

Implementing Individual Career and Academic Plans at Scale



Introduction

Without Limits: A Shared Vision for the Future of Career Technical Education calls on the Career Technical Education (CTE), education and workforce communities to provide the necessary coordinated set of supports that enables each learner to navigate their career journey skillfully and successfully. Empowering learners to make informed career decisions requires a comprehensive, accessible and connected advisement system.¹ This system must start by engaging learners as they build occupational identities and span their lifetimes, providing coordinated support and guidance as they continue to gain skills and progress in their careers. Successfully aligning advising practices takes a cross-systems approach, which is no simple feat. Nationally, only 4 percent of State CTE Directors believe career advising and development are closely aligned across the elementary, middle and high school levels in their state.²

Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs) are a key piece of connected career advising that align learners' career and life goals with academic, postsecondary and career pathway options.³ ICAPs have different names in different states, including Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs).⁴ They refer to both the process of engaging in individualized academic and career development activities as well as the product: a living, usually online, portfolio that is created by each learner and regularly updated as they advance through school and transition into the workforce.⁵

Completing a meaningful ICAP process helps learners connect the relevance of education with their career and life goals and select a postsecondary pathway and create academic course plans that support their goals.

When done well, this process is collaborative, drawing on input from the learner, their family, educators, school counselors, and other caring adults who interact with the learner. Many school districts are already conducting activities related to ICAPs, such as work-based learning, career counseling sessions, career interest surveys and intentional course sequencing. The goal is for these activities to be integrated into a seamless ICAP delivery process that all school stakeholders feel ownership over.⁶ Completing a meaningful ICAP process helps learners connect the relevance of education with their career and life goals and pursue a postsecondary pathway and academic course plans that support their goals.⁷

When implemented equitably and with fidelity, the ICAP process is essential for opening the doors to postsecondary and career success for each learner. This brief highlights promising practices for ICAP implementation at the state and local levels in Colorado, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Wisconsin and provides recommendations for further state and local work to scale ICAPs.

Comparing Enabling State Policies and Funding for ICAPs

Many states have adopted policies that require all high school, and in some cases elementary and middle school, learners to develop and maintain an ICAP in an effort to help establish personalized academic and career goals.⁸ At least 38 states have implemented ICAPs, including 21 states that have mandated them.⁹ Some states even have tied ICAPs to graduation requirements. In Oklahoma, beginning in the 2019–20 school year, learners entering the ninth grade must complete an ICAP to graduate from a public high school. Beginning with the graduating class of 2021–22, Colorado is using Graduation Guidelines for learners to demonstrate Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) in Reading, Writing and Communicating and in Mathematics.¹⁰ Learners choose from a menu of options developed

by the state and adopted by local school boards to show what they know or can do in these subjects to graduate from high school.¹¹ The Graduation Guidelines process begins with the development of an ICAP.¹²

The following chart describes additional state policy conditions, including state mandates, requirements and funding, that enable the effective implementation of ICAPs in Colorado, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Wisconsin. All of these states have requirements in place for ICAPs, such as who should administer ICAPs and what activities ICAPs should include. For most of these states, these requirements are part of state law. In Massachusetts, the ICAP is not mandated by state law, but it is embedded in other state requirements. All of these states provide various forms of funding for ICAPs, most commonly by supporting the online platform districts use to administer ICAPs.

Comparing Enabling State Policies and Funding for ICAPs

	Oklahoma ICAP	Massachusetts MyCAP (My Career and Academic Plan)	Colorado ICAP
Beginning Grade Level	9th grade	Can begin as early as 6th grade	9th grade
Required for Graduation	Yes	No	Yes
State Mandate	Yes	No	Yes
State ICAP Requirements	<p>By state law, ICAPs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career- and college-interest surveys; • Written postsecondary and workforce goals and information on progress toward these goals; • An intentional sequence of courses that reflect progress toward the postsecondary goal; • The learner’s academic progress, including courses taken, assessment scores, any remediation or credit recovery, and any early postsecondary credits or credentials earned; and • Experience with in-service learning and/or work environment activities. <p>ICAPs should be developed by the learner and their parent or legal guardian, in collaboration with their school counselors, school administrators, teachers and other school personnel.</p>	<p>The MyCAP is not part of state law, but it is embedded in the state’s definition of college and career readiness and the High Quality College and Career Pathways initiative.¹³ The following are essential principles for MyCAP success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MyCAPs are student driven. • Every student has at least one key adult on the school staff, typically referred to as a school mentor, to encourage, support and guide MyCAP development. • The school or district selects at least one online college and career planning system to be the MyCAP electronic platform, which includes an ePortfolio to capture artifacts that document the student’s progress over time. • MyCAPs are developed within a structured program using a curriculum that offers lessons and activities through classroom instruction, outside resources and an online electronic platform. <p>Professional development is necessary to provide all staff with clear objectives, role definitions and strategies to support students and promote quality school-wide implementation.</p>	<p>By state law, school districts must provide access to an ICAP process for learners and families. Recommended items to include in the ICAP are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner’s efforts in exploring careers, including interest surveys; • Learner’s academic progress, including courses taken and concurrent credits earned; • Learner’s experiences in service learning; • Learner’s college applications and resume; • Learner’s postsecondary studies as they progress; • Learner’s scores on the basic skills placement or assessment tests administered; and • Any intervention plan created for the learner and their progress in meeting the intervention plan. <p>School districts are also encouraged to make ICAPs accessible to educators, learners and parents and comply with the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).</p>
State Funding for ICAP	The Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education provides funding for the OK Career Guide.	Some state grants are available to pay stipends for school teams to attend state MyCAP trainings. ¹⁴	The Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Workforce Development Council, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, and Colorado Department of Human Services Child Welfare Division provide funding for the online platform My Colorado Journey. ¹⁵ No other dollars have been appropriated specifically for ICAPs.

