



District & Student Requirements

Counseling Plans and Advising Requirements & Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) Requirements

This model policy outlines counseling plans and advising requirements as well as ICAP processes to facilitate middle school career exploration. The process of advising should guide students to make informed course selections, seek high-quality pathways, and plan for postsecondary education and training options – all aligned to career options that are in demand and of interest to the student. ICAPs are a process by which students can document their engagement in career exploration activities and associated academic and educational training planning that aligns with their careers of interest. While commonly referred to as an ICAP, states may choose to adopt alternative names for these plans. States should also consider how these advising and planning activities are aligned with other required student plans, such as Individual Education Plans (IEP), Transition Plans (required by 504), and English Language Learners individual learning plans (ILP).

Be it enacted by the (governing body) of (state):

Section 1. Definitions

- (1) “Career exploration activity” means any educational programming, activity, or event that provides early exposure to jobs and industries and creates links between what students learn in school and their emerging career interests.
 - (a) Career exploration experiences should be varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on. Opportunities should be aligned to individual student interests, with clear connections to durable or professional skills, careers that are aligned to the changing future of workforce needs, and to upcoming transitions to high school.
 - (b) Career exploration activities may include without limitation activities designed to immerse students in experiences that provide an understanding of various in-demand career fields including but not limited to field trips, guest speakers, community service, job-shadows, career fairs, interviews, research projects, project-based learning, internships, and work-based learning.

- (2) “Comprehensive Counseling Plans” means a plan developed by the district that details the delivery of counseling services, to include career, academic planning, and associated postsecondary education and training.
- (3) “Department” means the (*State*) Department of Education.
- (4) “Direct services” means services that are face-to-face or virtual interactions between school counselors and students and include the following: instruction; appraisal and advisement; counseling.
- (5) “Educator” means an individual with a state license to provide direct instructional services to students.
- (6) “Indirect services” means services provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors’ interactions with others, including: consultation; collaboration; referrals. These may include consultations between a student, a parent or legal guardian, school staff, and community agencies concerning a student’s academic, career, and social and emotional needs.
- (7) “Individual Career and Academic Plan” or “ICAP” means a plan that is developed by the student in collaboration with their parents/caregivers and school personnel that is reviewed and updated annually beginning in the fifth grade.¹ The plan should guide students’ educational and career pathway choices, such as course selection, activity participation, and postsecondary planning, to prepare students for success after high school, and should adapt to the student’s changing interests, goals or career aspirations, as needed.
- (8) “Middle school” means a school consisting of grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination that includes grades five through eight (5-8). Middle schools serve children who are approximately 10-14 years of age.²
- (9) “Middle school career exploration” means any activity that allows students to develop an awareness of all career fields as defined by (*national or state career frameworks*) and investigate their own interests and aptitudes related to careers.³ Students gain a deeper understanding of career interests and related occupations to obtain the information needed to make connections between their education and career aspirations in order to make a plan for reaching their future goals.

¹ States can use the starting grade that best meets their definition for middle school.

² States can adjust this grade band to fit their middle school definition.

³ States can use the National Career Clusters® Framework or an alternate state-specific career framework as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths and ensure student exploration isn’t limited to an outdated or more traditional list of occupations.

- (10) “Local Education Agency”, also referred to as “school district” means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within (*State*) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of (*State*).
- (11) “Postsecondary” means education, training, and career experiences beyond high school graduation, inclusive of 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, technical schools, bootcamps, programs that confer professional licenses, industry certifications or certificates, and short-term training programs as defined by (*state workforce agency*).
- (12) “School Counselor” means a certified licensed educator who oversees the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program.
- (13) “Social Capital” means the relationships and networks one has and the ability to leverage these connections for information and opportunities such as career advice, mentorship, internships, resources, and job interviews.
- (14) “Whole School Advising” means an advising program that is coordinated and directed by a school counselor and delivered by all student-facing personnel within a school, including, but not limited to, school counselors, career coaches, administrators, educators, and work-based learning coordinators.

