four states use ILP policy outcome indicators that are closely aligned with the federal K-16 data system frameworks found in the America Competes Act and other federal laws. Clearly, states that are advancing ILP policies for high school students are well positioned to use K-16 longitudinal data systems to document the influence of individual learning plans on postsecondary education participation and employment outcomes. When combined with individual and school-level measures of ILP robustness, education leaders possess an evidence-based tool for improving the quality of individual-centered learning innovations and tracking the effects on post high school outcomes for all students, including those who often encounter barriers and challenges. Second, while the need for using integrated K-16 data systems to track student and program success is obvious, in each state the capacity for data integration, analysis, and generating accountability reports and continuous improvement recommendations is both underdeveloped and uneven.

In his seminal analysis of the state role in education policy, Elmore (1982, p. 142) argues that “. . . increasing state influence in education requires more federal intervention, not less. Decreasing federal expenditures on education, granting increased discretion to states in the management of federal programs, displacing federal policy objectives with state objectives--all the mechanisms that are thought to enhance state influence relative to the federal government and localities, in fact, probably have the opposite effect given the present range of variability among states.” More than 25 years later, efforts to bolster state capacity to improve education attainment are being led by significant federal investments (e.g., The Race to the Top initiative, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the America Competes Act). However, in this cycle of intergovernmental education policy investments, two notable changes are present. Performance accountability requirements are more prominent in all federal programs than at any time in the nation’s history. Equally important, the federal and state education investments are strategically aligned with common indicators of success, which feature the use of K-16 and longitudinal data systems to inform practices and policies that will increase high school graduation rates and expand the postsecondary education attainment of all learners.

Recommendations

To advance state capacity for achieving the ILP policy outcomes in the midst of challenging economic contexts, state leaders should consider implementing the following strategies:

1. Develop strategically aligned state plans for employment and training (WIA), special education (IDEA), career and technical education (Perkins Act), and education of poor youth (ESEA, NCLB).
By aligning state plans, local recipients will be encouraged to expand the pool of available funds so that students' individual learning plans can support student's integrated service strategy (ISS, WIA) or individualized education program (IEP, IDEA). In other sections of state plans, federal funds could be designated for a variety of important state-level activities supporting ILP state policy initiatives, including professional and curriculum development focused on secondary-postsecondary programs of study, implementation and impact performance indicator systems, and comprehensive guidance counseling and academic advisory systems. Given the growing federal interest in performance accountability, state leaders should anticipate that upcoming re-authorizations of the Workforce Investment Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and other education and workforce policies will require detailed alignment and coordination strategies for federal investments at the state level.
2. Use future federal competitions and support from philanthropic organizations to expand state-wide, student-centered learning innovation initiatives, such as ILP policies.
Discretionary competitions such as Department of Education's Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation or the Next Generation Learning Challenge (NGLC) funded by the Gates and Hewlett Packard Foundations are vehicles for developing state-level ILP policy implementation efforts. Launched in 2010, the NGLC is a collaborative, multi-year initiative focused on developing technology-enabled approaches to dramatically improve college readiness, especially for low-income young adults.
3. Continue to develop systems of ILP implementation indicators that are connected to students' data records.
Most states are still developing or refining K-16 data systems with student-level identifiers that permit longitudinal progress tracking. Once these systems are established to document student performance, student growth or success in post-secondary settings, state leaders and technical assistance organizations must assist school teams in measuring students' involvement in key ILP practices, such as student-led conferences, technical skills assessments, and the quality of culminating high school graduation portfolios and projects. Data systems capable of tracking the number of student-led conferences and the outcomes of the conferences, for example, are an essential ingredient for determining how the ILP process contributes to post-school outcomes. Once refined and stable, these ILP implementation indicators can be added to states' K-16 student data systems.
4. Support state and local district participation in longitudinal research studies to examine the factors associated with robust implementation of ILPs and students' post-high school outcomes.
As noted herein, the state-level K-16 student data systems and workforce quality data systems must be linked to provide an invaluable resource for documenting the impact of the ILPs, and related innovations such as internships and technical skills assessments, on the economic and social benefits that graduates acquire from ILP-intensive schools.
5. All states pursuing or considering ILP policy initiatives should capitalize on the benchmarking, resource mapping, and policy alignment opportunities available through national associations and organizations.
Organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers, the American Diploma Project, the Education Commission of the States, and the Federal Interagency Working