Comparing Enabling State Policies and Funding for ICAPs

	South Carolina Individual Graduation Plan (IGP)	Wisconsin Academic and Career Planning (ACP)
Beginning Grade Level	8th grade	6th grade
Required for Graduation	No	No
State Mandate	Yes ¹⁶	Yes ¹⁷
State ICAP Requirements	<p>By state law, IGP's must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align career goals and a learner's course of study; • Be based on the learner's selected Career Cluster[®] of study and an academic focus within that Career Cluster; • Include core academic subjects to ensure that requirements for graduation will be met; • Include experience-based, career-oriented learning experiences; • Be flexible to allow changes in the course of study but be sufficiently structured to meet graduation requirements and admission to postsecondary education; • Incorporate provisions of a learner's Individualized Education Plan, when appropriate; and • Be approved by a certified school guidance counselor and the learner's parents, guardians or designee. 	<p>By state law:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every district provides ACP services to learners in grades six to 12. • The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) must provide and maintain technology for districts to provide ACP. • DPI must provide guidance, training and technical assistance to districts and school staff on how to implement ACP.
State Funding for ICAP	<p>Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) funds are distributed to districts to provide learners in grades K-12 career-related opportunities, activities and resources and alleviate transportation costs associated with these activities. These funds can also be used to provide guidance personnel professional development opportunities that will enhance their ability to meet the career development and preparation needs of learners and to lower the guidance ratio to an EEDA-legislated ratio of 300:1.¹⁸</p>	<p>Wisconsin provides funding for the online platform Xello</p>

ICAPs Supporting Career Pathways Systems

ICAPs are a cohesive part of learners' experiences within career pathways. When learners are exposed to career pathways, work-based learning and early college experiences through the ICAP process, they are able to think more deeply about their goals earlier and may be more inclined to choose career pathways. For example, Colorado has seen an influx in CTE participation with its ICAP process, as it makes learners aware of alternative postsecondary pathway options, including technical schools, industry certificates, stackable credentials and two-year community colleges. Starting the ICAP process early ensures that Colorado districts can be more intentional about matching course schedules and work-based learning experiences to learners' aspirations, meaning learners do not have to sacrifice other course-taking opportunities to enroll in CTE. CTE is an integral component of the advising and ICAP process, with school counselors able to enroll in the state's CTE credentialing class to become CTE Specialist Endorsed. Schools also use the Colorado Career Cluster[®] Model and color-coded course guides as guidance tools, filling in teachers' names, course titles, colleges known for aligned majors, and even salary ranges for entry-level positions next to corresponding Career Clusters.¹⁹

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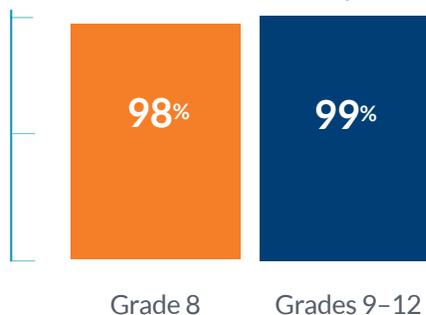
South Carolina's Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA), passed in 2005, establishes the state's Personal Pathways to Success program.²⁰ Under the program, every high school learner — including those planning to continue their education at a postsecondary institution — is required to declare either a CTE or EEDA major aligned with one of the 16 nationally recognized Career Clusters. Learners are expected to take career-focused courses through their elective graduation requirements, and districts are required to offer a standards-based academic curriculum organized around a Career Cluster system that provides learners with individualized education choices. All individual guidance and support services are connected to the development of an IGP. In the 2016–17 academic year, 98 percent of learners in grade eight and 99 percent of learners in grades nine through 12 completed IGPs.

Some states are including ICAPs in their state career readiness standards and career pathways structures. In 2013, Massachusetts adopted a definition of college and career readiness and a College and Career Advising Framework with three skill domains: Personal Social, Career Development and Academic/College & Career Planning.²¹ Massachusetts' ICAP program, called My Career and Academic Plan, or MyCAP for short, includes documentation of progress and learning in these three domains. Schools are encouraged to incorporate these MyCAP domains into daily classroom instruction and activities, including grade-specific objectives within these domains.