Section 2. District Comprehensive Counseling Program

- (1) Each public school district and charter school shall implement a comprehensive counseling program for all students. The purpose of the program is to support students as they navigate their education and plan their future; encourage an ongoing and personal relationship between each student and an adult in the school; and involve parents and caregivers in students' educational decisions and plans.
 - (a) The comprehensive counseling program shall employ a whole-school advising approach whereby students can receive academic and career advisement from school counselors, educators, administrators, work-based learning coordinators, and any student-facing adult who can deliver any of the components outlined in Section 2.
- (2) A comprehensive counseling program is a program that is designed to:
 - (a) provide systematic delivery to all students

- (b) include a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success
 - (c) close achievement and opportunity gaps
 - (d) result in improved student achievement, attendance, and discipline.
- (3) Each public school district and charter school shall develop a comprehensive counseling plan that includes:
- (a) Belief statements;
 - (b) Vision statement;
 - (c) Mission statement; and
 - (d) Program goal(s).
 - (i) Program goals include goals that are developed annually based on academic and career interest inventory school data and that are aligned with the vision and mission statements that are shared with individuals to ensure access to opportunities for all students.
 - (e) Program implementation, including the following:
 - (i) delivery of direct and indirect counseling and advising services.
 - (ii) a career planning process that includes, without limitation:
 - 1) Assisting students in college and career planning by using age-appropriate resources to help identify career interests and aptitudes;
 - 2) Guiding a student in goal-setting experiences and course selection aligned with the student's postsecondary goals, which should be documented in their individual career and academic plans (ICAPs);
 - 3) Providing guidance to students in understanding the advantages of completing career certifications and internships; and
 - 4) Following up with high school graduates to assess the effectiveness of career planning services provided and inform continuous improvement.
 - (iii) roles and responsibilities assigned within schools and at the local education agency, to include the following personnel

- 1) School counselors;
- 2) Career coaches;
- 3) School administrators;
- 4) Educators; and
- 5) Work-based learning coordinators.

Section 3. Accountability

- (1) Accountability ensures regular analysis of the comprehensive school counseling plan.
 - (a) As needed, the school counselor, in collaboration with the building administrator and other stakeholders, will review the program annually and update as needed using the following tools:
 - (i) Program assessment; and
 - (ii) Program goal results data.
 - (b) The comprehensive school counseling program shall follow the comprehensive school counseling program guidance provided by the department.

Section 4. Partnerships.

- (1) The school district or charter school has the authority to enter into a local career counseling agreement with the local workforce development board, the community college that serves the county, and other community-based organizations to provide career exploration and counseling services to middle and high school students.

Section 5. Individual Career and Academic Plans

- (1) Beginning in the *(academic school year)/(with the graduating cohort of 20XX)*, each middle school student shall establish an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP). Before or at the initiation of the ICAP, a career interest and skills assessment shall be administered to each student to help inform the student's course taking and initial identification of their education and career goals. The ICAP shall be established within the first 90 days of the fifth grade year to help students explore different career options and understand the education, training, or credential pathways—such as college, technical programs, or apprenticeships—that could prepare them for those careers.
- (2) Each academic year, middle school students shall update their ICAP as follows:
 - (a) Beginning in the first grade of middle school, students and their parents and/or legal guardians, in collaboration with appropriate school personnel, shall prepare a plan identifying a variety of career options in which the student has an interest.

The plan should include initial identification of middle school course selection in grades 7-8, acceleration opportunities as appropriate, and next steps for any potential remediation, exploration, and/or activity participation.

- (b) Each year thereafter, students and their parents and/or legal guardians in collaboration with appropriate school personnel shall revise career planning records in accordance with student interest. Revisions shall include course selection, including acceleration and/or remediation identified as supportive of their goals.
 - (c) Upon entering the final middle school grade, students and their parents and/or legal guardians in collaboration with appropriate school personnel shall review and revise the career planning record. The record shall include the following:
 - (i) a suggested high school course of study based on a students' education and career goals;
 - (ii) an alternate plan for career options in which the student has an interest, and;
 - (iii) the postsecondary education or training programs related to achieving a career goal.
- (3) Each public school district or open-enrollment public charter school shall ensure that students in grades five through eight (5-8) participate in career exploration activities that help them complete an individual career and academic plan.
- (4) Each public school district or open-enrollment public charter school shall establish protocols for the development, implementation, and student-based monitoring of Individual Career and Academic Plans.
- (a) Each school district or charter school shall designate a contact person to support school personnel in implementing the requirements of this (*state law, rule, or regulation*) at each middle school.
- (5) Beginning (in the *academic school year*)/(with the graduating cohort of 20XX), each school district or charter school shall have an electronic platform available to all students in grades 5-12 to facilitate the ICAP process. Districts may utilize one of the electronic platforms approved by the Department.
- (a) The electronic platform must allow for data collection that tracks usage of ICAP requirements to enable the state to continuously monitor and improve the provision of career advising services and career exploration activities, meeting the requirements set by the Department.
- (6) Required elements of the Individual Career and Academic Plan include:

- (a) Identification of career goals aided by a skills and interest assessment.
 - (b) Identification of education goals.
 - (c) A plan for courses taken in middle and high school that satisfies state and local promotion and graduation requirements and aligns with students' secondary and postsecondary goals that may include education, training, and careers.
 - (d) Identification of current and prospective individuals who serve as the students' social capital network and can help the student work toward their academic and career goals.
- (7) Students with a transition plan as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act, shall receive advisement services that incorporate ICAP requirements into their transition plans to ensure students have the opportunity to explore career options to inform postsecondary training and employment planning.
- (8) Public school districts and open-enrollment public charter schools serving students who qualify as English Language Learners may make ICAPs available in students' home language and/or may supplement planning activities and communications with translation services to allow parents and caregivers to meaningfully collaborate in the career and academic planning process.
- (9) The Individual Career and Academic Plan shall be updated annually at a minimum to address
- (a) the student's efforts in exploring careers in varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on ways, including noting results of interest surveys and additional assessments that the student completes;
 - (b) the student's academic progress, including the courses taken, any remediation or credit recovery, and any accelerated or early postsecondary credits earned;
 - (c) a student's changing interests, goals, and needs, including identification of the graduation pathway option(s) the student intends to complete to meet their educational and career goals;
 - (d) the student's resume, as it is prepared and submitted; and
 - (e) postsecondary education or training goals aligned to their career of interest.
- (10) The Department shall issue guidance and provide training to assist school districts or charter schools with implementing the requirements in this (*state law, rule, or regulation*).
- (11) Each public school, in assisting students and parents in creating and maintaining the individual career and academic plans, is in compliance with the requirements of the federal "Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974", 20 U.S.C. sec. 1232g.



District & Student Requirements

Career Exploration Coursework, Programming, and Activity Requirements

This model policy outlines career exploration course, program, and delivery requirements for middle school students. Career exploration delivery should provide students with regular opportunities throughout the school year via dedicated coursework, activities embedded in the curriculum, and through experiential opportunities such as those described in the model policy below. The sections in this model policy address each of those approaches to ensure middle school students have a variety of ways to engage in meaningful career exploration.

Be it enacted by the (governing body) of (state):

Section 1. Definitions

- (1) “Career development framework” means the state framework that outlines career development expectations for each grade band in grades K through 12 that include career awareness, exploration, and preparation.
- (2) “Career exploration activity” means any educational programming, activity, or event that provides early exposure to jobs and industries and creates links between what students learn in school and their emerging career interests.
 - (a) Career exploration experiences should be varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on. Opportunities should be aligned to individual student interests, with clear connections to durable or professional skills, careers that are aligned to the changing future of workforce needs, and to upcoming transitions to high school.
 - (b) Career exploration activities may include without limitation activities designed to immerse students in experiences that provide an understanding of various in-demand career fields including but not limited to field trips, guest speakers, community service, job-shadows, career fairs, interviews, research projects, project-based learning, internships, and work-based learning.
- (3) “Department” means the (State) Department of Education.
- (4) “Individual Career and Academic Plan” or “ICAP” means a plan that is developed by the student in collaboration with their parents/caregivers and school personnel that is

reviewed and updated annually beginning in the fifth grade.⁴ The plan should guide students' educational and career pathway choices, such as course selection, activity participation, and postsecondary planning, to prepare students for success after high school, and should adapt to the student's changing interests, goals or career aspirations, as needed.

- (5) "Middle school" means a school consisting of grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination that includes grades five through eight (5-8). Middle schools serve children who are approximately 10-14 years of age.⁵
- (6) "Middle school career exploration" means any activity that allows students to develop an awareness of all career fields as defined by (*national or state career frameworks*) and investigate their own interests and aptitudes related to careers.⁶ Students gain a deeper understanding of career interests and related occupations to obtain the information needed to make connections between their education and career aspirations in order to make a plan for reaching their future goals.
- (7) "Local Education Agency", also referred to as "school district" means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within (*State*) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of (*State*).
- (8) "Postsecondary" means education, training, and career experiences beyond high school graduation, inclusive of 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, technical schools, bootcamps, programs that confer professional licenses, industry certifications or certificates, and short-term training programs as defined by (*state workforce agency*).
- (9) "Social Capital" means the relationships and networks one has and the ability to leverage these connections for information and opportunities such as career advice, mentorship, internships, resources, and job interviews.

Section 2. State Career Development Framework

- (1) The (*State Department of Education*), in consultation with the (*State Workforce Agency*), shall develop or adopt, and make available to schools, a Career Development Framework that meets all of the following:

⁴ States can use the starting grade that best meets their definition for middle school.