Group on Youth Programs, see: <http://www.findyouthinfo.org/> offer opportunities for state and local teams to acquire resources that could enhance the development and implementation of ILP policies and practices.

To examine closely the efficacy of ILP policies and practices, researchers must build strong partnerships with leading ILP school networks (e.g., career academies, early college or middle college high schools, schools with small learning communities), high schools, and institutions of higher education to address two challenges:

- Identifying and measuring the key ingredients and school and community practices that represent robust and stable ILP implementation in school wide or classroom settings. With the multiple education reforms being launched in most states, it is essential that state and local leaders, including teachers, understand fully the teaching and learning activities generated by students' ILPs. Creating or using classroom and individual student-level measures of ILP activity engagement is essential for knowing which part or aspect of the ILP-IGP is generating improvements in graduation rates for which students.
- Documenting through well-designed non-experimental and experimental studies (including settings where schools, classrooms, or students are randomly assigned to well-implemented ILP-IGP practices) the impact of ILP practices on high school graduation rates, successful transition to postsecondary institutions and/or productive career pathways, and other important personal outcomes, e.g., living independently, self-advocacy, and community or civic engagement.

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APPENDIX

State Level Interview Protocol

Introduction

State policy makers are continuously working to identify ways to establish and strengthen high school graduation requirements. Nationally, many states have enacted policies that mandate high school students establish individualized learning plans (ILPs). In addition to the ILPs, some states have added graduation policies that align with Career Pathways as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education and include identification of post-secondary aspirations.

An Individualized Learning Plan includes plans for course taking, learning experiences and career development activities and is intended to help students identify and build capacity for post-secondary goals.

The Institute for Educational Leadership has received funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to study "promising practices" associated with the implementation of ILPs. This two-year research project is being conducted in partnership with the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth and the Center on Education and Work at the University of Wisconsin.

After reviewing graduation requirement policies throughout the United States, we have identified your state as one that has enacted promising practices and policies and would like to interview you for possible inclusion in our evaluation study. Responses to the interview questions below will be used to identify states that will be invited to participate in the 18-month demonstration project. We are planning to ask invited states to nominate districts for possible inclusion in the demonstration project. We will then follow up with district-level interviews and request from the districts a list of schools that are successfully implementing state mandated ILPs. Finally, we will be inviting schools from selected states to participate in the demonstration project.

We are planning to:

- 1) Evaluate whether successful implementation of ILPs improve student outcomes and readiness for making post-high school transitions to further education or the workforce, especially for students with disabilities;
- 2) Provide professional development, technical assistance, and a \$10,000/year stipend to support their continued efforts in helping students develop quality ILPs; and,
- 3) Provide an electronic ILP Portfolio for students to organize and store their ILP information.

Our evaluation draws from Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994) which directly links the specific qualities of a student's learning experiences to effective career development and transition readiness. ILPs offer a method of cataloging the types of learning experiences students will experience throughout high school. Our demonstration project will crosswalk nine research based indicators of a high impact learning experience to each student's ILP activity. The nine indicators of a high-quality learning environment include:

- a) Mastery experiences related to essential academic and career content knowledge;
- b) Vicarious experiences whereby students are able to observe peers engage in successful performance experiences;

- c) Verbal persuasion whereby an adult offers encouragement;
- d) Anxiety management to address the difficulties associated with engaging in new challenging experiences;
- e) Career exploration and planning experiences that result in students establishing stronger relational bonds with adults, educators, and peers;
- f) Written exercises that allow students to define their own short-term and long-term occupational goals;
- g) Individualized interpretations of personal and career assessments that allow the student to define for themselves the challenges they experience and the opportunity to become aware of the relevance of current educational opportunities in helping them develop the skills needed to address those challenges;
- h) World of work information in order to learn how to identify one's personal skills and interests, investigate the career opportunities available, and search for jobs;
- i) Seeking formal support from community sources.