Additionally, in 2017 Massachusetts launched a High Quality College and Career Pathways initiative as an overarching strategy for expanding

**FIGURE 1:
IGP COMPLETION IN SOUTH CAROLINA**

Percentage of learners who completed IGPs in South Carolina
(2016–2017 academic year)



learner access to high-quality career pathways.²² The two types of pathways under this initiative are Early College Programs and Innovation Pathways. Early College Programs are designed to provide high school learners with the opportunity to attain a minimum of 12 transferable college credits through guided academic pathways that expose them to a variety of career opportunities. Innovation Pathways connect learning to an industry sector that is in demand in the regional and state economy and guide learners to relevant postsecondary education and training. Aligned college and career counseling, including the use of MyCAPs, is a requirement of both programs.

Similarly, Wisconsin implemented Pathways Wisconsin, state-endorsed regional career pathways that are designed to reflect the needs and vision of a regional collaborative group of employers and postsecondary, district and workforce development leaders.²³ These career pathways provide specific Academic and Career Planning (ACP) for occupations that are in demand in Wisconsin so schools can focus on delivering curriculum with input and support from regional employers and postsecondary partners. In addition, Wisconsin's career development platform, Xello, includes a set of features that allow students to learn about and interact with employers. These features, often referred to as Inspire, include employer profile information, career-based learning opportunities, and access to volunteer online career coaches directly through the ACP system.²⁴ This coherence between career pathways, work-based learning and career advising enables learners to seamlessly connect CTE with their future goals.

System-Wide Approach to Implementing ICAPs

Too often career advisement is a siloed activity, often falling on school counselors who wear many other hats in a school building besides college and career advising, including academic counseling and providing social and emotional support to learners. There are simply not enough school counselors and related career development professionals to reach

Developing a culture of career readiness is necessary to ensure a district and school-wide approach to implementing ICAPs.

all learners. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of 250 learners to one school counselor.²⁵ Of the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, only New Hampshire and Vermont meet that standard. With low capacity, the ICAP process can become a box-checking activity that does not provide the meaningful guidance learners need to inform their career and life goals. Making the ICAP process a system-wide endeavor means that there is more accountability and staff support along the way and that ICAPs are integrated into processes, supports and requirements, therefore making ICAPs more accessible to learners.

Although it takes time, developing a culture of career readiness is necessary to ensure a district- and school-wide approach to implementing ICAPs. One strategy to create this culture is to establish school-level ICAP leadership teams that are made up of representatives from key stakeholder groups within a school.²⁶ The ICAP leadership team should develop a shared ICAP implementation plan and vision for a culture of career readiness, which includes incorporating ICAPs into core classes, activities, work-based learning and events.²⁷ Having all necessary stakeholders weigh in on the scope and sequence of ICAP implementation creates a coordinated whole-school effort that will ensure that the curriculum is relevant and meaningful for all members of an ICAP team.²⁸ In Oklahoma, ICAPs are implemented locally in many different ways, but one of the most common methods is through regular instruction. Many schools integrate ICAP planning into core coursework. Others use class advisory time, which could include 20 minutes three times a week for learners to connect with advisory teachers who go through their ICAPs. In Colorado, Denver Public Schools provides the grade six through 12 ICAP curriculum online, including lesson plans with activities and Spanish versions of the materials.²⁹

Ensuring that learners have adults with whom they feel comfortable discussing their future career pathways is important to the success of an ICAP process. States can set standards that enable all adults to participate in and have ownership of the ICAP process. The Colorado Department of Education provides guided conversation starters known as Meaningful Career Conversations for families, educators and community members to engage with learners in their journey to postsecondary and workforce readiness. The state encourages “any caring adult” to engage learners in career conversations.³⁰ These conversation starters were endorsed by ASCA and are now promoted nationwide at every developmental level.³¹ Similarly, one of the core components of the MyCAP outlined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is that “every learner has at least one key adult on the school staff, typically referred to as a school mentor to encourage, to support, and to guide MyCAP development.”³² Boston Public Schools takes the approach of engaging the entire community. It enables school-based partners to access MyCAP instruments and support school staff in executing some of the activities with learners, all while prioritizing and protecting learner privacy. Boston also provides support for MyCAP implementation at the middle grades level through the Transformative Mentoring initiative, which provides professional development and a community of practice for school-based practitioners as they build deep relationships with students.³³ This culture of commitment to ICAPs from all adults in the school building and community ensures that each learner

has at least one caring adult advocate, whether that person is a counselor, teacher, administrator, para-professional or other school personnel.

State and District Levers for Supporting School ICAP Delivery

ICAP implementation can vary by district, which makes monitoring equitable implementation challenging for states. However, this variability does leave schools with a lot of autonomy to personalize ICAP delivery based on the needs of the school culture and individual learners. States have the means to take the guesswork out of implementation and save time for locals by ensuring that they have the tools and resources they need to be successful with ICAP implementation. Some of the key levers states can take to support ICAP delivery include monitoring implementation; conducting evaluations; providing adaptable tools, resources and guidance; lifting up promising practices from districts and schools; and providing training, technical assistance and professional development to locals.