⁵ States can adjust this grade band to fit their middle grades definition.

⁶ States can use the National Career Clusters® Framework or an alternate state-specific career framework as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths and ensure student exploration isn't limited to an outdated or more traditional list of occupations.

- (a) Defines career development expectations for each grade band in grades K through 12 that include career awareness, exploration, and preparation.
 - (b) Incorporates career development instruction at the middle school level.
 - (c) Provides examples of career exploration activities to facilitate at each grade band.
 - (d) Aligns with existing state frameworks for advising and work-based learning.
 - (e) Includes strategies for engaging parents and integrating community, business, and industry interests.
- (2) The Career Development Framework must outline how public school districts and charter schools will prepare middle school students to successfully choose and transition to high school career pathways available in their district.
- (3) The department shall issue guidance annually on specific career awareness and exploration activities that are considered age-appropriate and scaffolded to support students and their families.

Section 2. Career Development Standards.

- (1) The (*State Department of Education*) shall develop Career Development Standards that will enable students to
- (a) Relate careers to personal interests, abilities and aptitudes.
 - (b) Explain the relationship of career training programs to employment opportunities.
 - (c) Analyze the economic factors that impact employment opportunities, such as, but not limited to competition, geographic location, global influences, job growth, job openings, labor supply, potential advancement, potential earnings, salaries/benefits, and unemployment.
 - (d) Analyze the relationship of school subjects, extracurricular activities, and community experiences to career preparation.
 - (e) Choose personal electives and extracurricular activities based upon personal career interests, abilities, and academic strengths.

- (f) Understand social capital concepts and skills, including how social capital can help students on their educational and career pathway and the development of skills to empower students to build their networks.
- (4) Beginning (in the *academic school year*)/(with the graduating cohort of 20xx), each school district and charter school shall ensure that their curriculum incorporates grade-appropriate instruction that aligns with the career development standards in each grade.

Section 3. Middle School Career Exploration Course

- (1) The (*State Board of Education*) requires all middle schools to offer a career exploration course designed to increase awareness of industry sectors represented in the (*national or state career framework*)⁷, related occupations, and associated college and career pathways. Students enrolled in this course shall explore high school, college, and career options based on their individual interests.
- (a) Every middle student shall be required to participate in a Career Awareness or Career Development course at least once during grades five through eight (5-8).
- (2) The career exploration course shall be aligned to the Career Development Standards in Section 2.
- (a) A public school may submit a request to the department to combine or embed the Career Development Standards with standards from another course into one (1) combined course. The public school shall continue to teach the academic standards for each separate course that is combined.
- (3) The career exploration course shall provide students with the direction, decision making, and planning needed to inform their personal and academic career paths.
- (a) The course shall integrate Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) requirements to facilitate student career planning.
- (4) The career exploration course may be taught by a certified educator, school counselor, or work-based learning coordinator.

Section 4. Middle School Career Exploration Activities

⁷ States can use the National Career Clusters® Framework or an alternate state-specific career framework as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths and ensure student exploration isn't limited to an outdated or more traditional list of occupations.

- (1) To prepare students for choosing a career field and planning their educational training, each public school district and charter school serving middle school students shall incorporate career exploration activities that expose students to careers of interest.
 - (a) Each public school district and charter school shall annually provide a minimum of six (6) career awareness and exploration activities for each student in grades five through eight (5-8).
 - (b) Career exploration activities shall
 - (i) provide students with opportunities to assess their skills, interests, and aptitudes in an authentic way through personal experiences and interest inventories to determine how those align with various career paths. These results shall be used to create a living plan to inform future education courses and experiences, including the provision of additional career exploration experiences;
 - (ii) include exposure to various durable or professional skills needed to be successful in any career field;
 - (iii) allow students to learn content and practice skills that help them build their social capital;
 - (iv) be documented in an individual career and academic plan pursuant to (*state law, rule, or regulation*) that follows students to high school through graduation.⁸
- (2) Each school district shall facilitate partnerships with community organizations and agencies, municipal entities, and businesses to identify and recruit employers to provide and support career exploration activities for middle school students.⁹
- (3) The provision of career exploration activities shall not be dependent upon student participation in career and technical education courses, honors or advanced academies, and/or after-school programming.

⁸ States should reference the appropriate policy language that reflects their student academic and career planning requirements.

⁹ See the policy language reflected in Establishing Intermediary Support for Middle School Career Exploration for specific requirements for partnering with intermediaries.