These nine features are also core components of the *Guideposts for Success* ([http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources & Publications/guideposts/](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources&Publications/guideposts/)).

State Level Interview Questions

The questions we are interested in pursuing are:

1. Why was the ILP approach selected as a high school graduation requirement? How was it developed?
2. Are there external partners that helped develop the plan (e.g. postsecondary institutions, workforce, employer community, etc.)? If so, are they involved in implementation in any way? If so, why and how?
3. What support from state appropriations or other public funds (federal or local) are used for the development, implementation and management of the state's ILP program?
4. Does the state require a specific office or program to be responsible for working with students to develop ILPs? Do they receive supplementary resources to manage this function? What parts of the state department of education are partnering to assist local school districts to implement the ILP? Units responsible for:
 - Academic standards?
 - Career Pathways, if you have this as a part of graduation requirements?
 - Career Guidance/counseling?
 - IDEA Transition requirements?
 - Career/Technical Education, Perkins?
5. Is there a state mandated form for the ILP? How many years does the plan cover? Does it include any years beyond high school? How often are ILPs reviewed? Is there a process for amending ILPs? What happens to ILPs if students drop out of school?
6. Does the state have specific types of assessments or rubrics that are used to evaluate the ILP system? If so, what are the components of the assessment and how often are they applied?
7. What are the specific requirements that each school must follow to develop and update a report on the results of the plan to share with:

- Parents/Guardians?
 - Youth?
 - School personnel?
 - District?
 - State?
8. How does the state department of education oversee the progress made by local school districts? What does the state do with information collected about the ILPs? Is it a part of the state report card?
 9. What longitudinal data systems are used to track students during and after high school? Is the ILP included in the tracking system?
 10. Is there any state level staff training specific to the implementation of ILP policies? If so, what is the content? How frequently is staff trained and who receives this training?
 11. Is there a unit of study students must take to develop the plan? If so, what is included? Does the state have a set of standards for the unit? Are parents involved in the process? If so are they required to “sign-off” on the plan?
 12. Are students in charter schools, state-run schools (in correctional facilities, alternative schools, special schools for youth with disabilities such as hearing and visual impairments, gifted and talented schools, etc.) required to develop ILPs?
 13. Can you please provide the contact information for the units identified as being responsible for assisting in the oversight and implementation of the ILPs (Title, E-mail and telephone #)? This needs to include the person responsible for Special Education Transition as there will be a series of questions for that person regarding the transition requirements in individual IEPs.

Questions for the SEA Special Education contact:

14. What thought has gone into the integration of IEPs into ILPs? What role does the IEP team play in the ILPs process for students receiving special education services?
15. Is there any relationship between IEPs, ILPs and the new federal requirement for transition plans for students in your state? If so, are ILPs used to meet this requirement?

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Dr. Phelps is an emeritus professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis and former director of the Center on Education and Work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Over three decades, his research, teaching, and public service agenda has examined the dynamic impact of economic change and workplace innovations on educational practices and policies in the secondary and postsecondary education sectors. He has given particular attention to state and federal policy initiatives, equity issues, business and industry partnership innovations, and professional development practices.

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Ms. Wills established the Center for Workforce Development (CWD) at the Institute for Educational Leadership and now serves as a part-time Senior Policy Fellow with CWD. CWD concentrates its work on the development and improvement of employment-related learning systems in the United States. It focuses on development of new tools (such as skill and literacy standards); systems improvements (such as transition from school to work, adult literacy programs); and capacity of institutions (such as employer-led organizations to work with education institutions and youth serving agencies).

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