States can monitor local implementation by requiring reports from districts and by performing audits or quality checks. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education sends regional accreditation officers to school districts as part of the annual audit to see if ICAP implementation requirements are being met. The South Carolina Department of Education, on the other hand, has done random

Education Strategy Group recently developed *Making the Connection: Aligning Advising to Improve Postsecondary Access and Success*, a new microsite that makes the case for prioritizing alignment of advising across K–12 and higher education, offers a vision for achieving that alignment, and lays out concrete action steps and resources for the many stakeholders who have a role to play. The site can be accessed at <https://alignedadvising.edstrategy.org/>.



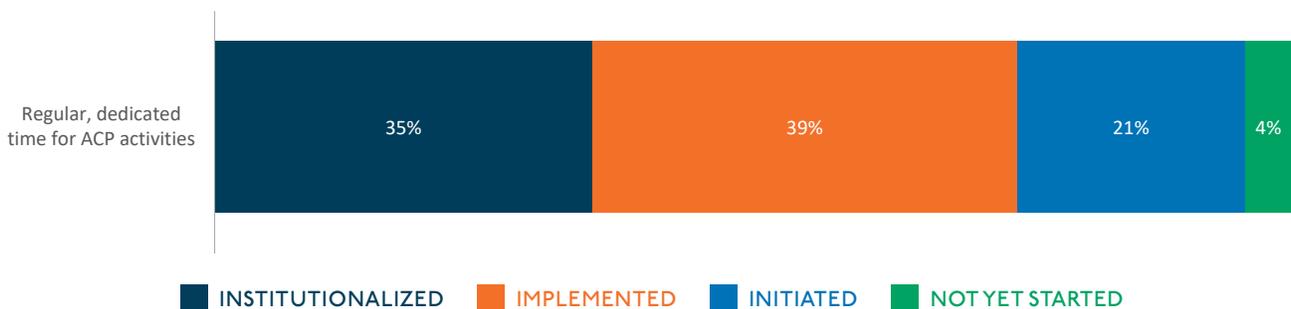
auditing by sitting in on some sessions to ensure that IGPs are delivered correctly. The first approach ensures that ICAPs are being implemented for all learners, and the second ensures that the ICAP experience is high quality. In South Carolina, these visits have since been replaced with an IGP survey that is sent to randomly selected learners, parents and school counselors. This survey is used to measure the effectiveness of the IGP process. In Colorado, ICAP completion is tied to graduation, a metric that district and state leaders are familiar with and monitor closely. Some districts, including Denver Public Schools, monitor ICAP completion rates for accountability purposes to track progress through graduation. Learners have to complete 100 percent of their ICAP to receive their diploma, so their web-based ICAP portal will auto-save their progress and flag incomplete sections. The percentage of learners on track with their ICAP are reflected in the weekly school data report summaries, including individual learner progress.

Another way states can support ICAP implementation is by evaluating and sharing best practices. In the early stages of ICAP implementation, the Oklahoma State Department of Education enlisted 73 school districts to serve as pilot districts. As pilots they provided feedback via surveys and focus groups and helped create ICAP implementation materials. Since ICAP implementation is now in full swing, the pilot has ended. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is in its sixth year of evaluating ACP implementation.³⁴ The evaluations are conduct-

ed through interviews and school-level surveys. The surveys measure the implementation level (institutionalized, implemented, initiated, not yet started) for various high-quality ICAP criteria, such as inclusive culture and goals, family engagement, supportive and safe adult relationships, time for ICAP activities and equitable opportunity for learners. (see Figure 2).³⁵ Some of the criteria, such as access to Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, economic status, English language status and special education status. Leaders from three districts interviewed during the 2019–20 school year evaluation mentioned having or striving for a school-wide culture of ACP and that staff buy-in has been increasing over the years. Sufficient time for staff collaboration was identified as an issue, and even the most “institutionalized” district reported always needing more time. Lessons learned from these surveys are used to adjust the state’s ICAP implementation.

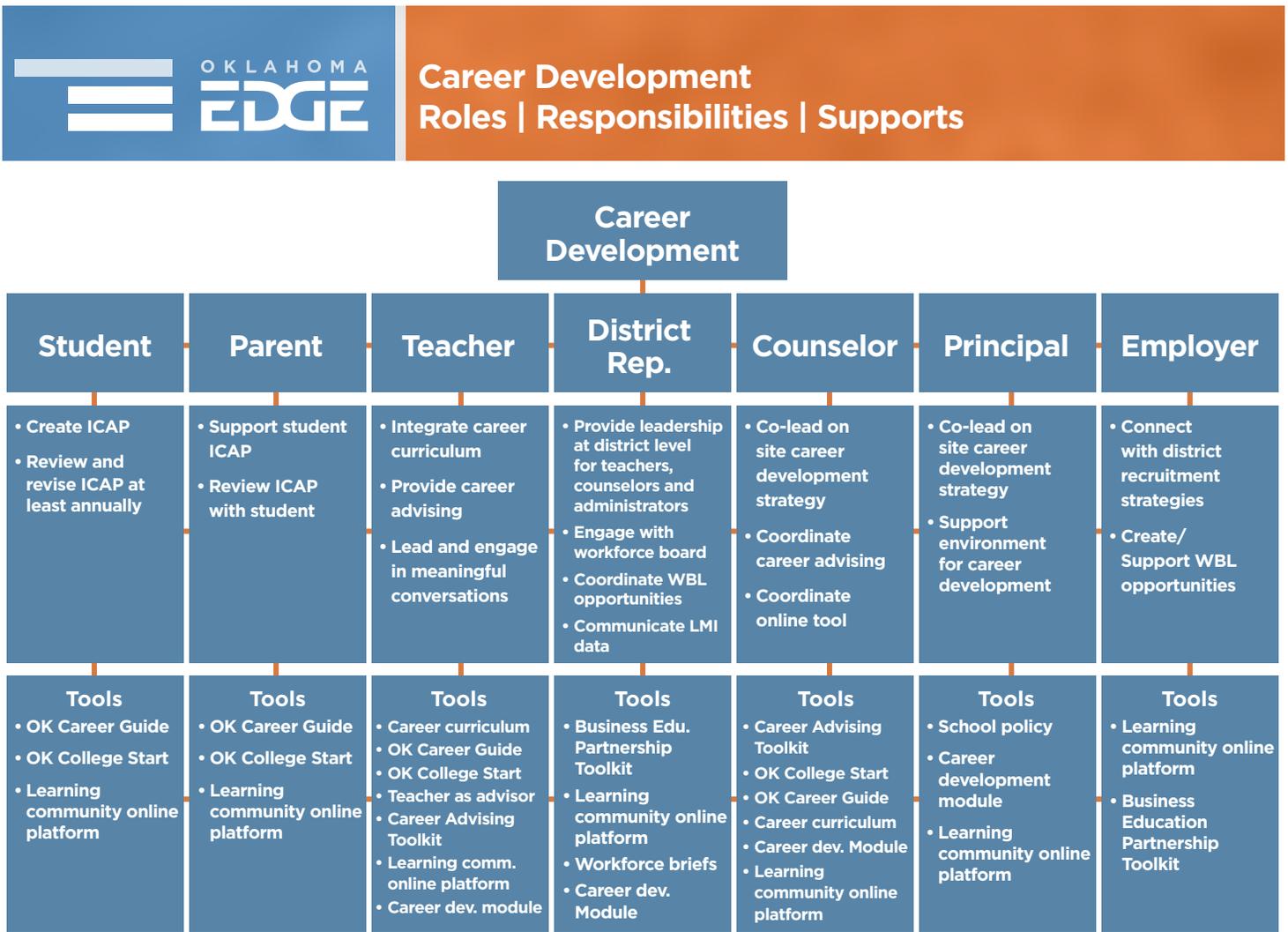
States can also provide robust resources and tools for districts to use and adapt, and in some cases, the state can elevate best practices developed by districts that others can use, saving practitioners on the ground precious time. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education has many resources and tools on its website that districts can use to begin implementing ICAPs, including a suggested timeline for implementing ICAPs, frequently asked questions (FAQs), a tool to assemble a school ICAP team, and sample activities crosswalked to existing courses (See Figure 3).³⁶ The Wisconsin Department

FIGURE 2: DEDICATED TIME FOR ICAP ACTIVITIES AND EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNERS FROM WISCONSIN’S 2019–20 IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION



Source: Academic and Career Planning Survey 2019-20

FIGURE 3: CAREER DEVELOPMENT ROLES FOR THE OKLAHOMA ICAP



of Public Instruction also provides FAQs, a district ACP implementation self-assessment, an implementation guide and other communication resources.³⁷ Similarly, the South Carolina Department of Education has a comprehensive school counseling and career guidance model specifically for school counseling and career guidance personnel that explains the importance of the IGP in the career advising process as well as professional development webinars and workshops on its website.³⁸

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a robust MyCAP implementation guide in addition to a college and career readiness scope and sequence that includes learning objectives and lessons and activities for each of the three college- and career-ready domains, broken down by grade.³⁹ Recently, Massachusetts engaged leaders from eight schools and community partners to come together and develop a similar scope and sequence for the middle grades. The Colorado Department of Education has many implementation

resources for districts on its website, including an ICAP implementation toolkit and postsecondary and workforce readiness playbook. Each resource was co-developed by stakeholders and features essential guidance, promising practices, stories and tools so districts and schools can implement ICAPs in a way that is personal to their individual strengths and areas for growth.

Colorado is also unique for recognizing excellent district and school practices and making them available for others to learn from. Two online resources, the PWR Playbook⁴⁰ — a how-to guidebook designed by practitioners — and PWR Practices, Tools and Resources⁴¹ — a searchable database — provide guidance, tools and practices for others to study and adapt. The state also hosts monthly showcases that feature that year's award-winning ICAP teams and promising practices.⁴² The showcases highlight learner and staff stories and celebrate successes. For example, Aurora Public Schools won an ICAP Award in March 2021 for an elementary school ICAP curriculum. The comprehensive lessons incorporate CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) competencies, the Colorado Academic standards and Colorado Essential Skills. Through this initiative, the promising practices can help inspire other districts.

Providing training, professional development and technical assistance is another way that states can ensure that local leaders are equipped to implement ICAPs effectively.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in partnership with MASCA (Massachusetts School Counselors Association) has been providing formal state MyCAP trainings for three years to school MyCAP teams.⁴³ In the first year, more than 80 schools attended the MyCAP trainings. Now the trainings have evolved to include separate middle and high school options and opportunities for training trainers. The South Carolina Department of Education provides technical assistance and training for school counselors and career

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specialists together so they can understand how they should partner. Similarly, Colorado hosts regional gatherings called PoWeR symposia that bring practitioners together to share ideas and talk through challenges.⁴⁴ The Colorado Department of Education and state CTE office provide technical assistance through an advisory board of regional volunteer trainers that are available to any school that needs technical assistance.

Districts also play a role in supporting schools to tailor the ICAP process to individual school and community needs. For example, Boston Public Schools offers an individualized approach and collaborates with city partners. The district focuses on equipping schools with the strategies and resources they need to design their own models on the ground. This approach can look different across schools and grade levels, so the district tries to make the process highly flexible. Since schools are coming to the process with different needs and resources, the district has the structure to go deeper with some schools, providing asset mapping and coaching sessions. The district also includes many different city partners and stakeholders in its MyCAP work, including weaving it into different city strategic plans and consulting with partners that are familiar with learner transition periods and college access to contribute to the scope and sequence of lesson plans by grade level.⁴⁵ In the 2020–21 school year, the district piloted an initiative to introduce MyCAPs in sixth grade through a range of delivery models including in-class instruction, advising and affinity spaces. The middle grades curriculum is designed to be culturally responsive to help learners develop a self-identity and identify personal skills and talents to make informed choices about their future once they get to high school.

Leveraging ICAPs to Support Learner Transitions

Engaging in ICAP activities leads learners to demonstrate stronger academic outcomes, seek out and complete a postsecondary credential, and secure higher paying career opportunities.⁴⁶ However, while ICAPs can support learners in planning their postsecondary pathways, few states and districts design ICAPs to seamlessly connect and transfer from secondary to postsecondary education. Although many of the online platforms states use for ICAP delivery remain accessible to the learners after they graduate, learners themselves are most commonly responsible for taking their ICAP with them to their next step after high school.

The Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education's OK Career Guide, however, is a state-provided platform that can be used across education levels, supporting all individuals in the state to explore careers and connect with employers.⁴⁷ Schools can use this platform to track learners' progress on their ICAPs, and each school has an administrator who can easily transfer a learner's file to a new school or district. Although ICAPs are mandated in ninth grade in Oklahoma, this platform enables learners to start using it in elementary school, continue using it through postsecondary, and create resumes and explore job opportunities and trainings in adulthood.

Oklahoma is also working to align the ICAP process among institutions. The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University instruct incoming learners to connect their ICAP to their major. At the University of Oklahoma, learners can identify a major by comparing their ICAP personal interest survey results or Career Clusters survey results from high school with the university's career pathways major planning tools.⁴⁸

ICAPs provide the opportunity for learners to have meaningful conversations and develop relationships with supportive adults, making ICAPs a critical tool to ensure equity in the career development process.

Milwaukee, WI, also recently began a regional collaboration among the city's three major public education institutions: Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), Milwaukee Area Technical College, and the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.⁴⁹ The initiative is called M-cubed, and one of the goals is to implement a consistent ACP process for all MPS sixth graders, who will revisit and revise their ACP with guidance support through their college years. Denver is also working on a pilot to scale ICAPs from secondary to postsecondary. So far, it has started the data-sharing process between secondary and postsecondary institutions and has begun training staff to prepare for the first pilot class, which was scheduled to begin in the 2021–22 school year. Creating cross-system ICAP transfer processes will help remove silos between education levels and ensure that learners are prepared when transitioning out of high school.

Additionally, data sharing between secondary and postsecondary institutions is one of the most impactful ways to continually refine and align the ICAP process. The Colorado Department of Higher Education provides feedback reports illustrating the postsecondary progress of learners by district, including postsecondary enrollment, Free Application for Federal Student Aid completion, first year persistence and credential attainment.⁵⁰ This information enables secondary leaders to assess the outcomes of ICAPs by understanding trends in how their learners fare after graduation and where adjustments in support may be needed.⁵¹ They can assess how many learners continued on their chosen CTE pathway, where they went and what their grades are. By tracking this data, states can provide an actionable plan for schools to target and refine advising efforts for maximum impact.⁵²

Ensuring Equity in ICAP Implementation

Young people value opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about their futures.⁵³ Learners from historically marginalized populations also often face additional barriers to opportunities to develop their occupational identity, build social capital, and take agency over their own career journey by making informed decisions. ICAPs provide the opportunity for learners to have meaningful conversations and develop relationships with supportive adults, making ICAPs a critical tool to ensure equity in the career development process.



The Relationship Between ICAP and Hope

ICAPs play an important role in building and sustaining hope among young learners by helping them identify career pathways and set goals for their future. Emerging research from the University of Oklahoma's Hope Research Center shows that learners who have greater feelings of hope report higher grades and miss fewer days of school and that the ICAP experience is positively and significantly associated with increased levels of hope.⁵⁴ The research also shows that first-generation learners in Oklahoma experience lower levels of hope, suggesting that ICAP implementation could help build hope among this population.

Equity must also be considered in ICAP implementation to ensure that it is actually reaching each learner in a meaningful way to guide their future education and workforce decisions. Although ICAPs are often mandated for all learners, having the exact same process for all learners will not always address the specific needs of communities or learners, including those from historically marginalized populations who may need additional advising, supports or interventions. This is why pairing ICAP implementation process with levers to ensure equity, such as training for school staff to recognize and address learner needs and barriers, is critical. Colorado sees the "I" in ICAP as permission to dive deeper into equity efforts, as the I is all about self-awareness, social-emotional learning, and supporting learners to see themselves in their future goals.

School staff should also be trained and equipped to deliver ICAPs in a way that is inclusive of various identities. Boston Public Schools has been focusing on teacher development to deliver MyCAPs in a culturally responsive way and to root MyCAPs in identity development. The district does this by using its Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices Framework, which tailors district-wide norms, policies and practices to affirm the identities of and expand opportunities for historically marginalized learners.⁵⁵ Separately, the ICAP team at Thornton High School in Thornton, CO, adapted their practices during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic to focus on equity and created online lessons and videos in English and Spanish that supported individual learners, groups and families.

Another key strategy for ensuring equity in ICAP implementation is to track implementation data at the learner level and disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, gender and other special population categories. Wisconsin is starting to disaggregate data to see where learners are engaging in the ACP process and is training staff on how to interpret the data to uncover root causes. Similarly, Denver Public Schools is disaggregating its ICAP school completion reports to uncover the percentage of learners in various groups that are on track with their ICAP.

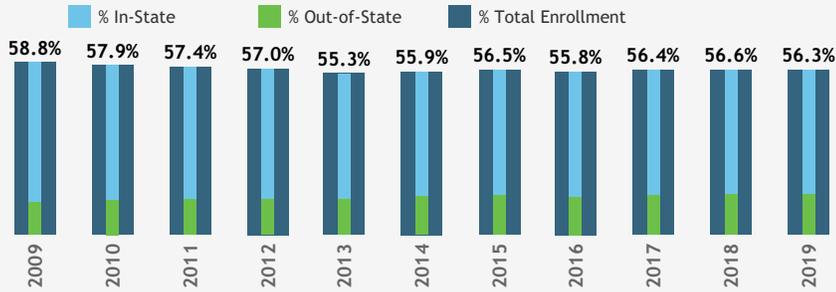
FIGURE 4: COLORADO HIGH SCHOOL FEEDBACK REPORTS

District at a Glance

HS Class All District All High School All Race / Ethnicity All Gender All FRL * All

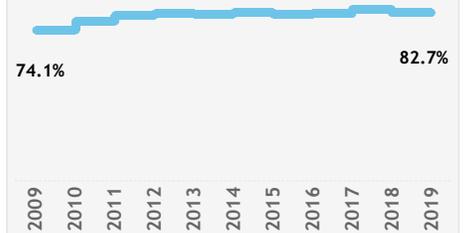
Data for this report are collected using the SURDS database, which includes information from all public colleges and universities in the state and the University of Denver, Regis University and Colorado Christian University. The National Student Clearinghouse database is used to collect information on enrollment and retention rates for Colorado high school graduates who attend out-of-state institutions o..

Postsecondary Enrollment



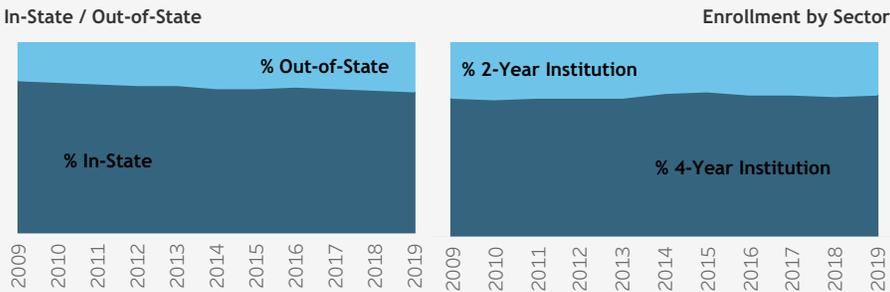
Includes all students who graduated from a Colorado public high school.

FAFSA Completers



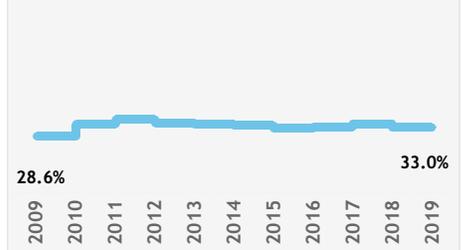
Graduates from a CO public high school who enrolled in a CO public postsecondary institution. **

Enrollment Characteristics



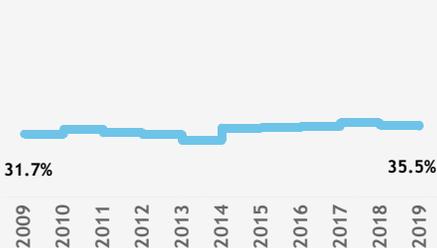
Includes all students who graduated from a Colorado public high school.

Pell Grant Recipients



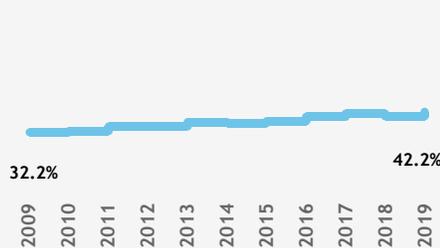
Graduates from a CO public high school who enrolled in a CO public postsecondary institution. **

State Aid Recipients



Graduates from a CO public high school who enrolled in a CO public postsecondary institution. **

Inst Aid Recipients



Graduates from a CO public high school who enrolled in a CO public postsecondary institution. **

Recommendations

Through aligned advising practices such as ICAP delivery, learners develop the ability to make informed academic and career decisions.⁵⁶ The following recommendations will ensure that states and districts can scale ICAPs to be meaningful experiences that reach all learners at key points in their education and career journeys.

Implement a system-wide approach to ICAP delivery. Creating a school-wide culture of college and career readiness requires buy-in from all adults in the building and supports from state, district and community partners. ICAP delivery cannot fall solely on school counselors or career service staff. There should be a continual effort to expand the scope of supportive adults participating in this process with learners.⁵⁷ A true systems-level approach to ICAP implementation takes more than dedicated individuals; it takes aligned policy, funding and resources at the state and district levels to enable schools to do the work on the ground. ICAPs should be institutionalized into multiple requirements and standards, making them an integral component of career pathway delivery.

Meeting this goal will take:

- Embedding ICAPs into graduation requirements, standards and course curriculum;
- Taking a team approach to ICAP curriculum development and delivery and including representatives from multiple stakeholder groups within the school on the ICAP team;
- Ensuring that all adults in the school building are aware of and equipped to support the ICAP process in an equitable and inclusive way; and
- Engaging community partners, employers and other career development personnel to assist with ICAP delivery.

Implement and align ICAPs across a continuum from middle school through postsecondary and workforce. Many states do not mandate ICAPs until grade nine, missing out on key early exposure opportunities in the middle grades. Earlier and ongoing career exploration enables learners to find out about their options sooner, begin building support networks, and participate in additional learning opportunities in their interest areas. Beginning ICAPs earlier can also support the often-difficult transition from middle to high school.

Meeting this goal will take:

- Introducing learners to the ICAP process in the middle grades and aligning technology, policy and practice so ICAPs can follow learners from high school to postsecondary and the workforce;
- Creating buy-in across education levels to adapt and use shared ICAP practices so the learner has a seamless user experience at every stage of their education and workforce journey; and
- Developing technology that enables learners to build and transfer their ICAPs through every transition.

Build data-driven systems to ensure that ICAPs are implemented with fidelity. States should use or expand accountability mechanisms to monitor ICAP implementation at the local level. Collecting and analyzing data is critical to understanding equity gaps and challenges.⁵⁸ This information can help tailor ICAP delivery to the specific needs of districts and schools and ensure that ICAPs are high quality and reach all learners in a meaningful way.

Meeting this goal will take:

- Building incentives for districts to prioritize tracking and reporting data;
- Requiring that data be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender and special population categories;

- Equipping districts with the knowledge and capacity to interpret the data to make adjustments and improvements to the ICAP process; and
- Conducting site visits to ensure that ICAP delivery is thorough and high quality for all learners.

Ensure that ICAPs are being implemented equitably. ICAPs allow learners to develop relationships with supportive adults and understand the options available to them to achieve their career goals, making them a critical tool to ensure equity in the career development process. As such, it is important to ensure that ICAPs are, in fact, being implemented equitably to reach each learner in a way that is responsive to their individual needs.

Meeting this goal will take:

- Providing learners who face additional barriers, including learners from families experiencing low income, first-generation learners and learners of color, with targeted supports and interventions throughout the ICAP process;
- Aligning ICAP implementation with Individualized Education Plans for learners with disabilities;
- Ensuring that ICAP materials are translated into multiple languages and translation services are provided to families when going over their learner's ICAP, if necessary;
- Using disaggregated data along with knowledge of the community to explore different ICAP models that are responsive to varying community and population needs; and
- Prioritizing additional funding, technical assistance or professional development to high-need districts and schools.

Use state levers to build local capacity. States should ensure that districts and schools have the tools, training, resources and support they need to successfully implement quality ICAP experiences. Providing all learners access to high-quality career advising practices requires investments in additional qualified advising professionals who have specific career development knowledge and competencies.⁵⁹

Meeting this goal will take:

- Investing state funding in advising professionals and cross-system data and reporting systems;
- Building incentives to prioritize ICAPs and whole-school collaboration;
- Providing districts and schools with training, professional development and technical assistance to deliver high-quality ICAPs; and
- Elevating local best practices and professional learning communities for districts and schools to learn from each other.

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The six *New Skills ready network* sites are: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Nashville, Tennessee. These sites are formulating new partnerships between local school systems, higher education, employers and government entities to develop pathways and policy recommendations that give underserved students access to higher education and real-world work experiences that lead to high-wage, in-demand jobs.

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